



Sermon – January 27, 2019
Wes Wilkinson

Verses Covered

John 15:1 - 11

1 John 2:6

Hebrews 12:6

Well it is always such a joy and an honor when Chris asks me to fill in. I love being able, and cherish the opportunity, to open God's word with you all. And so this morning, we're going to dive right in and start running hard right from the get go. So if you're got your Bibles, if you will turn to John 15. John chapter 15. And we're going to pick up in verse 1.

Now where we find ourselves, we're going to pick up in the middle of a conversation that Jesus is having with His disciples the night before He is to be crucified. He is, John recounts this conversation. It's the final instructions that Jesus will give to His followers before He is taken from them. And His emphasis all throughout this section, chapters 13, 14, 15, 16, is He wants to make sure His disciples understand how they will continue to follow Him even when He is seemingly gone from them. And so this is where we pick up, and we're going to pick up right off the bat with a powerful statement that Christ makes. So if you're there, John 15:1, look with me. Jesus speaking, says:

¹"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes it away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.

So here we have Jesus, Jesus makes a powerful statement of truth. This is the last of the seven I Am statements that John records in the gospel of John. You may recall "I Am the bread of life." Or "I Am the living water". "I Am the resurrection from the dead." Here He makes the final statement. "I Am the vine." And then He proceeds to give all this vine imagery which; many of us might pick up on the agricultural picture He's drawing. There's an important aspect in His statement, I am the vine, for us we miss. If you go throughout the Old Testament, God calls Israel "His vine." Psalm 80, He speaks of His vine that He brings out of Egypt and plants it in the promised land. God expected His vine, His people planted in the promised land, to produce His fruit and thus bear witness to the world as the world awaited the Messiah. But it's going to be

their failure to do so that causes God and places like Isaiah 5 to speak of His vine and say, this is my beloved vine whom I have done everything for. What more could I do? But rather than my vine producing fruit which is good, has produced fruit which is worthless. Rather than the fruit of justice, it has born bloodshed. And it's an indictment upon Israel, the failure of Israel, to be who God called and purposed Israel to be. And so Jesus making this statement, I am the true vine, is His saying where Israel has failed, catch my Bible, where Israel has failed, I have fulfilled. I am the vine of God in the world who produces His fruit. And my Father, He's the vinedresser, and He states what the Father's goal is. The Father's goal is to produce fruit. That the vine would produce fruit. Now stop with me a moment. This is a powerful truth. If you are in this place today and you are in Christ, and He says in verse 3, He looks at the disciples and says,

³You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

What He's saying is because you have believed what I have said, you are in the vine. If you are in this place today and you, like me, have believed the gospel message. You have believed the words of Christ in faith and He has saved you by His blood through grace. Then you are in the vine. And being in the vine, the will of the Father is to produce His fruit through you. But it's not just the will of the Father, it's the work of the Father. I think many of us, we understand God desires His fruit, God desires His righteousness born out through our lives. But sometimes we can approach it, God this is what You want so it's a matter of now it's up to me. God looks at us and says, "I want this, now do it." But that's not the picture here. The picture here is God says, this is the fruit, this is what I desire out of your lives, and I am the one at work to bring it in your life. Can you just imagine; God wants to bear His fruit through our lives. What is His fruit? There's all sorts of things in scripture listed as the fruit of God. Romans 1 speaks of leading others to Christ as bearing fruit. Romans 6 speaks of growth and holiness and obedience as His fruit. Romans 15 talks about generosity in the Spirit of the believer, of giving abundantly as being a fruit. Colossians speaks of good works and service as being fruit. Hebrews says that the praise that springs out of our heart and through our lips, the praise we have just offered to God is His fruit in our lives. Of course the most familiar would be the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5, love, joy, patience, peace, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. These are His fruits in our lives. They are fruits from the inside out. The fruit that God wills to bear in our life and works to bear in our life is nothing less than total conformity to the person and image of Christ. He is at work in your life and my life to produce Christlikeness. That's a powerful truth. So what, then, is our response? If that's God's will and it's also what God as the vinedresser is at work in our lives to do, what is our part? Well this is what Jesus answers for us. Look down in verse 4.

