

Another seven days have passed and here we are again; another new week stretches out before us. What will this next week hold for us, I wonder? Will it be more of the same? Will we fall into predictable routines or will something new happen? Will we find ourselves soaring, or tanking? Will this be a week of breakthroughs? Only God knows.

But you're here, and that tells me that at the very least, you're open to the possibility that God might say something, do something, or reveal something that will shape this coming week. Friends, anything is possible because for God nothing is impossible.

I don't know what's on your mind this morning, but you need to know that you are on God's mind. In John 14:23 Jesus said, "*Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.*" You need to know that right now God is in hot pursuit of you. And what He's after is relationship, deep relationship. He wants to make His home in you; He wants you to feel at home with Him. This is what we're getting at when we talk about intimacy with God.

I want to remind you as I begin this morning, that we didn't choose God, He chose us. None of us were chosen because we were the brightest and best, the most gifted, the most faithful, or the most obedient. God loves you. He loved you before you loved Him back, He has loved you in the middle of your wandering away, and your doubts hasn't quenched His love; even though you've maybe given up on life, given up on God, He hasn't given up on you.

This morning I'm going to preach a message entitled, *Abiding and Abounding*, but at the heart of this message, at the heart of Jesus'

words in John 15, there is an invitation: *Let me make My home in you...stop running and find your home in Me.* Are you ready?

If you have your Bibles, I want to invite you to turn with me to John 15, and listen to this invitation, straight from the lips of Jesus. If you are using the Blue Bibles in front of you, you can find our text on page 1676. Otherwise you can follow along on the screen as I read verses 1-16.

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. 2 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. 3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. 4 Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have

loved you. **13** Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

14 You are my friends if you do what I command. **15** I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. **16** You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last”.

What I want to do this morning is to make our way through this text, from start to finish, and draw out a few of Jesus' key themes. And I trust that by the time I'm done, you'll have a clearer picture of what it means to find our home in Jesus. Let's begin where Jesus did:

1. “I Am the True Vine” (vs. 1)

Every chance Jesus got, He would tell a story or use a metaphor to reveal what God is like. Here, He refers to Himself as the true vine, God the Father as a Gardener, and us as branches. And while this might not be a familiar metaphor to us, it certainly was to His original audience. The vine, or vineyard, is one of the most common metaphors in ancient literature.

Again and again, the Old Testament Scripture speaks of Israel as being God's vine/vineyard; Psalm 80 and Isaiah 5 are but a few of

the examples.¹ And often, when this metaphor was applied to Israel, it drew attention to her *lack of fruitfulness*.

Jesus picks up right where the Old Testament left off. He says, *I Am the True Vine*. What He was doing was redefining who the people of God were. Before the coming of Jesus, having an I.D. card that read “*Born in Israel*” was all it took; the matter was settled. Here, Jesus redefines the boundaries around Himself: now, to belong to God, one has to be connected through Jesus. With statements like this, it's no wonder they killed Jesus.

Where Israel was unfaithful and unfruitful, Jesus will be **the** faithful, and fruitful Vine; He will succeed where Israel failed.² And more, He will ensure that the branches connected to Him will bear much fruit, to the glory of God the Father.

In just a moment I'm going to move on, but before I do, I need to make a few things clear. At times, Christianity can be narrowed down until it is little more than a shadow of its true self. Sometimes Christianity is reduced to a list of things to believe:

- if you believe that Jesus is both God and man
- if you believe that He died for our sins and rose from the dead
- if you believe that Jesus is the only way to God...**then you are a Christian.**

Now, what we **believe** about Jesus is critical but there's more to it than that.

¹ c.f. Psalm 80:9-16; Is. 5:1-7; 27:2ff.; Jer. 2:21; 12:10ff; Ezek.15:1-8; 17:1-21; 19:10-14; Hos. 10:1-2.

² Gary M. Burge, *NIV Application Commentary: John*, 417.

Others have reduced Christianity to a way of living (commonly known as ethics). And so,

- if you read your Bible, pray, and go to church;
- if you turn the other cheek, love those around you, and give generously to the poor;
- if you follow the example Jesus left for us...**then you are a Christian.**

Now, **the way we live** is critical but there's more to it than that. Following Jesus includes a way of thinking (**belief**) and a way of living (**ethics**), but it also includes a dynamic personal connection: He comes to make His home in us...He comes to live His life in us and through us. He is the True Vine and we are the branches, and when we remain in Him, we cannot help but bear much fruit. Let's move on to vs. 2

2. "My Father is the Gardener" (vs. 2)

Jesus said, "*my Father is the gardener. 2 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.*"

Can I point out the obvious here? If you redefine your life around Jesus, fruitfulness will be your destiny. Jesus is the True Vine, everywhere He goes, He brings life. If Jesus is living in you, what do you think He will pass on to you? Life! And the Father is like a Gardener, He knows just what to do, at just the right time to make a branch even more fruitful.

Remember, we didn't choose Him, He chose us and appointed us to bear fruit that will last. I'm not so confident in my ability to be produce, but I'm supremely confident in His ability as a Gardener. How many of you here this morning enjoy gardening? Likely, every raised hand among us indicates a person who knows more about pruning than I'll ever know. But I know this much, branches that are left to grow as they please, don't become more fruitful, they become less.

