

Message

Stay Attached to the Vine

We have been making our way through John 15. We are taking our time, looking at some details that may get overlooked in a brief study. I believe that chapter provides us with important information about what it means to be a follower of Jesus, especially in the “in between” time. Jesus returned to heaven. Some day he will come back to this earth for us. How are we to live during this time when we wait for His return. We have spent some time digging into this word picture, or parable that Jesus paints for us in the opening verses of the chapter. We will move on to the next paragraph in the chapter next weekend.

The key verse in this section, and possibly for the whole chapter is verse 8: ***“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”*** Jesus is the vine and we are the branches attached to the vine. Our purpose as branches is to produce fruit –

- **Lives that are characterized by obedience to God’s word**
- **Christlike character – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control**
- **The fruit of other followers**

Last week we talked about **the work of the Gardener**, or Vinedresser in this process of producing fruit. The Gardener cares for the vine so that it will remain healthy. He **removes dead branches that are not producing fruit**. And **He prunes fruitful branches** so that they will continue to bear fruit and even bear more fruit. Sometimes the Father/Vinedresser uses hardship or suffering to “prune” us, to develop our character into the character of Jesus. That act of pruning may be difficult for us. But we endure it, knowing that God is working for our growth and development, so that we will be able to bear more fruit.

Now today I want to talk about **what steps we must take in order to be healthy and productive** for the Lord. There is one thing for us to do in order to be fruitful. There is a word in the passage that Jesus repeats over and over. **Remain [in me.]** The word remain appears 11 times in these verses. Most of the modern translations translate the Greek word this way – Remain. King James Version uses the word Abide. We understand what the word Remain means. It means to stay. “Don’t move away”. “Stay put.” But it is not a Passive word. As we “Remain” we are to be actively producing fruit.

As we consider the example of a Vine that Jesus uses, we understand that to **remain attached to the vine, means that we are “in Him” and He is in us**. If you are building a house with stone walls, you will place one stone alongside another. They stay next to each other. But they have no inner connection with each other. What we are to understand from Jesus’ illustration, is that when we remain in Christ, there is a mystical, inner connection that exists between us. He is in us, and we are in Him. There is life giving energy, sap flowing from the vine into the branch.

The farming practice of grafting may be helpful to us as we try to understand. You can attach new branches to the vine. To do that, you clean the end of the branch, and you make a slice in the vine. Then you put the branch into the slice in the vine and you fasten it in place. In time the grafted branch will push out little roots, and they will grow into the wood of the vine until the branch becomes one with the vine. The branch “clings to” the vine. The **branch sinks itself into the vine** and they become one unit. That is what the picture that Jesus paints means.

What does it mean to **be attached to Jesus**? First of all it means that we have **become a follower of his**. When Jesus met with a man named Nicodemus, he talked with him about being born again. He was referring to a spiritual birth. That happens when we look to Him in faith and believe in him. We believe that He is God’s Son, that He died on the cross for our sins, and we trust him for forgiveness. When we embrace Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we are attached to Him, we are “born again” into Him.

We are attached to Jesus through His Spirit. He gives the Holy Spirit to all who believe. The Spirit is how we are connected to Jesus.

To be attached to Him means that we are **surrendered to Him**. We have given over control of our lives to Him. C. S. Lewis once wrote that **God wants “creatures whose life on its miniature scale, will be qualitatively like His own, not because He has absorbed them but because their wills freely conform to His.”** Our will becomes one with His.

To be attached to Him means that we **will deny ourselves and forsake all others**. We will not look to others to satisfy our spiritual longing.

So Jesus' teaching here is that we will **Remain Attached to Him**. We must not lose heart and turn back. Even when the pruning shears come out, and we go through a temporary time of hardship, suffering or pain, we must remain in Him so that we can bear fruit.

What are **the steps** we must take to insure that we remain attached to Him. **We must maintain contact with Him**. I believe that we need to regularly engage in practices, spiritual disciplines that will keep us connected to Him. The disciplines of **prayer, fasting, solitude, contemplation** are all intended to keep us connected to Jesus. The more time we spend with Him, the more comfortable we will be with him. Married couples sometimes get to a place where they instinctively know what the other partner is thinking. They finish each other's sentences because they know each other so well. They become “One” with each other.

In the passage Jesus gives us another clue into how we remain attached to Him: Verse 7: **“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.”** Our connection to Jesus is dependent on whether **His words remain in us**. What practices do we follow to keep Jesus' words in our hearts? Do we regularly read through the gospels and teachings of Jesus. Memorization of Scripture is important. You cannot expect to live a productive and fruitful life if you are not keeping Jesus' words in your heart. Remaining in Jesus keeps us fruitful.

But Jesus also suggests in this verse that Remaining in Him affects the effectiveness of our prayer life. Jesus challenges us to **“ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.”** Now some people understand that this is a blanket promise, like a wish list you would give to Santa Clause. But we must understand it in the context in which it is given. **The promise is conditional**. It is conditioned on our remaining in Jesus. Remember what we said it means to be attached to Jesus. **Our will becomes one with His will**. So as our will is shaped by His will, that will determine that kind of things we pray for. We will pray regarding the **challenge to bear fruit**. We will pray about **what brings the Father glory**. We will pray about **our life as a disciple of Jesus**. We will **pray that others will come to faith in Jesus**.

Remain attached to Jesus. Again, as I have emphasized several times in this series, this passage is instruction on how to live our lives as a disciple. This is the test for discipleship. Discipleship is not determined by knowing the right answers to theological questions. Discipleship is determined by our relationship to Jesus. Are we attached to Jesus? Are we producing fruit for Jesus?

Closing Prayer