⁴Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, no neither can you unless you abide in Me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches; and he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

God is at work. It is His will to bear fruit through our lives. Jesus is the one who is going to bear that fruit because He is the true vine. It's God's work to produce fruit in our lives, but what is our response? Our response is to abide. Abide, it's an interesting word. It's a simple word in terms of its definition. And it means simply to continue on in a state of being. Or to remain somewhere

instead of leaving. That's why we often translate it; to dwell, to live, to make your abode. It's a simple word in meaning, but it's powerful because it's not just a suggestion. Jesus here does not say, casually abide. But if you go to the Greek, there is no stronger way he could phrase a command. This is a command for your life and my life with the utmost of urgency and passion. And while the word is simple to understand in definition, it can become a little bit more complicated to understand in application. What does it mean in application? You go throughout scripture, you see in 1 John, same writer, he pulls the same idea. He says, this is how you know you abide in God, by the Spirit whom He has given you. That's the end of 1 John 3. In 1 John 2, he says that abide in what you have received in the beginning. That is the gospel message. And if you abide in the gospel message, then you know you abide in God and Jesus. So what does it mean to abide? Let me just put it very simply. To abide in Christ is to rest in faith in who He is and what He's done. And as Chris has been talking about at he's been walking us through Ephesians, the position we have been given in Christ. To abide in Christ is to rest in faith in who He is and what He's done and the position that He's given us in Christ. It is to rest completely and firmly on that and that alone. It is to seek a life of daily persevering, complete dependence upon Him and Him alone. It is to dwell in Him. So let me phrase it maybe another way. How often as you go about your day, as I go about my day, do I take my thoughts and dwell in the business of life? How often do I dwell in the worries and doubts about life? How often do I dwell in worries and doubts and fears and even untruths about my Lord? Let me give you an example. I tend in my life, and just internally and those of you who knew me growing up, this will be no shock to you. I am internally very driven and very perfectionistic with myself. That's why in football practice, my punishment was never to run sprints, it was to keep me from running sprints because I was going to keep going. This is how I tend to be. Because of that I tend to view God in this way. If I am not perfect enough, then He does not want to meet with me. And so if I'm going to come into His presence on a daily basis, I better make sure that I am at the peak level of Christian performance, otherwise he won't want to meet. That's how I feel often. Here's the problem with that. That's a denial of who He is and what He's done and the position I have in Christ. Who is He? He is God who loved me even when I did not love Him. What has He done? He has done what I cannot do because I am not perfect in and of myself. He has been perfect. He has lived the perfect life. He has given me His righteousness. And what is my position because of what He's done? Far from having to come into His presence groveling to convince Him to meet with me, scripture says that through the Holy Spirit, I cry Abba! Father! Hebrews says I come in with boldness and confidence. I run into the room. I jump into His lap. I don't have to convince God to meet with me. God desires it. God already thinks about me more than I could ever possibly imagine. Even though all the world isn't about me, it's all about Him. I'll give you an example of this to simply say, because often when we read, abide in Him, the first thing our mind goes to are things we need to do. To abide in Him, I need to read my Bible. I need to pray. I need to do this. I need to do that. And I am just here to tell us all that it is possible to read your Bible every day and not be abiding in Christ. It is possible to pray and not abide in Christ. It is possible to share the gospel and not be abiding in Christ. It is possible because you can do those things from a place of fear and from a place of doubt rather than a place of faith where you are firmly resting in who He is and what He's done and the position He's given you on your behalf. I fear this is why. What does He say? Abide in Me and I in you. And unless you abide in Me, you can do nothing. And I love the way one commentator put it. We don't often, we miss the radicalness of the statement. Nothing to Jesus is nothing. It's not something. It's not a lesser thing. It's not a smaller thing. When He says you can do nothing, it means you can do nothing. You and I cannot

bear the fruit of God in our lives. God must bear His fruit in our lives. What you and I must do is abide. We must abide. We must rest. It is He who does it and I fear that this is often why, why in our lives, why when you look at the church and the 21st century world in America today, why is there so little fruit? Perhaps it's because we are addicted to 3-point sermons with 3 things to go do or don't do. And we've missed what it means to abide. Because to abide is a little abstract. It's a little bit mystical, if you will. It's not really. Really it's just resting in simple faith in Christ. But we have a tough time with that. Maybe it's too simple. Maybe it's, we just like to do things. But to abide is to rest in Him. But it's not just resting in Him. Look what he says, verse 4, abide in Me and I in you. To abide is mutual. It's me abiding in faith in One in whom there is a mutual relationship. Jesus indwells me. He abides within me and His abiding is not determined by my abiding. If you're in Christ, His abiding in you is unconditional. As I abide in Him, I'll become more aware of Him abiding in me. My fellowship will become far deeper and more intimate with Him. But He abides in me. At work in me to bear fruit. This is what it means to abide. But Jesus takes it a little bit further and says, if you're going to abide, here's what it's going to look like as it plays out in your life. Look at verse 7.

