

SERMON NOTES
John 15:1-17
“Abiding in Jesus”

Intro:

Have you arrived yet at the place in your walk with God where you realize that you are inadequate and unable to live the Christian life as it is supposed to be lived?

Most of us understand that we become a Christian and are saved not by what we do for God / *but rather simply by accepting by faith what God has done for us through Christ’s death and resurrection*

When a person first becomes a Christian, there is great freedom and joy in experiencing the forgiveness of sins and new life in Christ

-- But then as we learn more about the Bible and get involved in a church, we begin to realize something of what is involved in living the Christian life

-The gift of salvation may be free for the asking and believing / but we begin to discover that becoming a fully devoted follower of Jesus is quite costly

-Becoming a Christian may require only a simple decision of faith / but living a life of obedience to all of Christ’s teachings may seem quite demanding and burdensome

- *For many believers, as time goes on, the Christians life becomes more and more a matter of following rules and guidelines, and meeting expectations, and fulfilling duties and responsibilities*
- **And falling short** – and feeling guilty and inadequate and frustrated and defeated
- *Some believers check out – they either stop coming to church altogether – or at least they stop progressing in the faith, and just go through the motions to keep up appearances*

Other defeated Christians hang in there / they respond to their frustrations by just trying harder and working harder

-they rededicate their lives to Christ again and again

-they resolve again and again to break that bad habit / to overcome that sin / to get that chronic anger or lust or envy or foul language under control

-they make every effort to be more patient and kind and cheerful and loving at home

Yet their Christian life continues to be marked more by defeat and frustration than by victory and joy

And they wonder silently to themselves: *Am I the only one? Am I the only one missing out on the abundant Christian life? Is there something wrong with me?*

-Or does the Gospel promise more than it delivers?

-*Maybe the Christian life isn't quite what it is cracked up to be*

-cf. Wyoming (Grand Tetons vs. Nuclear Wasteland)

- *Has it ever occurred to you that there is more to the Christian life than what you are now experiencing?*

Romans 5:10 (NIV) ¹⁰For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

- *Most of us understand the part of the Gospel that teaches that we are forgiven and reconciled to God by means of Christ's death on the Cross*
- **But what does it mean to be saved by Christ's life?**
- **Salvation is a Life – not just a decision or a prayer to accept Christ – and not just the forgiveness of sins and a ticket to heaven**
- **Salvation is all about restored relationship and restored likeness**
- *We were created for a love relationship with God*
- *We were created in God's image in order to reflect His likeness*
- **The whole point of having our sins forgiven is so that we can obtain access to a holy God – and the whole point of going to heaven is so that we can live forever in God's Presence**
- *If we understand that – then we will seek God's Presence in worship with passionate zeal – certainly on Sundays – but also throughout the week*
- **What's the point of being saved if you don't long to be with God and enjoy His Presence?**
- **We are saved for a restored relationship – for access into God's Presence – and also we are saved to reflect God's likeness**
- **God created us in His image to reflect His likeness – but we all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**
- **God saves us not only to reconcile us but also to restore and renew His image in our lives so that we will glorify Him by reflecting His likeness**
- **In John 15 Jesus calls this bearing fruit – which among other things means reflecting the likeness of Christ's character as well as doing his works**

- ***The whole purpose of being saved is to abide in Christ the True Vine and to bear fruit – which is another way of saying restored relationship and restored likeness***
- ***Salvation is not merely wiping the slate clean of our sins and giving us an admission pass into heaven***
- ***Salvation is God drawing us into the love relationship of the Trinity – it is abiding in Christ and Christ in us – being united with the very Person and Life of Jesus Christ***
- ***Salvation is being grafted into the True Vine, Jesus Christ – so that we become one with Him, and His life and His love flow through us***
- ***Our life is taken up into Christ's, and Christ's life is received into ours so that we bear fruit and become like Him***
- ***Salvation is the impartation of life – the very Resurrection Life of Christ Himself – to those who believe in Him***
- ***The Christian life is the Christ-life***
- ***Only the Life of Christ flowing within us – transforming us from within – can produce an outward life that is like Christ's***
- ***To become like Christ outwardly, we must first become like Christ inwardly***
- ***To become like Christ inwardly – we must remain connected to the Life of Christ so that the Life of Christ can flow through us and change us into His likeness***
- ***A “saved life” therefore will reflect the likeness of Christ***
- ***And the only way to live a “saved life” – a Christ-like life – is by having the Saving Life of Christ flowing through your veins***

