

Abiding in Christ

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: 29 October 2017

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] And please, if you would, turn again to John chapter 15. Jesus speaks very much about his words abiding in you, not the words of the preacher, but his words, and so please have them in front of you.

So it's been a while, as I said, since we've been in John, and so by way of reminder, where are we up to? Well, Jesus is preparing to go back to the Father via the cross, which means that he's no longer going to be with his disciples in a physical manner.

And we've been making the point over the last few times that the disciples spent more time without the physical presence of Jesus than they did with the physical presence of Jesus.

And that's important for a couple of reasons, because as Christians, we can tend to believe, or at least convince ourselves, of something that's not true. And that is that the disciples had it easier because they had the physical presence of Jesus with them.

That's just not true. They did have the physical presence of Jesus with them, but they also had a lot of time without the physical presence of Jesus. And their Christian life and walk and devotion and how they operated in the world was very much the same as we have to do it now.

[1 : 35] Well, Jesus is on his way to the cross. That's a mission. The cross is not a mistake. It is where he planned to go all along.

And he is demonstrating that when he dies on the cross, his love for the Father. He's demonstrating his love for you, but he's demonstrating his love for the Father.

I mean, why else would you do it? The Father so loved the world that he gave his only son. And the son loves the Father so much that he demonstrates that through sacrifice.

Maybe in the future I'd like to do a whole series on the issue of the Christian's sacrifice. Because it seems that as Christian goes on, there becomes less and less Christianity to our Christianity.

And that is a concern. Sacrifice, I think, is possibly one of those areas. But Christ's sacrifice accomplishes salvation. It accomplishes the forgiveness of sins.

[2 : 38] That means that before you were not with God and now you are. But not only are you with God, you're perfect. Now, when we look at each other, we don't see perfections.

We see a whole lot of imperfections. But when God looks at us, he sees us at the point of completion. He sees us, what we will be like, when we actually see him face to face.

And that's exactly how John puts it. That when we see him, we will become like him. Okay? Now, that's crucially important. When we see him, we will become like him.

Why when we see him? Well, because biblically, we become like what we worship. We become like what we see, what we focus on, what we are drawn to.

So the reason why some Christianity looks a certain particular kind of way is because they're not necessarily worshipping the triune God, but an imagination of the triune God.

[3 : 38] And the scripture is full of people doing this, and we shouldn't think that we don't do the same today. So that's where we're up to. Jesus is on his way to accomplish salvation.

But now we enter into chapter 15. Jesus begins to talk about our relationship with the Father. And the reason for not tackling 17 verses like I was initially going to, and only tackling 8, is because of the difficulty.

I'm going to put my hand up straight away and say that apart from Philippians chapter 2 and a few other chapters in scripture, John 15 is probably in the top five of the most difficult chapters.

Now, it's not difficult to understand. It's not necessarily difficult to explain because the Bible helps us to explain it. What it is difficult is to receive it.

Now, that's the difficulty. You say, well, if it's easy to understand, and the Bible explains it clearly, where's the difficulty? Well, the difficulty is like anything, when you can't bring yourself to believe it.

[4 : 47] Okay? When it stares you in the face, when something is so obvious that it stares you in the face, but you cannot bring yourself to believe it for whatever reason, that's the difficulty. And that's the difficulty that we find here in John chapter 15.

So right from the very beginning, you'll notice that both Jesus, the vine, is mentioned, and also the Father is mentioned. In both instances, they have an active role in the life of who?

They have an active role in the life of those who belong to Jesus. And I want to say, those who belong to Jesus, and those who belong to Jesus in some way.

And you'll see why I'm saying that in a minute. Jesus then moves on to say that this whole section is about abiding in him, and him abiding in you.

His Father, God the Father, is the one who can and does remove branches from Jesus. Now, if Jesus is the vine and you are the branches, then the natural conclusion is that God removes you.

[5 : 55] Now, why would God remove you? Well, Jesus says, any branch in me that does not abide, any branch in me that does not bear fruit, the Father cuts away, and it withers, and it's thrown into the fire.