⁷If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified in this, so that you may bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

If you and I abide in Christ, it's going to do something. It's going to transform how we pray. He says, if you abide in Me, he gives a condition, if you abide in Me and my words abide in you. What does it mean for His words to abide in us? His words abiding in us is nothing less than, than us surrendering our thoughts and our will to be completely in line with His thoughts and His will. It is being so enamored and wrapped up and consumed by His word. It is a mind that takes seriously all the passages that say, take captive your thoughts. Or be transformed by the renewing of your mind. It is a will and a heart that is completely submitted to His words. As I abide in Him and His words abide in me, here's what's interesting, this is what caught me off guard. The ask is not just a statement, it's not, "Hey, do this and, oh yea, you should ask." It's actually a command with the same force as the command to abide. Jesus is saying when you abide in Me and My words abide in you, when My words, when My will, when My ways, when you have submitted and surrendered to that, I command you to pray and to pray with urgency. Why? Because at that point, what I will be praying is not my will and not my list, but it is His will and His heart and His desires. And God is a God who wants to bear His fruit in and through our lives. So when I am praying His will, He answers with fruit. It says, in this God is glorified that you may bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. If you and I abide, it's going to impact our will. It's going to impact our surrender and submission to His word. It's going to impact our prayer life. Not only that, but look at what He says in verse 9.

⁹Just as the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.

What is He saying there when He says that the Father has loved me? The Father has a perfect complete love. The Father could not love the Son any more and will never love Him any less. It's perfect. And Jesus says, just as the Father has loved Me, that is how I have loved you. All of us in this room, that is how Jesus has loved us. His love is unconditional. It's not based on our performance. It's not based on what we can do or offer Him. His love is perfect. It is complete.

He could not love you more and He will never love you less. If you are in Christ, you cannot lose His love. Instead if you're in Christ whereas once you were an object of His wrath, now you are an object of His love, Ephesians 2.

So what does it mean to abide in His love? It's a command there. The same urgency as the previous command. Well to abide in His love is to, to rest in a place where I am able to consistently experience the goodness of His love. Not going to lose His love. It's not abide in His love as if I'm going to lose His love. But it's to be in a place where I can experience His love. And here's what He says.

¹⁰If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept the Father's commandments and abide in His love.

Here's what abiding is going to do. If I'm going to abide in Him, if I'm going to abide in His love; while it starts, the base is a resting in faith in who He is and what He's done and my position in Him. It must lead to then the reality, the tangible, of obedience in my life. And notice what He says, my obedience to abide in His love is no different than the example that Jesus Christ has set Himself. 1 John 2:6 says this.

⁶the one who says that he abides in Jesus ought himself to walk in the same manner as Jesus walked.

What do we see in the life of Jesus? We see in the life of Jesus, Jesus depended completely and fully upon the Father for everything. He only did what the Father told Him to do. He only said what the Father told Him to say. This is His own words that He told us this. Jesus was consumed with the Father's will. He was consumed with taking everything of the Father seriously. So we just ask a question. Are our lives consumed with the Father's will? Do we take Jesus seriously at everything He says? Now here, don't miss the point. We can jump over here and do the things He's commanded and not be abiding. We start abiding in faith, but if we're going to abide in faith and rest in faith in who He is, we must take Him serious. Perhaps the reason many of us do not sense the love of God in our lives, is not because God does not love us, but perhaps because we are walking in places that are not in line with His heart. And He wants to bring us back. Jesus says abide. He says, abide in Me and I in you. He wants us to take it serious, hence the warning in verse 6, if anyone does not abide in Me, he is cut off. And Jesus doesn't really give, who is cut off, who is this, who is that? We don't really know. It's a picture. And the point of it is to take serious God wants to bear fruit in our lives and to do so we must abide. But if we are going to abide, Jesus says, there's going to be two realities in our lives. Look at me I'm doing the Austrian way of counting; one, two. That's two there. I'll do this; two. There's two ways. Two realities Jesus says that are going to be in our lives. Look back at the top with me. Speaking of the Father he says, "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away. But every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit." If you endeavor to live a life where you abide in Christ, and that abiding produces in you and leads you to a life, a fruitful prayer life, because you're submitted to His will, and an obedient lifestyle abiding in His love. You are walking with God well. Here is what Jesus says the reality of God is in your life. The Father is going to prune you. And this is where many of us will give up and cease abiding. Because in our minds we have this very American idea, or western idea, 21st century idea, that the more I follow Jesus, the easier

