

The Church - Its Life and Development

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 July 2026

Preacher: Rev Callum Macleod

[0:00] And we can read at the beginning of the chapter. John chapter 15 and at verse number 1. I am the true vine, and my father is the vine dresser.

Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away. And every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

And so on down through the following verses. The last day we met together in the prayer meeting, we were looking at the letter of Timothy, and we were thinking about the subject of congregational health and what the New Testament has to say to us about the people of God.

And when we did so, we looked at the importance of health in organisations and the way in which there has to be clear communication of what the function of that organisation is, we noticed the way in which those who work for the organisation have to be aligned with the mission of the organisation.

And we also noticed that the people who serve the organisation work best when they are aligned with the mission of the organisation and when they are resourced to enable them to do so.

[1:20] And we are all aware that in most organisations, at least, there will be a human resource management department and their function in any organisation is really important because not only do they be involved in recruitment, but especially they are involved in training and development and to ensure that those who are employed by the organisation have the resources to enable them to serve that organisation and to perform at the highest level.

And they will also take part in assessing those who work for the organisation to ensure that they do have the resources and that they are able to improve their employment.

And I'm guessing the Bible is what we have for our human resource management in the Church of Christ. All of these things are brought before us in different ways in the Word of God.

And when we look at this passage, we think especially of the way in which it is important that we understand our identity. And part of the problem with the disciples in these chapters is they did not understand who they were.

They were named disciples, but they didn't appreciate what that meant. And Jesus in these chapters is speaking to them to help them to understand how relationships with him are established, to help them to understand how these relationships are maintained, and also to help them to understand that when the relationship breaks, that there is a way of restoring it.

[3:02] Identity is important if we are going to serve the organisation to which we belong. And a proper understanding of our identity as the children of God, as disciples of the Lord Jesus, is important if we are to serve him effectively in his church.

And so tonight we want to look at these verses and think of the church, its life and its development. I want to see first of all that we have a proclamation.

And the proclamation comes to us from the lips of the Lord Jesus himself. And whenever I read the Lord Jesus using the words, I am, he is connecting himself and showing continuity with the revelation God made to himself as the covenant God of the Old Testament people.

He is himself the Lord, as Thomas confesses that he is at the end of this letter. I am, he says, the true vine.

And we saw in Isaiah chapter 5 the way in which God makes it clear that his people were themselves the vine. He planted the vine, he cared for the ground, he took everything out of the way, he made sure that the vineyard was protected and he was looking for fruit.

[4:22] They were his people, they were bound to him in covenant and they ought to bear fruit. And we go on in these verses to see the way in which God looked for the vine to yield grapes, but

alas, the vine yielded wild grapes.

In other words, Israel was disobedient to her covenant calling and because of that, the vine is burnt, the enemies come in, the hedges are torn down and we have an image of destruction.

Israel, as the vine, failed to fulfill her calling and there we have the disaster that fills Jerusalem when the people of God are exiled.

So Jesus is now saying, I am the true vine. Not simply the genuine vine, but I am the vine that was symbolized in the Old Testament people of God.

I am now the ultimate reality of what it means to be the vine of God. And we are to see in Jesus, in that sense, the person who himself incorporates the people of God, the person who himself stands as the church of Christ and the person who represents the new covenant people of God as opposed to the Old Testament people of God.

[5:52] And when Jesus tells us that he is the true vine, he reminds us that there is management of that vine and the management takes place by the Father who is the vine dresser.

How is Jesus a true vine? How is he the church? It is because of the management, the work, the activity of God the Father in dressing this vine, in preparing this vine, in working so that this vine will produce its fruit.

And we could go along to expand on that and to think of the way in which God prepared a body for a son. God prepared a body for a son so that he could suffer.

And God prepared a body so that Jesus could suffer and be prepared, be perfect, be suitable as the one who is the founder of our salvation.

But the key thing is that Jesus as a true vine is the embodiment of the church. I look for the church. I don't look for individuals.

[6:58] At first, I look for the Lord Jesus. And wherever I see the Lord Jesus, there is the whole of the church. And along with that proclamation, there is also a reminder to the disciples who they are.

I am the vine in verse 5. You are the branches. You are the broken off twigs from another tree or another vine.

They are tender offshoots of that vine. They are taken by the person who is managing the vine. The vine that is taken and grafted into the vine that is going to be fruitful.

They are made part of the vine made part of the body of Christ. Every branch in me. A further reminder to us that we are not individual Christians in the first place.

That the priority rests in the fact that together we are part of the vine which is Jesus Christ. Every branch in me.

[8:09] We tend to think perhaps that the Apostle Paul is the first person who speaks to us in the New Testament about union with Christ but in actual fact we have that whole idea from the lips of the Lord Jesus himself.

Every branch in me. And as surely tonight as the vine dresser who is managing the vine as surely as he has worked to prepare Jesus to be our saviour he is also managing the vine by preparing you and me in order to be the children of God.

And he is managing that process not in the sense of recruiting those who are going to be part of the vine but in the sense of selecting and electing.

And Jesus makes that clear in these chapters himself. you did not choose me I chose you. And the Father who loves us chose us before the world ever was and he gave us to his Son.