Now, the difficulty is this, that all those who belong to Jesus in salvation belong to Jesus forever.

Okay? Forever.

We are sealed with the Spirit until the day of redemption. Now, the Bible affirms that clearly in Ephesians chapter 2. It affirms it even in the Gospel of John.

So now you can see my problem. Here I am, faced with a passage, that says that God the Father can cut you out of the vine of Jesus Christ, but earlier in John, he says that no one can pluck you out of my Father's hand.

How is the minister going to get through this? Well, fortunately, the Bible, or not fortunately, that's a sinful word, isn't it? And I can't believe I just said that.

[6 : 58] That is a sinful slip of the tongue, and I apologize. I'm sorry. Please forgive me.

Providentially. No fortune, is it?

We don't believe in that. Come on. Providentially. We are here to understand what John has to say to us.

It's very, very clear that if you abide in Jesus Christ, you produce fruit, and if you produce fruit, this glorifies God, and it proves to you that you are actually a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Now, at this point, I want to try and illustrate how the relationship works, because the relationship is not without its difficulties, and so we're going to have to make our way through fairly carefully.

So we need to understand how it's to be understood, and then understand it in exactly the way that it's meant to be understood. So the difficulty is this. How can a person who belongs to Jesus forever be cut away from Jesus by the Father?

[8 : 03] Okay? The Bible is affirming both. How can a person who belongs to Jesus forever be cut away by the Father? Now, that is a difficulty that we have to overcome this morning, and we're going to try and get there eventually.

But I want to say this, that you're not going to be able to understand this part of Scripture or any other part of Scripture without the vantage point, standing on the vantage point of the whole of Scripture.

And what that means is, is that I shouldn't make my mind up about what John 15 says without knowing the rest of the Bible. And you shouldn't make your mind up about any particular verse in the Bible without knowing about the rest of the Bible or what it teaches.

And the reason you shouldn't do that is because if you do, you can arrive at wrong conclusions. And the conclusion that you could arrive at here if you don't take into other parts of Scripture is this, that true, genuine believers can be cut away from Jesus and burned forever.

And that's not true. It says it here. I've just read it. No. This is how to read it. And we need to read it carefully.

[9 : 15] There are such things that the Scripture affirms called barrier beliefs. Okay? Evolution is one of those barrier beliefs. So I'm going to give you an example. Now, whatever you think about evolution, you know, I understand that the Christian church seems to adopt this position.

I have no idea why. Why would the church adopt evolution as an idea when they believe in the resurrection? It makes no sense at all. But I understand that there are people in the world who believe that they come from apes and monkeys and originally from a pool, a swamp, and tadpoles, and whatever else comes from it.

In fact, one of the fashionable or perhaps not so fashionable criticisms of someone who wants to proclaim to you that they come from apes asks them very politely, is that on your mother's side or your father's side?

Now, immediately, they're going to be offended. But then you have to point out to them, why are you offended? Because if you're claiming that to be true, it must be true for your mother and her mother and her mother, right?

So there's no reason to be offended at it if you hold to it. But the trouble is with a belief like that is if you believe that you evolved, then it blocks any belief that teaches that God creates.

[10:36] So one belief becomes a barrier to another belief. Right? Because I believe A, I cannot, because of A, believe B. So we as people don't realize how many beliefs that we hold that stop us from believing other things that we should believe.

And that's how John 15 kind of works. We want to believe that once saved, always saved. And because of that, John 15, it just can't be true.

Right? We don't even allow room for John to speak his mind to us this morning because we are so convinced sat here that if I'm saved, I'm saved forever, that that belief, when held incorrectly, then blocks what John is actually teaching.

And we shouldn't allow that to happen. But neither should we allow the reverse to happen. That if John is saying a believer can be cut away or a person can be cut away who belongs to Jesus, that that shouldn't be a barrier of belief to the rest of scripture which says that a believer can never be cut away.

So when we talk about handling scripture carefully, this is one of the chapters which we have to handle very, very carefully. It affirms both that a person can be cut away from Jesus who belongs in Jesus and a person can never be cut away from Jesus who belongs to Jesus.