I. WE EXPERIENCE THE SAVING OF LIFE OF CHRIST BY THE INDWELLING SPIRIT

- ***It is the saving death of Christ for us that reconciles us to God***
- ***It is the saving Life of Christ IN us that changes us into the likeness of Christ***
- ***We gain access into the Presence of God the Father through the death of Jesus Christ for us***
- ***We experience the Ongoing Presence of the Living Christ in us through the indwelling Holy Spirit***

- **We enter God's Presence through the Cross of Christ**
- **God's Presence enters our hearts through the indwelling Spirit**
- Jesus' teaching on the Vine and the Branches takes place right in the middle of His teaching on the Paraclete – the Spirit of Truth
- *The meaning of his teaching on the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the meaning of his teaching on the branches abiding in the vine are essentially the same*
- **Experiencing the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit cannot be separated from abiding in a love relationship with Jesus**
- *It is as the life of Jesus flows through us by means of the indwelling Spirit that we are empowered to do ministry that will bear fruit*

John 14:16 - 18 (NIV) ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— ¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

Jesus is equating "He (the Spirit) will be in you" with "I will come to you."

The implication is clear: *The indwelling Paraclete (Spirit) is the indwelling Jesus.* Jesus fulfills his promise to come to the disciples by sending the Spirit

*Do you believe in the Oneness of the Spirit and the Son just as you believe in the Oneness of the Father and the Son? **As one sees the Father in Jesus (John 14:9), so also one experiences Jesus in the Spirit (John 14:15ff).***

Most of us view the Father as Personal, and we certainly view Jesus as Personal. *Do we also view the Spirit as Personal—of the same essence and character and purpose as the Son?* The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jesus, the Spirit of Christ -- *How can there be any essential difference between Jesus and the Spirit of Jesus?*

Why, then, do some Christians struggle with viewing the Spirit so differently from Jesus—viewing Jesus as our Friend while viewing the Spirit as some wild and crazy ghost-like impersonal force to be kept at arms length?

Why do people who say they love Jesus get uneasy when the subject turns to the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Jesus?

Some people want a relationship with God without coming to God through Christ.

But Jesus said: **“He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.”** (John 5:23) *The Father and the Son are One.* To love one is to love the other. To reject one is to reject the other.

Some Christians today want an intimate personal relationship with Jesus apart from the Spirit. They are comfortable with Jesus but uncomfortable with the Spirit. **But it is no more possible to honor the Son without honoring the Spirit than it is to honor the Father without honoring the Son.** *Father, Son and Holy Spirit are One.*

Jesus is now exalted at the right hand of the Father in heaven. **It is by means of the Spirit that Jesus lives in our hearts.** *We experience the ongoing Presence of Jesus by means of the indwelling Spirit.* **The Spirit and the Son are One.** *To love one is to love the other. To be closed toward one is to be closed toward the other.*

Ephesians 3:16-17 “I pray that out of His (the Father’s) glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”

If we want Christ to be at home in our hearts, then we must welcome and embrace and open ourselves to the Spirit. **We must welcome the Spirit as warmly and openly as we would welcome Jesus himself.**

We experience the saving Life of Christ by the working of the Spirit of Jesus within us

- If Holy Spirit talk makes you uneasy – or if you have never received much biblical teaching about the Holy Spirit – or if you would like to experience more of the fullness of the Spirit in your Christian life and service – *then I invite you to attend the Summer elective class on the Holy Spirit starting next Sunday at 9:00 am*
- We cannot become a spiritually dynamic church body apart from embracing the ministry of the Holy Spirit

II. WE EXPERIENCE THE SAVING LIFE OF CHRIST BY ABIDING IN JESUS

- As Jack Palance told Billy Crystal in the movie “*City Slickers*,” – the key to a life that really counts is to figure out the **One Thing** that will give your life meaning – and then stick to that

- *Many people haven't figured out the One Thing and so they try to substitute the busyness of Many Things for the significance of the One Thing*
- *Other people choose one thing to focus their life on – but they choose the Wrong Thing instead of the One Thing that will give life meaning – they choose something like Money or Success or Happiness or Sports or Sex or Career*
- *How about you? Have you discovered the One Thing that will give your life lasting significance – or to use a biblical term – live a life that will bear much fruit that will last?*

John 15:4 - 5 (NIV) ⁴Remain 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. ⁵“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.