They were yours says Jesus and you gave them to me. No recruitment selection election. And in the grace of God we are united to Christ by the fatherly work of the Son who calls us into the fatherly work of God who calls us into the fellowship of his Son so that we are part of him.

[9:43] And that's why Paul says in writing to Colossians your life is hidden with Christ in God. Where are we going to find ourselves tonight?

Where are you going to find your identity tonight? Not in the individual sense of the fact that you are a Christian you are going to find your true identity in the sense that you are one branch of the body of Jesus Christ.

And it's so important for us to grasp that so that we reverse the cultural tendency to focus on the individual as the most important thing in the world world.

That we are reminded by Jesus to focus on the incorporation and the corporate and the body that we are as one.

And as soon as we make a habit of thinking of ourselves as the collective as the body of Christ it changes our thinking it changes our behaviour it changes our attitude and it changes our understanding of the word of God.

[10:53] We come to understand truly what the word of God means. The proclamation that for you and for me this is who we are.

This is how we are identified and there as one vine we are bound together strengthened together created in Christ Jesus Paul says for good works.

There is that sense of proclamation or revelation. Secondly we want to see that there is responsibility. We have that in version number four for example abide in me and I in you.

There is a sense of staying where we are as the people of God. in a very simple way abide means staying at home and perhaps old fashioned English would ask the question where do you abide? Well I abide in such and such. This is where my home is. And Jesus wants them to think in an Old Testament way that as surely as the people of God were at home with God as their covenant saviour following him devoted to him so they must be devoted to him and follow him.

[12:25] And Jesus uses a parable in Luke chapter 15 and it shows to us that we can be God's covenant people and at the same time away from home.

And with the parable of the prodigal son and he took a journey into a far country he wanted to go and do his own thing. He was no longer settled at home.

He asked his father and he took and he went. We can be covenant people and not be obedient, not to be at home with the Lord.

I guess putting it very simply for many of us tonight we can say that we are brought up in Christian families and yet we rebelled against that.

And we went and did our own thing. And our behaviour was a direct contrast to what we were shown in our home from Christian parents. But two things remain true.

[13:29] First of all, we still belong to the family. That was unchangeable, irreversible. and the second thing is that despite our behaviour, that connection with the family was never lost or changed.

And Jesus is asking them to abide in me and God is asking you and I to abide in him in the same way. Reminding us tonight that I can be the child of God as by God's covenant grace united to Jesus Christ in a irreversible, indestructible bond with the Lord Jesus through faith, that can be true and it is true from the child of God.

But it may also be true that at the same time and despite that that my behaviour may become a contradiction of that. It doesn't change my permanent eternal union with Jesus Christ as my saviour.

That can never be changed. But behaviour can change and the way I live my life can change. And so Jesus said to them abide in me and I in you.

There's a living relationship as well as an unbroken one. And it's the living relationship that thriving sense of being alive in my relationship with God and with Jesus abiding in him.

[15:07] And following the image through a simple question is where do you where do I where are we most at home in our lives?

Are we most at home when we have communion of the Lord Jesus when we are following him and serving him is that where we find ourselves at home?

Or is it the case that we're more at home doing other things and that being at home with Jesus in that life of communion is something that's an add-on to our lives?

Because the answer to these questions will convey to ourselves will give the evidence in the face of the assessment of God's word it will show where we are.

It will who we are. And when we read down through the rest of this chapter certainly down to version number 17 what we do see is this that Jesus goes on to make the comparison that they are to abide in him as he abode in the father that they are to keep his commandments as he kept the father's commandments and that highlights two things for us that this abiding in him this being at home in Jesus is evident in two particular with two strands to the evidence and the first of these is love for God the father that's what Jesus did in the first place he loved to do the commands of God the father and for you and for me that's the simple evidence of my abiding of my living permanently in this relationship with the

[17:01] Lord Jesus that I love God that I keep his commandments that I love his word that I love to study his word to learn what his word has to say to me to develop my relationship through the word of God by the spirit of God that's the first focus of my life but along with that there is the horizontal expression of the love that Jesus had for his disciples greater love has no one in this than that he should lay down his life for his friends the horizontal the balance of two strands Jesus the perfect example he loved the Lord his father without restriction without any deviation from the word of God he was constant in his love for his father and at the same time he was constant in his love for his disciples and

I guess we could say that the constancy of his love for the disciples flowed out and was energized from the constancy of his love for his father and that's tonight how you and I are to abide in him that's the evidence the assessment is what is our focus the evidence should show tonight that we do love the Lord Jesus with all of our hearts he is our first love but that is accompanied by our love for one another the same self giving love that Jesus showed to us that that's the kind of love that we are to show to others that's the challenge for us and embracing the responsibility of our identity as those who have life in