[12:02] Confused? Right. Now you understand why I went from 17 verses at the beginning of the week down to only dealing with 8 this morning. So let's have a careful look at the first 8 verses.

Firstly, Jesus Christ is the true vine. Now, it doesn't say that he's the vine. It says that he is the true vine. And whenever you put a positive like that in front of the vine, you're saying that there are other vines out there that are not true.

Okay? Jesus is the true vine and other vines out there are not true. Jesus Christ is making a comparison to a previous vine. Now, God's people, Israel, the nation of Israel, God's people of old, were often called God's vine.

And as God's vine, they were to bring blessing to the world. They were to produce blessing and fruit for the world. But they failed.

They failed each other and they failed to bring anybody else into God's revelation. And the reason they did this is because they got caught up in idolatry and basically disobeying God from the get-go.

[13:16] Then God threatens them with judgment. And it's very important, I think, to be threatened with judgment in Scripture because it brings people to their senses. Suddenly, they're realizing that they're dealing with God, not just their next-door neighbor.

You know, we don't take a threat from someone who's weaker than us. They're just not a threat.

You know, if a four-year-old boy came up to me and says, you meet me outside after this morning, I'm probably not going to go, but I'm not threatened by it either.

But if God the Father turned up, I'm not even going to utter a word. You know, these people who say, I've got a lot of questions from when I meet God, it says that every tongue will be stilled, even yours.

You're not going to say a thing and you're not going to be able to do a thing about it. So when God threatens with judgment, it is actually an act of mercy.

Now, that may seem like a very strange thing to say, that when God threatens judgment, it's an act of mercy. I'll give you an example. God threatened Nineveh with judgment through the prophet Jonah and they repented.

[14:42] So the very threat of judgment is a very act of mercy to the people who are being threatened, though you don't see it like that at the time. But it does bring you to your senses.

And in the same way, there's a threat here of anyone who doesn't abide in Jesus will be cut away. It's a very act of mercy on God's part, isn't it? That Jesus is the true vine, that he is the only one who can produce fruit.

And the only way for fruit to be produced in your life is if you abide in him. That's the principle. The only way for fruit to abide in the life of the Christian is if the Christian abides in Jesus Christ. Now, before we get on to what that fruit is, and we may not get there for a bit, it's interesting to point out that the fruit is produced by belonging to the vine.

Okay? The apple tree produces apple, not just the branch of the apple tree. Okay? And that's the point here. The other point here to recognize is that the father is the vine dresser.

[15 : 54] And the vine dresser does two things. He cuts away people, and he prunes people. Every branch that bears fruit, he prunes so that it would bear more fruit.

And perhaps you've experienced that in your Christian walk where you feel that God has cut you back. And at the time, it's increasingly, incredibly unpleasant, but over time, it becomes incredibly fruitful decision on God's part because of what is now apparent.

Well, that's what's happening here. God does cut back those who belong to him. It is painful. We don't like it, but it is for the purpose of producing more fruit.

And more fruit does two things. It glorifies God and proves to you that you are actually connected to the vine. That's the point.

But the other thing that God does here is that he does cut away. He does remove. Remove. Every branch that does not bear fruit, he cuts away. But every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it would bear much more fruit.

[17 : 05] Jesus is the vine and you are the branches. This means that when God prunes branches, he's actually pruning you. And when God cuts branches away, he is cutting away people who belong to Jesus.

We can see, hopefully, from this alone that the whole point of belonging to Jesus is so that your life would produce something that it doesn't produce when you don't belong to Jesus.

Okay? Is that a fair statement? That in order to belong to, sorry, by belonging to Jesus, your life will produce that which only it can produce by belonging to Jesus.

And so by abiding in Jesus, which is something we'll move on to in a minute, is simply an overflow of actually belonging to him in the first place. But the important fruit production of your life, for want of a better word, is incredibly important to God.

Okay? God does everything to motivate and to encourage your life to produce the kind of fruit that it should be producing. That's why he prunes you. But for those that don't, he cuts away.

