

# Abide in the Vine

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[0:00] Good morning, everybody. Nice to see you all. We're going to read from John chapter 15 and the first eight verses.

But more about that next week. So a little bit of a break after this from John's Gospel until the new year. It'll be now. But it's a good place to stop because we stop at a place where Jesus encourages us to make sure that we're always resting and abiding in him.

That's going to be the important message that we're going to get this morning. So, John chapter 15, beginning to read at verse 1.

It'll be on the screen for you to follow along. I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, so that it will be even more fruitful.

You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself.

[1:33] It must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned.

If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, you will ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciples.

Amen. And the Lord will bless to us the reading of his word. Now, Maggie loves sticks. I'm talking about my Labrador, not my child.

But she loves sticks. And if she's off a leading, you throw a stick, she loves pelting after it. Pelting is a jolly word, means she runs fast.

[2:45] Now, occasionally when I throw a stick for her, it's quite a healthy-looking stick. It still has green leaves on, and it looks fresh. And you can tell when you pick it up, because it's still got sap in it, that it's just recently fallen off the tree.

It's not that I destroy trees to throw sticks. Don't get me wrong. It's just it's on the ground, and I throw it ahead of her. And if Maggie chases after that healthy-looking stick, she will make it unhealthy-looking quite quickly.

But the reality is, of course, is that stick is dying and will soon be entirely dead. It will dry out. Its leaves will fall off.

It will lose its sap. It will become brittle and much easier for Maggie to destroy. Why is that? Well, the reason for that is that it's lost connection with the tree.

And therefore, it will no longer receive any nutrients from the tree, and it will die. You get the point. In John 15, we're told about a different kind of tree.

[3:51] We do have them in this country, but they're not usually along the roads I walk Maggie. And they are vines. And vines give out grapes, which is wonderful for producing wine and other kind of delicacies as well.

But in order for the vine to bear fruit, it has to... Sorry, in order for the branches to bear fruit, they have to be connected to the vine.

If they're broken off the vine, then they will no longer bear fruit. And Jesus is using this as a metaphor of connection. We need to be constantly and ongoingly connected to Jesus if we are to bear fruit in the Christian life.

But if we are cut off from him, if we cease to abide in him, we will die. And so there is a very strong warning here that we have to pay heed to.

You can say it very simply in this way. The secret to a healthy spiritual life in Jesus is to stay close to him each day.

[5:06] It isn't complicated, really. Jesus is saying, look, if you want to live this life of discipleship and you want to make sure that your life counts for something, you have to stay close to me.

Every day, abide in me, abide in my word, and abide in prayer. So the first thing we notice here is that Jesus is the true vine.

Now, the significance of the vine is simply this, that the vine itself was a picture of Israel. It was one used often in the Old Testament.

Next slide, please. So when Jesus says, I am the true vine, he is telling us that he is the true Israel and God is at work in and through him to ensure that God's people are fruitful in their life.

Now, this is a very controversial claim and Jesus knew it would be. He didn't mind controversial claims. Because Israel thought of itself as the vine. And in the teaching of Jesus, Jesus is going to say to the people of Israel that God is fed up waiting for them to be fruitful and he's going to cut them off and replace them with people who will respond to him and connect to Jesus.

[6:40] So he's going to say something very shocking. Now, the vine was the picture of Israel. In Psalm 80 verses 8 and 9, it says, you brought a vine out of Egypt, you drove out the nations and planted it, you cleared the ground for it and the fruit unfilled the land.

That's clearly referenced to Israel. They were the vine. But God was looking for fruit from it and repeatedly, they failed to bring forth fruit.

Isaiah chapter 5, verses 1 to 5, if you want to turn to that, it says, I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard. My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.

He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the clearest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I look for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?

[7:53] Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard. I will take away its hedge and it will be destroyed. I will break down its walls and it will be trampled.

So God prophetically, through the words of Isaiah, 800 years or so before Christ came, was warning Israel that their days were numbered. Jeremiah 2.21 says the same.

I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt wild vine? Now, a little bit more reading from Matthew chapter 21, 33 to 44.

This is the parable of the vineyard that Jesus told. Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard.

He put a wall around it, dug a wine press in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

[9:02] The tenants seized his servants. They beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.

Last of all, he sent his son to them. They will respect my son, he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, this is the heir.

Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance. So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?

He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, they replied, and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time. Jesus said to them, have you never read in the scriptures, the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone?

The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes. Therefore, I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you, that is from Israel.

[10:09] It will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit, that is non-Jews, Gentiles. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.

Now, I have to be careful not to go off on a tangent here. Does this mean that God has rejected Israel forever? No, it does not. Israel still has a place in the purposes of God.

