

"How Can We Bear Much Fruit?"

John 15:1-17

This is a great time of year for food. We're getting fresh strawberries, raspberries, cucumbers, tomatoes, canteloupes, potatoes and pretty soon corn, squash, pumpkins, broccoli, cauliflower, peppers, etc. Whether you're a full time farmer or you have a small garden in your back yard, when you plant those seeds you are hoping for a good crop. You are anticipating enjoying the fruit of your labours. So you'll water and weed and prune and do whatever regular care is needed so you will bear much fruit.

So if we understand what we need to do to bear much fruit in our gardens, then we will completely understand how to bear much spiritual fruit for the Lord. We will do the regular care of feeding on the Word, talking to God about our needs and others' needs and weeding out the sinful habits that continually creep into our life so that when God checks on His spiritual garden (you and me, Jesus' church), He can see how our attitudes, actions and words are sounding more like Jesus each day.

When Jesus talks to His 11 disciples hours before His death about abiding/remaining in Him so that they will bear much fruit, He too uses an agricultural analogy. *"I am the Vine, you are the branches. If anyone remains in Me and I in them, they will bear much fruit."* They would have understood that the Vinedresser needs to cut away those parts of the vine that are hindering growth. That He will lift up fallen branches and support them so that the life-giving sap continues to flow smoothly to the branch. And He will invest all that time and energy with the goal of seeing much fruit. Last week we focused on the security of the relationship we, the branches, have in Jesus. We are united to Him. Those branches that never produced fruit dried up because they were not connected. But He remains with His branches. We need to know Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us. Earlier in John's gospel Jesus said,

10:25 "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

Many people in the crowds who followed Him around, didn't really follow Him. They wanted to see miracles. Maybe they enjoyed Jesus' putting the religious leaders down. But when asked to follow Him and do what He says, they said no. Meanwhile, those who desire to hear His teaching and do what He says (even if they fail at times) are those whom Jesus said 'No one can snatch them out of my hand.' Or as Paul says in Col. 3:3

3:3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Without this assurance of Jesus' uniting Himself to us and desiring to pour His life into us, we will be unable to produce the fruit of Christlikeness in our life. So how can we live in a way that God will cause us to bear much fruit? In these verses Jesus uses the phrase abide/remain numerous times but specifically in 3 ways that will result in the Father producing the fruit of Christlikeness in us. Abide in Jesus. Abide in His Words. And abide in His love. Let's look at these:

As we covered last week, Jesus makes a clear link to Judas not being 'clean' and a branch that had no life in it from the beginning to the disciples who are clean and are in the Vine/Jesus. So Jesus says in v.4,

⁴ Remain in me, and I will 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.

Unfortunately, the English translations make it sound like its up to us if Jesus remains in us. Which would contradict what we just read in John 10 and numerous other passages. In the Greek it is simpler, 'You Remain in me, as I in you.' As the vine is connected to the branch, flowing its life giving sap to the branch which alone enables fruit production, so you should look nowhere else for satisfaction than Jesus Himself. To remain in Jesus means to

Trust in Jesus Alone to Satisfy You **(15:1-4)**

Don't let the chapter divisions cause you to lose context of the passage. Let's back this up a few verses to 14:28 and see what Jesus has been talking about; His Father.

²⁸ "You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. ³⁰ I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, ³¹ but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me. "Come now; let us leave. "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.

He's been reassuring His disciples that even though He's leaving, He will send the Spirit and He is going to the Father to prepare a place for them but He is coming back. Even though the evil one is coming (Satan's work to kill Jesus), he will not win. He has no hold on Jesus nor God who Jesus says is greater. Jesus loves the Father and does exactly as God commands Him. 'So if God is going to do some pruning in your life, it's okay. He sent Me to die. I fully obeyed His will and trusted Him in all this. This will shake you but remain in Me. Don't trust in anyone or anything else to satisfy your life. God will work things out in your life and you will be content with that.' As the vine gives the branch what it needs so, Jesus gives us

The revelation of God Himself (14:28-15:1)

We downplay the Father's role here because we fail to see the connect with what He was already saying. To trust in Jesus alone connects us to the Father who made us and who ultimately changes our heart towards His Son, who with His Son gives us His Spirit and is committed to conform us into the image of Jesus Himself. Also in Ch. 14 Jesus told His disciples

^{14:10} Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

If the Father is in Jesus doing His work in Him – which Jesus is fully trusting Him for, even the cross – then we can trust/rely on Jesus and the Father to do what they are doing in our life, even

when we experience difficulties; as the disciples will in just hours. Judas didn't want what Jesus was offering. The disciples have stayed with Jesus. Hang in there, says Jesus because He and the Father

Give us an eternal purpose (vv.2-3)

We talked about this last week too.

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.