[18 : 18] So here's the difficulty. And I'm going to try and explain the difficulty as simply as I can. I want to explain it firstly in the negative way.

And this is how Christians in the past, some Christians, have explained it. I've not heard too many ministers explain it this way, but I've heard plenty of Christians in congregations explain it this way. And a couple of ministers that I can think of back in the day. So this is their explanation. That a branch that's cut away, okay, that's burned and then sent to hell, because believers cannot go to hell, they're saved forever, they conclude that they could not have been real believers in the first place.

That's how they argue. Well, these people who are cut away never really belong to Christ in the first place anyway. They never really belong to Jesus. brothers, you know, but the trouble is with an explanation like that is John is saying the very opposite.

Any branch in me that does not bear fruit, the Father wouldn't be cutting away if you weren't connected in the first place. So, you can't get away with it by simply saying they didn't belong in the first place.

[19 : 32] And, the reason you can't get away with that is because it affirms, Jesus is affirming that he is the vine and you are the branches and branches, in order to be cut away from the vine, must belong to the vine in the first place.

And so, this is the important part or it all is but focus on this. There is a way, please listen carefully, there is a way of belonging to Jesus without actually belonging to Jesus.

That doesn't make any sense. Let me explain. there is a way of belonging to Jesus where you can enjoy massive blessings. I am going to give you a list of them out of Hebrews.

Enlightenment is a blessing and a benefit, that is revelation. Tasting the heavenly gift, that is of the things to come, that is a blessing and benefit.

Sharing in the Holy Spirit. Taste of the goodness of the Word of God. baptism and the goodness of the things to come, the powers of the age to come after that.

[20 : 45] You can have all of those and then fall away from Jesus. You know, I get a little bit frustrated over people who think that children shouldn't be baptized until after a certain age.

They must be 11 or they must be 12 or they must be 15. But when was baptism a guarantee, especially when you read Hebrews 6, that a person can even experience baptism and then be cut away and never again return again unto repentance?

You need to speak sense. You need to read the scriptures carefully. And what the scriptures teach is that apostasy is real.

Apostasy is real. And that is when someone who comes to Christ and looks as if they're sharing in all the things that Christ has and Christ shares those things with them, baptism, the Holy Spirit, enlightenment, revelation, powers of the age to come, they get to receive all of these things. The trouble is their life is being lived in such a way where they are saying that they proclaim, they're saying they belong to Jesus with their mouth but their life is saying something differently and because their life is being lived in a particular way they are then cut away for good and burned.

[22 : 12] So, there's the threat of judgment. We want to be able to say that a believer can never but believers produce fruit. But it is possible as Hebrew says and as John 15 says here to be able to share in all the things that are available in Christ because you're in Christ in some kind of way but then at the same time fall away through apostasy.

And apostasy is best put this way that if you live in such a way where it looks like you don't belong to Jesus Christ then you will eventually prove to yourself that you don't belong to Jesus Christ. I'm going to say that again. If you live your life in such a way where it looks like you don't belong to Jesus Christ then you will eventually prove to yourself and to others that you don't belong to Jesus Christ.

And how often when you have a just a casual look back over the history of any church do we see that story played out time and time and time again.

Why do you think I make such an effort to bring all the children in this church up covenantally? I mean do you think I'm messing around? I mean do you think I don't know what I'm trying to teach?

[23 : 39] I mean come on. I mean this is super serious. We need to bring children up in the faith not up in doubt. We need to bring children up in Jesus instead of trying to say to them you need to prove that you're in.

John 15 doesn't say you need to prove that you're in. John 15 says you prove that you're in by staying in. Okay?

But how often do we see time and time again parents who don't bring children up in the faith but bring them up in doubt? Well you can't get baptized now you can't take communion now you can't have any of these things now. Why? You want me to come to church you want me to sing you want me to pray but in the same breath you're saying I can't participate in the same things that the church do.

Well what am I? Do I belong or don't I belong? Where am I? It's no wonder children are so confused. Make it plain. Keep it simple.