And as far as I read Romans 11, one day in the future, and who knows, it may not be too distant, the Messiah will come to Israel and they will repent of their rejection of him and then all Israel will be saved.

And together with the Gentiles will make the Israel of God. But this is a break in God's working. In the rejection of Jesus, God cut the nation of Israel off and he gave the vineyard to non-Jews who bring forth fruit.

That is within the economy and purposes of God. And that lasts until now. And it will continue in the future and then those who were of the natural vine shall be grafted in again to use the language of Paul.

[11:35] Now, I'm going to stop there. I'm very tempted to go on from there. I'm going to stop. The message here is that God is cutting off. And this is John.

This is in keeping with John's message. He came to that which was his own but his own did not receive him. And Jesus' insistence that what makes you a true servant of God, what makes you a true Jew is not your national identity.

It is your readiness and willingness to bring forth fruit for the glory of God. A person is known by their fruit, not by their suit.

Somebody once said. So Jesus is teaching us something really important here. The vineyard of the Lord of hosts will be taken away from the Jews and given to the Gentiles.

But the true vine upon which everything hangs is not Israel and the nation but Jesus, the Son of God.

[12:44] That's something that Israel will have to discover in the future. That the Messiah whom they rejected is the one they must depend upon in order to be the vineyard of the Lord of hosts.

And it is still so for us. So when Jesus says, I am the vine, the true vine, he is saying, I am the source of life and blessing for you and there is no other way to God but through me.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me. You bear your fruit because of your connection to Jesus. Make sense?

Good, we'll move on. Jesus is the true vine. Secondly, the Father is the gardener. Next slide. The Father is the gardener. Jesus makes that clear.

So this landscape, as it were, that we operate in is being tended by God the Father.

[13:43] He is at work in the garden of my life, so to speak, and in the garden of your life as well. And what is he doing there? Well, he is digging up your weeds.

And that's not so nice, is it? Weeds, actually the thing about weeds sometimes, you know, is it's difficult to tell whether a weed is a weed or a flower. I know Andy Lloyd has trouble with that which is why he doesn't do the gardening, isn't he, Fiona?

Yeah, he has trouble with deciding. At the moment, Eve has a plant in the window and it has an unusual thing coming out of it and she said to me, is that a weed? And I really don't know. I'll have to get my little app on it to see or, you know, but we can't tell.

It looks quite attractive. The weeds of your life or sin. Sin can be very attractive. We don't want it dug up. We'd quite like it to be in there.

But God is digging up the weeds. He is cultivating good fruit but it has to be in good soil. And your heart is like soil.

[14:48] And God is fertilizing that soil and he's getting rid of the weeds to make room for more spiritual growth. And the fruit that he is growing is the fruit of the Spirit.

Do you know it? The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. You can repeat it if you like. Patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control against such there is no law.

God is bringing forth fruit. He is making you a better person. And that is why Jesus says it's by their fruit that you know them.

you know them because God is changing them. It's not about what they sing or how they look or where they attend. That's obviously going to be a consequence of bearing fruit.

They're going to want to go to church. They're going to want to worship. They're going to want to be among God's people. But crucially, that's because they're being transformed from the inside out.

[15:48] We talk about being born again. You see, we're having room for God in our life. God actively at work in us. This is his land. This is his garden.

This is his vineyard. Oh, heavenly Father, come and dig out some weeds in me. I won't mind. They need to go. He will remove from your garden, the garden of your life, your fruitless branches.

The things that don't honor and glorify him. And he will prune you. Now, whenever I hear that word prune spoken for a majority, it does sound rather common, doesn't it?

Can you remember when you went to school and you had prunes? They gave you prunes and custard. I mean, goodness, it wasn't you. Well, actually, very good for you, I'm told.

Especially if you have trouble going, you know what I mean. Get some prunes in you. The prunes will make you flow a little better.

[16:55] It'll make things work. Well, forgive me, but your heavenly Father is pruning you for the same reason. To make everything better.

To get rid of what is bad. To leave room for what is good. Now, pruning sounds nasty. I don't know if the vine's saying, hey, that hurt.

But pruning hurts. To get rid of that which is bad in us might hurt us. But like a lot of things that hurt us, they're also good for us.

Yeah? We often think mistakenly, don't we, that if something hurts us, it can't be good for us. It's not true. For God to wean us off the things that our heart loves, even though we know that it's bad for us, well, that's painful.

You know, if you've ever tried, you know, getting fit, it has to hurt a bit before you'll get fit. If you've ever tried losing weight, yeah, you've had to kind of deny yourself the chips and the extra lashings of mayonnaise to get rid of that which is causing you trouble.