A vine left to itself will direct life (sap and nutrients) towards all of its branches, even the dead ones. And so the wise Gardener will do the unthinkable every winter: they will take something sharp and begin to hack away at something very much alive. And at first, their activity might appear a little careless.

The dead branches must go, that we can understand, but why attack the fruitful branches with the same vigour? Jesus says, "*every branch that does bear fruit [The Father] prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.*"

And I want to make a connection between what I said last week and our subject this morning. One of the Father's most effective pruning tools is the tool of *hiddenness*. There are times in our life with Jesus that we cannot sense His nearness; it is during these winter seasons that God begins to prune. In hiddenness, God exposes the dead wood within us...often in the form of flawed expectations or thoughts about God. Then, He performs surgery to remove what is dead and enhance what is healthy.

So what needs pruning in your life? Where is the dead wood that needs to be hacked off? Is there a complaining spirit that is growing

wild and unchecked in your life? Or how about a selfishness that demands that others orbit around your needs and desires? Are you caught in a pattern of sin (pride, gossip, lying, greed, anger, lust)? What dead thing is choking your fruitfulness?

And which healthy branches does the Father wish to prune? Maybe it's in one of your relationships that God is doing some pruning...He's working in you so that you can communicate better with your spouse, or friend, or parent? Maybe you are involved in a ministry, using your gifts, and you are going through some growing pains...the Father is sharpening your focus, or calling you to more humility, or asking you to invest more time.

None of us of us are exempt from pruning and none of us ever graduate from pruning; expect it, welcome it, it's a gift. Vs. 8 says, *"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."* Ultimately, our fruitfulness points away from us and back to Father. Jesus is the True Vine and we are the branches, apart from Him, we can do nothing, but in Him, our lives produce fruit that makes His name great upon the earth.

Next Sunday, I'm going to spend the morning talking about the fruit Jesus produces when He makes His home within us. Now let's turn our attention to the one word that dominates this entire text. Jesus said:

3. "Remain in Me and I will remain in you" (vs. 5)

³ John 1:38-39.

⁴ Luke 19:5-6.

In a matter of 7 verses, Jesus repeats the word "*remain*" 11 times. In my mind, there's only two reasons why a teacher repeats themselves: because of forgetfulness, or for emphasis. Jesus was a brilliant teacher, and if you pour over His teaching you quickly discover that He rarely wasted words. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus gave us only 57 words, and yet we could spend our lives praying this prayer and never run out of things to pray. 11 times in 7 verses? Jesus wants to make sure that we don't miss something really important.

As you read through the Book of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we see that this word "*remain*" is often used in connection with a person's house or home. In Luke 1:56 we read, *"Mary stayed (remained) with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home."* When Jesus first appeared on the scene, Andrew, Peter's brother, approached Jesus and asked Him, *"'Rabbi' (which means 'Teacher'), 'where are you staying (remaining)?' 'Come,' he replied, 'and you will see.'"*³

On another occasion, when Jesus was passing through Jericho, a short tax collector climbed a tree to get a better look at Jesus. *"When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay (remain) at your house today.' So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly."*⁴

So what do we make of this word? It seems to encompass the idea of living with someone, to enter someone's home, to fellowship with

someone, and to enjoy a meal together. *Remain in me*, Jesus says, *and I will remain in you*. Come and live with me, let me enter your home, I want to enjoy your company, spend time in your presence, enjoy a meal together, hang out. All of this is encompassed in this word “*remain*”.

vs. 7 provides another clue; Jesus says, “*If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you.*” Colossians 3:16 says, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*”. In part, remaining in Jesus is tied to the way we are at home with His word, the way we enjoy the company of His word, the way we feast on His word, the way His word directs our thoughts and attitudes...

When we get to vs. 9, Jesus reveals a little more. He says, “*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.*” To remain in Jesus is to open the door to God’s love...to let His love be the first word and last word about your value and worth. When the love of Jesus fills the home of your heart and mind, not only will you see yourself differently, you’ll see others differently...you’ll find yourself wanting to lay down your life for others (vs. 12-13). Jesus was completely at home in the Father’s love; He invites us to be completely at home in His.

Jesus tells us that remaining in Him is the key to a fruitful life. “*4 No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*”

But here’s the question: if remaining in Jesus is the key to fruitfulness, the key to living a life that glorifies God, *what’s the key to remaining? How do we ensure that Jesus remains at home in us, and we in Him?*

The answer is very simple. It’s found in a 9 letter word, that in our culture, reads more like a 4 letter one. *The key to remaining in Jesus is obedience.*

4. Obedience (vs. 10, 14)

If you ask any General, any parent, or dog owner, they will tell you that obedience is a wonderful trait in a soldier/child/dog...but if you widen the circle even just a little, obedience is not held in such high regard. “*It makes sense for a soldier;*” we might say, “*because they operate in life and death situations.*” “*It makes sense for a small child,*” we might say, “*because they don’t see what a parent can see; they need a wisdom beyond their own.*” But in nearly every other arena in life, obedience is low on the list of desirable qualities.