Christ that he as the vine that he bears his fruit through us as the branches and that we as the branches have our life from him and it's a blessing to think of our life being his life but is it not challenging to think that the fruit of the vine will be seen through the branches that the fruit of the vine will be seen through you life through my life through the life of the people of God that's the challenge love for God the Father love for God the Son love God the Holy Spirit and love for one another by this people will know that you are my disciples and Jesus makes it clear in these verses that unless in verse number four as a branch cannot be a fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine neither can you unless you abide in me in other words we cannot combine a life with waywardness with strength from the Lord with bearing fruit if we are not walking and living at home with the Lord Jesus then the fruit will not be there without me Jesus you can do nothing it's my life it's my power that's what influences your life and it's only because of the life that is found in me that you will ever bear fruit but we have the habit of stunting the growth by your behaviour we have the habit of standing in the way of God's work by failing to obey by slipping away from devotion to him and by failing to show in every aspect of life our true identity as the children of God and so we have a revelation and we have a responsibility and finally want to see that there is a resolve in these verses and the resolve is not on your part or my part we see the resolve on the part of God himself how is it that we are here how is it that we continue as the children of God only because of God's resolve and determination that his work will continue and that we will bear fruit and we see that in two ways in these verses first of all we see the resolve of God and the way in which he refines his own people and that's what Jesus is saying in verse number two every branch of of mine that does bear fruit he takes away and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit all those who bear fruit God will prune so that they will bear forth more fruit it's a cleansing not by washing it's a cleansing by cutting that's what the vine dresser does in managing the vine and ensuring the productivity of the vine the vine dresser cuts off the dry and withered branches the vine dresser he prunes away the developments in the branches that get in the way of future growth he takes away branches that cut across each other and that spoil the development of the vine the vine dresser skillfully manages the vine by cutting close and not too close by knowing what to take away and knowing what to leave and the master vine dresser manages the vine in such a way that the vine flourishes and grows and that's what

[23:16] Jesus says God as the vine dresser will do in your life and in mine he works in our lives if cutting means removing parts of the branches then when the vine dresser is managing your development and my development it suggests to us that this will be a process where there will be pain that this will be a process where there will be loss that this will be a process where there will be major adjustments and that this will be a process that the right to the Hebrews describes as the discipline of God that is the mark of being the children of God and which God works out in our lives skillfully determined to ensure that we grow that we develop and that we bear the fruit the refining fruit bearing doesn't mean that there's no need for refining the order that we have here is that fruit bearing requires further refining so that there is more fruit bearing and so it will continue to develop it's the human resource management that looks at the person's development and what is necessary for growth and development and serving the organization so God works in our lives and you and mine in order to make us better to take away the things that hold us back to make space for more

growth and we could say that the very things that hold us back and that fill up the space where there needs to be space for growth are probably the things that we are totally unaware of and as the vine dresser comes to the vine and prunes the branches so God in his time in his season he will come and he will come to touch your lives in some way through pain through suffering through sorrow through other people through trials through testings in some way

God will come and God will discipline and he will do so because he loves and because he wants us to bear more fruit and as afraid as we may be from that sense of God's hand in pain the purpose of God is the purpose that should inspire us to work faithfully through everything even amidst the questions that arise when the pruning takes place working through these questions and remaining loyal to God and our Saviour the Lord Jesus so there is the the resolve to ensure that we continue to go and there is also the father's resolve to lift us up when we fall down and we see that in that same verse every branch of me that does not bear fruit he takes away we read that in line with version number six if anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers the branches are gathered thrown into the fire and burned and I'm reading the two verses together because there is a difference and the difference is in the verb that we have in version number two every branch of mind that does not bear fruit he takes away 16 out of the 24 times that this verb is used by John it means not takes away it means lift up and I'm suggesting to you that that's what Jesus is saying in verse number two it's not repeating verse two and verse six he is saying something different he is saying every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he lifts up and that's what the vine dresser does he is managing the vine he is looking for the branches that are bearing fruit he is also looking for the branches that have fallen off the trellis that are lying on the ground that are not facing the sun and he sees that he needs to take action in order to reconnect them with the vine in order to place them on the trellis and in order to make sure that they're facing the sun so that they will begin to bear fruit once more and there we see the fatherly love and care of God his determination that we will not be lost his determination that we will bear the image of his son his determination that whatever goes wrong in our lives that it will not interfere with his ultimate goal that we shall be like

Jesus that we shall bear his image and that he will put us into the right support structure that he will point us in the right direction that he will connect us to reconnect us with the people of God and their places in the very position of future growth and for me and I hope for you also rejoice in God's restoring care of the branches that all of us at some point we fall down we stop bearing the fruit but God does not leave us there and we are here tonight considering his work his management of the vine his management of his church his building up of his church the development of his church and here is a crucial part of it that no matter where I stray to where life takes me away from God God will not leave me alone he has chosen he has elected he has selected for a purpose and Jesus goes on in chapter 17 to speak of the way in which he wants those from God has given to him to be with them where he is that they may behold his glory and nothing you can do can stop that happening if you are the elect child of God and so will rejoice in the church as the vine of God will rejoice in God the father as the vinedresser the great manager of the vine and will rejoice in God's determination to build his church and to build us up as individuals to serve him more faithfully to serve one another more diligently and with greater devotion and so prove ourselves to be the very children of God may God bless these thoughts to us so we are going to conclude by singing in Psalm number 92 in the Scottish Psalter at verse number 12 that speaks verse