- *Jesus is saying here that remaining well-connected to Him is the One Thing that will enable you to live a fruitful life of lasting significance*
- **Jesus is the Vine – we are the branches – and just as the branches of a grapevine are nourished by the life-giving sap of the vine flowing through the branches, enabling the branches to bear fruit – so also we are nourished spiritually by the Life of Christ flowing through us, enabling us to grow in Christ-likeness and serve God's Kingdom purposes**
- ***It is the Vine that gives life to the branch***
- *Nourishment from the vine enables the branch to bear good fruit*
- *It is not heroic effort that enables the branch to bear fruit – branches bear fruit simply by remaining connected to the Vine and by virtue of the sap of the vine flowing through the branches*
- *No one praises the branches for a good harvest of grapes – they praise the vines and they praise the gardener*
- **God the Father is the Gardener and Jesus is the True Vine**
- *Abiding in Jesus does not require any Herculean effort*
- ***The key to abiding in Jesus is to Love and Treasure Jesus above all else – to set the thoughts of your mind and the affections of your heart upon His Greatness and Majesty and Love***
- *Ask the Holy Spirit to show you Christ's glory in increasing measure – and your natural response will be to abide in Christ*

- *The key to bearing much fruit is not our striving or labor*
- *The key to bearing much fruit is abiding in Christ – remaining connected to the Life of Christ*
- **As we maintain our connection with Christ – then the Life and Power of the Spirit flow through us to produce much fruit**
- **To be a disciple of Jesus means having an inner spiritual life that is nurtured by a life-giving connection with Jesus Christ**
- *Everything else flows from that*
- **Therefore, the first priority for the Christian is to nurture that inner spiritual life by remaining attached to the Life of Christ**
- *To abide in Jesus is essentially the same reality as to Rest in Jesus*
- Abiding in Christ is not a life of feverish activity and relentless stress
- *Abiding in Christ is setting our minds and hearts on Christ // resting in the sufficiency of his love and grace // drawing strength from His power // being refreshed and renewed by His Life flowing through us*
- **To abide is not to strive and labor – to abide is to stay close and trust and yield**
- **Salvation is a Life – and that Life is nurtured and grows and develops and bears fruit as we remain attached to Jesus who is the Vine and the Life-Giver**

III. WE ABIDE IN JESUS THROUGH PRAYER AND THE WORD

- How do we remain connected to a Person we cannot see?
- *Jesus is alive – but His living presence in our lives is unseen*
- How do we remain attached and draw Life from Someone we cannot see?

John 15:7 - 8 (NIV) ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

- *We remain connected to Jesus by means of communication through abiding in His Word and through prayer and through other spiritual disciplines that enrich our inner spiritual life and connect us with the Life and Spirit of Christ within us*