We're to bring our children up in the faith we're to bring ourselves up in the faith and we do that by abiding in Christ. Why? Because we can't produce any fruit in our children through our parenting we can't produce any fruit in our own life through our own living.

[24 : 54] It can only be produced in us by belonging abiding in Christ. So apostasy is real and so too is abiding.

We don't want to live a life that proves in the long run that we never abided at all. We don't want to live a life that looks as if we don't belong to Jesus and then prove to ourselves that we don't actually belong to Jesus.

Apostasy is real. No messing. No messing. It is real. So abide and with these two things we will conclude.

The exhortation that Jesus makes here verse 4 to abide is for the simple reason that a branch cannot bear fruit by itself. The reason to stay close to Jesus the reason to be in Christ properly in salvation in trust and repentance in the Lord Jesus Christ is so that our life can produce the things that it can only produce by belonging to Jesus.

Now he restates this Jesus restates this in a contrast in verse 6 that any branch that does not bear fruit is then removed. So the clear distinction here is between branches that bear fruit and branches

that don't.

[26 : 11] The true distinguishing mark of true Christianity is fruitfulness. And the fruitfulness has to be determined by scripture itself. You can't determine your own fruit.

I'm a good neighbor is one of them. I'm a good person is another one of them. That's coming up with your own fruit basket. The fruit has to be determined by what God says is fruit not what you want to say is fruit.

So the lesson here is immediately apparent I feel that the Christian life may not actually be what you imagined it to be. The Christian life may be different than what you have imagined it to be. the purpose of your life is to bear fruit to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Now I want to affirm at this point even though I've said everything else that those who have been saved by grace through faith which is both a gift of God are sealed with the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption. Those people can never ever ever ever be separated from Christ. But if at this point you're still feeling the threat of being cut away that's mercy.

[27 : 35] That's waking you up to your senses so that you would abide in Christ. So how do we abide? What does a Christian do when they abide in Christ?

Well daily prayer maybe of course daily trust yeah daily obedience yeah all of those three but we don't produce fruit in our life by abiding which fruit is produced in our life by belonging to Jesus Christ.

By abiding is affirming the relationship that we belong to Jesus. What we're meant to see here is that true union with Jesus Christ produces things in our life that cannot be produced without him. This is why Jesus affirms whoever abides in me and I abide in him here it is that bears much fruit verse 5 for apart from Jesus we can do nothing.

It cannot happen. The fruit we produce is a reflection on the Lord Jesus Christ or more importantly or as importantly what we produce in our life is a reflection on what kind of relationship we have with Jesus.

[28 : 50] Okay? What we produce in our life is the benchmark here is the reflection of what type of relationship we have with Jesus.

So here's the exhortation as we close. God is watchful. God is paying attention to your life every single day without question.

And God is doing everything that he can in your life as a believer to encourage fruit. Even at the point where he prunes you back and it's uncomfortable and it's painful and those who have experienced it will know that they don't want it to happen again.

But when it happens it happens for the purpose that God knows you belong and God wants you to be more fruitful than what you already are.

God does everything for you in you to encourage fruitfulness so that he would be glorified by the fruit that you produce and so that you would prove to be his disciples.

[30 : 02] But proof to who? No proof needs to be made to God and no proof needs to be made to Jesus. Proof to who? Proof to yourself. It is the assurance that you belong.

How can I know that I belong? Do I just tell myself? No. I know that I belong by the things that come out of my life that could not come out of my life if I did not belong to Jesus.

So the fruit that my life produces simply by belonging to Jesus is a sign and a proof that I am actually and you are actually a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Christ. So, John 15 verses 1 to 8. It's difficult and it's not without its difficulties and I hope that I have preached it clearly enough for you to understand both the threat and the assurance of both the certainty and the difficulty.

But understand this, that Jesus is the vine, you are the branches, the Father is the vine dresser and he does everything that he does in this relationship to encourage your fruitfulness.

[31 : 15] Amen. Amen.

Father God, we pray that your abiding love and your grace and your mercy would be present in the congregation here this morning and in their children forevermore.

Amen.