Can you imagine talking about a close friend, and in the midst of praising their qualities, saying: “*He’s so obedient!*” Obedience is seen as a sign of weakness, the ever-obedient one is seen as dependent and unable to think for themselves. We value independence, autonomy, the right to choose; we’re always climbing ladders to increase the circle of people who obey us.

We don’t typically connect joy to obedience, but Jesus did. We don’t typically connect freedom to obedience, but Jesus did. We don’t typically connect intimacy to obedience, but Jesus did. To

quote Martin Luther, “*wherever Jesus goes, there He goes against the flow.*”

I want to construct an analogy that’s been brewing in me over the last month and a half. Its genesis began with something John Wimber wrote, but the picture wasn’t complete until I understood what the word “*remain*” was all about.

Probably most of us here this morning would consider ourselves Christian. At some point you came to the realization that you were in need of God’s forgiveness, that Jesus died on the cross for you, your sin upon His shoulders. You invited Jesus into your life, and have been following Him ever since.

As I was reading a book by John Wimber, I came across the following lines. He writes, “I did not ‘*invite Jesus into my life*’--this is a different posture than the one I am advocating. I *gave myself* to Jesus.”⁵ There’s a massive difference. When we invite someone into our home, it remains *our* home...their presence is at our request, their ongoing presence is dependent upon our willingness to have them remain.

We do not ‘invite Jesus into our life’...we’re not inviting Him to come and be a guest in our home. Here’s a better analogy: we sell our house and everything we have when we give ourselves to Jesus...in essence, we become homeless. And we come to Jesus asking, *Can I remain with you Jesus? Can You be my new home? The place where I*

live, eat, sleep, and dwell? You set the terms, they will be more than generous and fair.

You see, that part of us that demanded the right to determine the when, the where, and the how of our lives...that part of us died when we gave ourselves to Jesus. When we gave ourselves to Jesus, we gave up the right to our lives...we belong to Him now.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says “*You are not your own; you were bought with a price*”. Romans 14:8 says, “*If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord.*” In John 15:10, 14, Jesus said, “*If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love...You are my friends if you do what I command.*”

You know what scares me? Besides needles, I mean. You know what really scares me? I fear that I’m living in a world gone mad. I live in a world, and among a people who are no longer willing to listen, no longer able to take direction. What do you do when everyone around you is a self-declared expert? Because everyone is an authority, no one has any authority. I fear we fast approaching the time of the Old Testament judges where everyone “*did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.*”⁶

I fear I’m living at a time in the Western Evangelical Church, where even Jesus’ words are on a take it or leave basis. We call Jesus

⁵ John Wimber, *The Way In Is The Way On: John Wimber’s Teachings and Writings On Life in Christ*, 47.

⁶ Judges 21:25, New Living Translation.

“Lord” but only when it suits our purposes. When did obedience become optional? *C’mon now Jesus, if you want my vote, you’re going to have to be a bit more flexible. Maybe I could be your consultant Jesus, I could re-package your message, take out the unsavoury bits, and I’ll guarantee you another 30% market share. Heck, I’d even follow you on Twitter, Lord, as long as you follow me too.*

Why do we call Him Lord, Lord, and not do what He says?⁷ Am I the only one who sees this? We’re drifting.

The key to fruitfulness is remaining connected to Jesus. The key to remaining connected to Jesus is obedience. Obedience is like the focus of an Olympic sprinter before the gun goes off. They’re at the starting line, their head is down, their feet planted firmly in the block, they’re poised on their finger tips, they look relaxed but every muscle is rippling, every muscle poised to do what what they’ve been trained to do, to react instantly to the crack of a pistol and explode out of the blocks.

That for me is the picture of obedience: waiting, listening, focussed, and ready to respond when Jesus calls. It’s not about perfection...it’s about a posture, a willingness, a surrendered-ness...my life is not my own, I’ve been bought with a price, and so I will honour God with my life, with my words, with my time, with my money, in my relationships, with my gifts...we are called to obedience.

John Wimber once said, “I’m just change in God’s pocket; He can spend me how He chooses.”⁸ That sounds like something Jesus would say: *Father not my will, but yours be done.* You know, the most miserable people I know are Christians who are trying to have it both ways...serving themselves and serving Jesus. You’d think that a life of obedience would be miserable, but it isn’t. Jesus promises that obedience unlocks His joy in our lives. The people who search for freedom by living for self end up enslaved. And those who surrender their lives to Jesus, find life, real life, a fruitful life.

Conclusion: As I conclude this morning, I want to finish where I first began. At the heart of John 15, Jesus extends to us an invitation: *Let me make My home in you...stop running and remain in Me, abandon your plans and find your true home in Me.*

I pray you’ll heed His call...don’t ignore Him is He is knocking on the door of your life. Maybe today is the day that you wake up to the love of God. Maybe today is the day you give your life to Jesus. Maybe today is the day you get after obedience and stop living for two Masters. Maybe today is the day.

Pray

⁷ Luke 6:46.

⁸ Wimber, 33.