- Thomas a Kempis (“The Imitation of Christ): *“Christ will come to you and comfort you if you prepare a worthy place for him in your heart. All his glory and beauty lies within you, and he finds great delight in living there. He often visits the person who has a rich inner life, holding sweet conversation with him, granting delightful comfort, much peace and intimate friendship...”*
- *“Make room for Christ, then, and place him at the center of your life. When he alone rests there, you will have great wealth, and he will be all you need.”*
- *So how do you develop a rich inner life where Christ will be at home and where you can enjoy sweet conversation and intimate friendship with Jesus?*
- Listen to the comparison between verse 5 and verse 7:
- **John 15:5** *“If a man remains in him, and I in him, he will bear much fruit”*
- **John 15:7** *“If you remain in me, and my words remain in you...”*
- **One of the primary ways of remaining connected to Jesus is by his words abiding in you and by his words shaping your prayer life**
- *Your prayer life reveals how well connected you are to Jesus and how much influence His Word is having on your heart’s desires and passions to bring them into alignment with the Will of God*
- Spending time in the Word of God and in prayer is not about earning brownie points with God or impressing others with your spiritual devotion or fulfilling a requirement for God’s blessing on your day
- **The spiritual disciplines are the means of spiritual attachment to Jesus**
- ***The spiritual disciplines are the means of remaining connected to Jesus the True Vine so that His Life and His Love and His Power can flow through us so that as we become like Christ inwardly, we can live like Christ outwardly***
- *It is by means of the spiritual disciplines that the Life of Christ takes hold within us and transforms us into the likeness of Christ*
- ***It is by means of the spiritual disciplines that we develop a friendship with Christ so intimate that it becomes life-changing***
- *The spiritual disciplines are to Christian living what practice is to an athlete or musician – they are what we do behind the scenes to become the person we long to be and live the life we long to live*
- *Many Christians try to live the Christian life like a middle-aged weekend athlete trying to perform on game day without practicing between games*

- We want to be like Christ in our outward behavior in public view -- on game day, so to speak – but we don't put in the practice time to become like Christ and develop the fruit of the Spirit inwardly
- *We wish we could live the kind of Christian life that some other godly man or woman demonstrates – we admire their patience or compassion or boldness or faith or wisdom or self-control or joy -- but we fail to develop the kind of inner spiritual life through the practice of the spiritual disciplines that makes such a lifestyle or character possible*
- What are the spiritual disciplines?
- *Bible reading // prayer // fasting // Scripture meditation and memorization // solitude and silence // worship // Bible study // submission // service // confession*
- **The purpose of the spiritual disciplines is to connect us to Christ so that the life of Christ within us can transform us and empower us to bear fruit**
- Jesus did not say: *If you have your daily quiet time and attend worship services every week, you will bear much fruit*
- He said: ***If you abide in Me – if you remain connected to Me – then you will bear much fruit***
- Bible reading and prayer and fasting and Scripture meditation and worship are simply means to the end of connecting with Christ so that His life and love and power can flow through us to enable us to bear much fruit
- *The spiritual disciplines are the means by which we keep our ax sharpened in Christ's service*
- Abraham Lincoln: *“If I had 8 hours to chop down a tree, I'd spend 6 hours sharpening my ax.”*
- Most of us are not so wise.
- *When I used to cut firewood to heat our home in Ely, I hated to take time out to sharpen the chainsaw – after all, no wood gets cut while you're sharpening the chainsaw*
- But eventually I would have to give in and take time out to sharpen the saw – and then I would be amazed how much faster the sharpened saw would cut through the wood
- *Many of us spend much of our Christian lives working hard to serve Christ with dull axes – because most of us think the way to bear much fruit is to keep on chopping*

- How do we sharpen our axes so that our Christian service will be effective and actually produce fruit rather than just growing a bunch of leaves?
- **We sharpen our axes by remaining well-connected to Jesus Christ, the True Vine – so that His Life and Power flow through us to enable us to bear fruit**
- *Branches do not bear fruit by working hard – Branches bear fruit by remaining connected to the Vine*
- ***The power to bear fruit resides not in the branches themselves – but in the life-giving sap that flows from the Vine through the branches***
- *We demonstrate how much we believe that truth by devoting ourselves to prayer and the study of the Word of God*

IV. WE ABIDE IN JESUS BY ABIDING IN HIS LOVE

John 15:9 (NIV) ⁹“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.”

- *We remain connected to Jesus by living in His love*
- Not just when we're at church // Not just when we're having our quiet time // Not just when we're doing Christian work – *but all the time*
- *We are to live in his love when we are at school or at our workplace or at home or playing sports or eating dinner or socializing with friends*
- Henry Blackaby: *Everything in your Christian life – everything about knowing Him and experiencing Him – everything about knowing His will – depends on the quality of your love relationship with God.*
- *Our abode – the home of our soul – is to be the love of Christ*
- ***To abide in the Vine is to abide in His love just as Christ lived his life by abiding in the Father's love***
- The love of the Father to the Son is not a sentiment – it is a divine energy
- *It sustained Christ through life and the grave itself*
- ***The Father loved the Son, dwelt in the Son, did all for the Son, worked through the Son***
- *So also the love of Christ to us is a divine energy – a living power – that will accomplish in us all that He delights to give*