it should get. When Jesus says, if you're going to follow Me and abide in Me, the Father's going to take His pruning shears and is going to prune you. When vines grow, what vinedressers have to do when vines grow is, a grapevine if left to itself, will stop producing grapes and instead, the branches will just send out all of these extensions and just take over vast territories. So the first thing the vinedressers have to do is they have to trim away all that excess territory to discipline the branches to focus on fruit. The second thing they do, though, is when it comes to that fruit, they will even come in and cut off clusters of grapes so that the vine will focus on only the very best clusters of grapes. This is what God does in our life. We are prone, left to ourselves, we're prone to wander. And in self-love whether for good things or sinful things, we can send out branches and take over territories. And what God is going to do in our life is He's going to prune. He's going to allow trials. He's going to allow suffering. He's going to bring conviction. He's going to shut doors. He is going to cut off any aspect of self-love or self-dependence in our lives. Not only that, though, but He's going to come and even to good things in our lives, things we look at and we say, "Wow, God, I don't understand. Why did this door shut to this job? I'm not aware of any sin in my heart. It seemed a perfect opportunity. You seem to be leading and giving peace. And the door slammed shut. Why God did this relationship, this person who I thought was the one, but now they're not. What is going on here?" Or perhaps, "God you're given me all these opportunities of service, look at how you've allowed, but all of a sudden, these doors have shut and I cannot teach that class anymore." Or I cannot serve in that organization anymore. God will prune even the good things in our lives. Things that are difficult to give up because there does not seem to be anything wrong. And maybe there's not anything wrong. But God will prune it because the health of the vine, the vine cannot be healthy, the branches will not produce good fruit if He does not prune. Now you can understand about God's pruning. Hebrews 12 phrases it this way speaking of the discipline of God. Says this:

⁶“My son, do not regard difficulty, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you're reprov'd by Him; for those whom the Lord loves He disciplines.

Now we can only think of discipline in terms of punishment for doing something wrong. But discipline simply means instruction in the correct way to go. And God does it in our lives because He loves us. Hebrews 12:11 says,

¹¹All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it,

To those who will abide and rest in faith in Christ that even when trials come, it doesn't mean God's not up to something, it doesn't mean God's turned His back, it might be the very means by which God produces even greater fruit in our lives for His glory. To those who have been trained by it afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Corrie ten Boom, who was the daughter of a Danish watchmaker, they kept Jews from the Nazis and hid them in their house in World War 2, she wrote a poem this way regarding this very thing. She said,

I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith and love and every grace.

Might more of His salvation know,
And seek more earnestly His face.

I hope that in some favored hour
At once He'd answer my request.
And, by His love's constraining power,
Subdue my sin and give me rest.

Instead of this He made me fill
The hidden needles of my heart.
And let the angry powers of Hell
Assault my soul in every part.

Yea, more with His own hand He seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe.
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds and made me low.

“Lord, why is this?” I trembling cried,
“Will thou pursue Thy worm to death?”
“’Tis in this way,” the Lord replied,
“I answer prayer for grace and faith.”

These inward trials I employ
From self and pride to set you free
And break your schemes of earthly joy
That you may seek your all in Me.

This is why James says, count it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter trials of various kind, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance and let, allow endurance to have its full and perfect effect that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing. It is God's will and God's work to produce fruit in our lives. The only way it will happen is if we abide. But if we abide in Him out of love, He's going to prune and discipline. But that's only one of the two realities Jesus gives. The last is this. Look at verse 11.

¹¹These things all of this I have told you so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be made full.

If you abide in Christ, you will face the pruning shears of the loving God. But Jesus will also give you His joy. Could it be that the fact that so few of us have joy is because we are not abiding? Now joy's not happiness, which is pleasure based on seen, temporal circumstances. Joy is something internal. It's something divine. And it's based on what I can't see yet, but is coming and is guaranteed in eternity. When you and I abide what God produces in our life, it's His joy to make our joy complete. May we be found to abide in Him.

If you'll bow your heads and close your eyes. Father, it just blows my mind that as someone who can offer You nothing, Jesus, someone who cost You greatly, You want to bear Your fruit through my life. You want to bear Your fruit through everyone in here's life. You don't want to just bear fruit through someone like Billy Graham. You want to bear fruit through every single son and daughter who is Yours. So Father I pray that we would take seriously Your word and we would really understand what it means to rest in who You are and what You've done and the position You've given us. Father, thank You. Jesus, thank You that You are the true vine. May we respond now as You stir our hearts.