God is pruning us through trials and His Spirit speaking to us through the Word to prepare us for eternity. This is still part of the conversation that began in Ch. 13 and in ch. 14 where Jesus said 'I am going to prepare a place for you in My Father's house.' God and Jesus are preparing our future home for us now, which also means they are working the eternal purpose of making us more like Jesus. Our purpose in life isn't our jobs, or to improve our golf game, or to be successful, its to be like Jesus so we glorify God. We need to wake up every day and ask God, help me to be ready for the eternal purposes you have in store for me today in my everyday responsibilities, enjoyments and people I live with or connect with. You were saved for an eternal purpose. And when we focus on that we are remaining in Jesus and finding that

Fellowship with Jesus brings us peace (v.4)

'Abide in Me'. Jesus is a real person and God's Son. How do we fellowship with people? We talk to them. Listen to them. Share life stories, interests, fears, concerns and joys. Over time you get to know them. You enjoy being with them. No different with Jesus. 'Remain in Me'. Get to know Me through My Word. Hear My heart. See what I see. See how much I love you.' The more we know Jesus, the more comfortable we are with Him because we are confident He loves us and has a purpose for our life. We can be at peace even when trials happen where we think He's not in control. Immediate example: the cross. When we rely on Jesus God will produce fruit – the evidence of Jesus' changing our life. And to do that we need to

Depend on His Words **(15:5-8)**

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If anyone remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ 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. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Remain in Jesus' words (all the Bible) means to depend on them, to live by them. That means to

Trust His Word to give victory over sin (vv.5-6)

Sin quenches the Spirit. Sin hinders spiritual growth. Sin is doing what we want against what Jesus wants. What we need to do with the sin we each struggle with is apply a verse or two to help us have victory over it. When we choose to obey the Word of God I believe Jesus empowers us to have victory. Paul wrote in Rom. 6:5-8

⁵ *If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.* ⁶ *For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—* ⁷ *because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.* ⁸ *Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.*

Jesus died to save us from the future penalty of sin – separation from God – but also from the power of sin in our life. Now. Prior to the Spirit's coming into our life at salvation we only had our own willpower to stop sinning. Now we have His power and that power is available when we choose to live out who Jesus says who we are positionally. We are dead to sin. This sin doesn't have power over me because Jesus paid for it. Therefore, I will do what Jesus says believing that obedience to His Word brings me greater satisfaction (and fruit) than this sin. By doing this

We allow His Word to renew our minds (vv.7-8)

⁷ *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.* ⁸ *This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.*

If we are trusting Jesus we are living by His Words which will change the way we think and change how we pray. Remaining in the Word changes how we think about sin, how we think about our purpose in life and how we think about people, etc. We will pray according to God's will more than our will. The more we allow the Word to renew our mind, the more our attitudes, words and actions will sound and look like Jesus. That is the evidence we are growing. Just like agricultural growth when the right internal ingredients get to the plant, growth happens. Similarly, just as we depend on God's Word and apply it to our life it changes us from inside out and we see the evidence of being more like Jesus.

⁹ *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.* ¹⁰ *If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed 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, that he lay down his life for his 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 to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.* ¹⁷ *This is my command: Love each other.*

In this last section on abiding, Jesus tells disciples you need to

Stay Rooted in His Love for You **(15:9-17)**

How does the Father love Jesus? Unconditionally, fully, joyfully. Jesus loves us unconditionally, fully and joyfully. Why does Jesus tell the 11 this now? Because they are going to doubt His love for them when He dies. When we experience difficulties or 'bad things happen to us' almost immediately we question God and Jesus' love for us. 'Why God?' 'Where were you God?' So Jesus tells all His disciples this

So that we won't be thrown by life's problems (vv.9-11)

Life throws us a curve. What should we do? Remain in my love. I still and always love you. That's our anchor. God's doing things we can't see right now because the storm is clouding our

perspective. Stay faithful to my Word. This is where your joy comes from. This is another way of saying content, secure, purposeful. But He doesn't end with that. Then He tells them to love each other. Why?

So we'll have healthy, encouraging relationships (vv.12-17)

No doubt this tight knit group of 11 were rattled by Judas' betrayal of Jesus. Perhaps they wondered if someone else was going to turn traitor, was going to leave Jesus? 'Love each other as I have loved you?' Unconditionally, fully, joyfully, sacrificially. Sacrifice is built into the word agape. Your best at my expense. They haven't understood yet that Jesus will throw His life down for them, His friends. He has shared God's Word with them. They have grown together. They will produce fruit with each other and because of each other.

Whose life have you invested time and energy in to help them grow in Jesus? Who has done that for you? Who have you gone to when you were doubting God's love because you knew they didn't and would give you God's perspective – what you needed? We can't do this alone.

Have you ever looked at a grape vine? What are all the branches doing? Twisting around each other. Growing together. Sometimes the pruning God does is through other believers. Sometimes He uses you and I to lift up someone else.

Remain in the Vine/Jesus. Depend on His Word to give you victory over sin, purpose and clarity when life is confusing. Rely on other believers to lift you up and prune those areas in your life that need pruning. Slowly, gradually, our focus changes on what God wants, our prayers pray for what God desires, our actions and attitudes become more selfless and our friendships become stronger with other disciples. And then we look out across the sanctuary (and zoom) and see there's an abundant crop growing here. Let's stay committed to Jesus, His Word and each other so we can produce much more fruit.

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