- *When we understand how completely and deeply and fully we are loved – we will give ourselves up to this love – and the more we yield to the love of Christ – the more the Life and Power of the Spirit will flow through us*

Romans 5:5 (NIV) ⁵And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

- *It is by means of the indwelling Spirit that we experience the fullness of God's love for us*
- The more we welcome and embrace the Spirit within us – the more we experience the fullness of God's love
- **To abide in Jesus' love is to believe that we are loved by Jesus – all the time**
- *To abide in Jesus' love is to cling to this truth whatever our circumstances*
- One of Satan's chief aims is to disconnect us from the love of Christ
- *When we go through trials and hardships and suffering – as all of us do in this fallen world – Satan is right there to try to convince us that this disease or disappointment or hardship means that we are not loved by Jesus anymore*
- If Satan can get us to doubt that we are loved by God – then he has won a major spiritual victory that will greatly impede our spiritual growth and rob us of the joy of our salvation and the peace of Christ's presence in our lives
- **Abiding in Jesus' love means continuing to believe – moment by moment – whatever the circumstances – that we are loved by God**
- *That is why it is important to live near the Cross of Christ – for the Cross of Christ is the proof of His and the Father's love for us*

V. WE ABIDE IN HIS LOVE BY OBEYING HIS COMMANDS

John 15:10 - 12 (NIV) 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.**

- *We abide in Christ by abiding in His love – and we remain in His love by obeying His commands – and His chief command is this: **to love one another as He has loved us***
- **We abide in Christ's love as we love one another as Christ has loved us**

- *As we love one another – the Life and Love and Power of the Risen Christ flow through us – enabling us to bear much fruit as individuals and as a church*
- Putting up with the faults of other Christians is not just a nice idea – it is necessary to maintaining your spiritual attachment to Jesus
- *Forgiving church members who offend you or hurt your feelings or sin against you is not just a nice idea – it is necessary to maintaining your spiritual attachment to Jesus*
- Humbling yourself and serving one another and submitting to one another in the body of Christ is not just a nice idea – it is necessary to maintaining your spiritual attachment to Jesus
- **There is one Vine and many branches**
- *Each branch does not have its own separate relationship with the Vine*
- **All the branches are connected to the same life-giving Vine – and the condition for remaining connected to the Vine is to love the other branches as Christ loves us**
- *When the branches do not love each other – when the branches do not forgive each other – when the branches do not live together in unity with one another – then the Life of the Vine is hindered from flowing freely through the branches – and the branches become less fruitful*
- If we want to be a spiritually dynamic church making a significant impact in vulnerable families – then we must remain connected to Christ Who is our Life – *and if we want to remain connected to Christ – then we must extend to others the love that we receive from Him*
- How did Jesus live his life?
- *By abiding in His Father’s love and then loving others with that love*
- How can we live a Christ-like life?
- *By abiding in Christ’s love and then loving others with that love that flows from the Vine through the branches to bear much fruit*

(Conclusion):

- Sometimes the Christian life seems pretty complicated – but Jesus simplifies things for us in this passage by teaching us the One Thing that really matters:

John 15:5 (NIV) ⁵“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.

- *It's not how much we earn or how much we have or how hard we work or how many church activities we are involved in that counts – it's being well-connected to Jesus that counts*
- So what changes do you need to make to better align your life and priorities with the truth of what Jesus is teaching here?
- *Perhaps some of you have been substituting the busyness of Many Things for the significance of the One Thing*
- Perhaps some of you have been working in the Lord's harvest fields with a dull ax and need to take some time out on a regular basis to sharpen your ax
- *Perhaps some of you have been substituting lots of activity in the service of Christ for a love relationship with Jesus – and you need to re-connect with Him*
- Perhaps some of you have a relationship with another believer or church member that needs to be repaired so that the Life of Christ is not hindered from flowing through you and our church body to bear much fruit

Prayer

Father, I Adore You