[18:15] Pruning may hurt, but pruning is necessary. It was necessary in the vine, those who dress the vineyard, they prune twice a year, spring, in order to kind of not allow things to get kind of overfull, the branches to get overfull, then they had to trim the healthy branches, remove the excess growth to leave room for more growth as they moved toward the autumn.

And then in the autumn, when the fruitful season was over, then they cut off the dying branches and they gathered them together and burned them. Twice a year, the Holy Spirit is working in his garden, in the garden of my life every day, to prune the things that cause me trouble and stop me from being the person that God wants me to be.

So God is actively at work in his vineyard. That's why you need the Holy Spirit. That's why Jesus in John 14 and in 16, and this is couch between the two, notice, this is the meat in the sandwich, the Holy Spirit comes to live in you, Jesus is going away, you're worried about that, how am I ever going to survive without Jesus, you're saying, and then he says, don't worry, I'm going to give you another comforter, another counselor, just like me, just the same, and he's going to live within you and he will convict the world of sin with regard to guilt and of righteousness and of judgment to come.

Yes, he's going to prune and make it uncomfortable, but he's always going to be at work in you every day so that you might bear for it. Praise God. So I am not what I once was by the grace of God and I am not what I will be by the grace of God because the Holy Spirit is at work pruning and bearing fruit in my life.

He will remove the dead branches and then he will ensure we prune to make our fruitful branches even more fruitful.

[20:23] And that's important because you see, you never get to the point where you say, ah well, I've cracked faithfulness or I couldn't be more kind.

You could. Yeah, you could. Oh, I've learned gentleness. I've nothing more to learn there. You see, it's not like that. The fruit of the Spirit never stops growing in you until you are finally perfected in glory and that means every so often you think, oh, I wasn't patient enough there.

I wasn't kind enough there. I could have been gentler than I was. God forgive me. Holy Spirit, help me to become even more fruitful for you.

So God is the gardener. Isn't that lovely? It's a lovely thought. God, when you go home today and you have a look in your garden, just take a moment to thank God that just as your garden is nice, I hope it's nice or nice-ish, mine's nice-ish, just as my garden looks very nice today, my life is changing and is becoming nicer because God is at work.

And then the crucial message is this, disciples must abide in Christ. Next slide. Disciples must abide in Christ. If we are going to become even more fruitful, we have to abide in the vine.

[21:59] You see, it's not about self-improvement. It's not, I'm determined to be a kinder, gentler, faithler person. No, no, no, no, no, no. Jesus says, apart from me, you can do, guess what?

Nothing. Apart from me, you can't do it, he says. You can't be the person you want to be. You will always be aware of your failure because you have something within you, a principle within you. It's called a sin nature. And the sin nature says, why should I be gentle toward that person they were horrible to me? I'm going to stick back at them. Well, that might just be me, but if that's not you, that's great.

The kind, you know, I'm not going to be kind to them. Why should I be faithful to them? They've proven themselves unfaithful to me, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Only Christ within you can say, uh-uh.

Do not treat others that way. Forgive others. When they sin against you. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

[23:11] Not as they're doing to you, but as you would have them do to you. If you want them to be kind to you, you be kind. If you want them to be faithful, you learn to be faithful, even when they are being unfaithful to you.

You can't do that by yourself. Nothing but the grace of God can make you love the unlovable and to show mercy to those who have harmed you.

To abide in the vine means you must always ever abide in Christ. The disciple is completely dependent upon Jesus.

Jesus, apart from me, you can do nothing. And remember again the context. He's preparing his disciples for his going away. And they're saying, how are we going to manage?

What are we going to do? He's saying, apart from me, you can't do it. But he's not saying that to make us feel helpless. He's saying that to make us feel hopeful.

[24:09] You can't do it. But I've given you the answer. The Holy Spirit in you can do it for you. So don't lose heart. It's as Paul says in Philippians 1, he who began a good work in you will do what?

He will complete it. He will carry it on to completion. Will I ever get to heaven? How will I ever manage? Well, you can't do it. But with Jesus in you, you will.

Because the gardener is always at work in your vineyard and he has given you the Holy Spirit to make sure you get there in the end. Thank God. Some people say, well, I trusted Christ but I couldn't keep it up.

Well, then you've got to question whether they really trusted Christ. It's not what people profess to be. It's what they prove themselves to be by the way they live their lives.

The evidence of your conversion is your fruitfulness and your endurance. When it gets tough, you don't give up.

[25:17] When it gets tough, in fact, you can't give up. You might want to give up because you think this is hurting me. It's too much. But something within you says, no, come on. Trust me, you'll be fine.

Okay, Father, I'll trust you. Though it hurts, I'll trust you. He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.

So what is the evidence of abiding? Well, it's bearing fruit. Yes, we've said that. But it's also, Jesus says, and my word abides in you. You abide in the word of God.

You see, this Bible, this scripture, these words from God, they're not just things that are to interest us or inform our minds. This is food. This is meant to feed you.

Now, how many of you go without food each day? Not many of you, I hazard a guess. Some of you might fast occasionally, but not many of you will go without food. Why? Because it keeps you healthy. Jesus says, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

[26:26] You abide in Christ when you abide in his word. You need the Bible to survive. You need it. You need the daily food of reading the word of God, not to inform your head so that you become more knowledgeable, but to feed your heart that you might become more like Jesus.

And then Jesus says, not just food, prayer. Because when you abide in me, you can ask me anything. The implication being you will ask him. Have you noticed that the closer you get to God, the more you pray?

And then when you stop reading the word of God, the harder it becomes to pray. Faithfulness produces prayer as a fruit. Unfaithfulness dries us up.

Like prunes. Prayer is a vital connector between us and Jesus. But it's also something else.

Prayer produces confidence in Jesus. Jesus says, when you pray, you can ask anything in my name, I'll do it. That's confident hope. That's expectation that when I speak to Jesus, he's going to do what I ask him to do.

[27 : 45] Now there's a caveat, 1 John 5, 14, we must ask anything in his name and he hears us. So just say, well I did pray to win the national lottery the other day and he didn't answer that prayer.

Well thank God he didn't. You never know what all that money might do to you but it normally doesn't do you a lot of good. He doesn't give you all your sinful desires prayers.

But he will give you everything that you need to produce much fruit in you. Help me to live closer to you Jesus. Help me to learn your word.

Help me to be kind to those I meet. He'll answer those prayers. Help me to get that job so that I can pay my way and you know I can look after other people.

Help me to be nicer to my wife or my wife to be nicer to me or my mother-in-law to be nicer to me. She's very nice to me aren't you Dad?

[28 : 46] All the time. I'll get extra close to that today. Anything according to his will. Anything that makes us more like Jesus.

Anything that makes us more righteous. Anything that makes us more useful in the world for him. We are confident when we ask. He hears us.

You abide in the word. You abide in prayer. And you abide together. This can often be missed but it's important. Jesus is the vine.

We are the branches. We connect to God through Jesus and we become one vine together. Unless we're cut off.

community is always implied here. It is implied here. To be together is the place where we grow.

[29 : 46] And he writes put it next slide. We must remain in the community that knows and loves him and celebrates him as its Lord. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian.

We can't go it alone. Now just a caveat. Occasionally if you're living in China and perhaps and you're persecuted or Iran and you're persecuted perhaps you have to do it alone.

But believe me they don't want to. They would love to meet openly. But anyone sitting in England saying I don't want this church stuff I just want to have Jesus. You're on a recipe for disaster.

It doesn't work like that. Jesus calls you to belong to a body. His people to be branches together in his vine.

So then what is the goal of bearing fruit? It is not so everybody says you're a lovely fruitful person. What a wonderful fruitful person you are.

[30 : 49] That will feed your ego. It won't do you much good. Jesus says so that my father is glorified. That's the point. So that people see more of God in you.

That God becomes real and something to be desired because he's seen in your life. And that actually in the end pleases you doesn't it?

If somebody says I can see you're different. I can see the difference Jesus has made in you. I want to know you're bearing fruit and that fruit will remain.

so then as the worship group come back we're going to ask ourselves a really important and a very sober question and it is this am I abiding in Christ?

Are you bearing fruit to the glory of God? For Jesus warns if you don't you'll be cut off and be burned.

[32 : 05] now I'm not getting a theology from that because this is a parable and I'm not entering into the old debate about whether you're once saved or was saved I think that's a very misleading phrase anyway.

Those who are truly born again are saved for all eternity I have no doubt of that but truly born again is evidenced in the life that you live.

it's not what you profess to be it's what you really are when nobody else is looking but God. So we're going to reflect and sing through as these I want you to think about this go back to that slide sorry can you just go back to the slide I want you to reflect as we sing are you staying connected to Christ daily through his word and prayer are you remembering the true fruitfulness comes from abiding in him and then I want you to reflect on this are you trusting in the father's pruning not resisting it not complaining about it though you can tell him it hurts he doesn't mind but trust in that he has a purpose in it to remove anything that hinders your spiritual growth and effectiveness to get you less interested in yourself and more interested in

Jesus and then thirdly will you live to bear fruit that glorifies God showing Christ's character in your words actions and relationships reflect on that as we sing this song to abide may