

Abide - John 15:1-11
Notes, Family Worship, Bible Reading

Notes from the Sermon

Ever made a trip to Eckerts or a similar place to pick apples, pears, or other fruit. There is something fun about walking through trees seeing the big juicy apples hanging from the branches. Depending on the time of year you go you might pick red delicious, yellow delicious, granny smith, or a wide assortment of apples that grow in our area. It's a lot of fun. Yet, truth is, my favorite apples can't be picked around here. I am a big fan of fuji apples, which grow primarily in Washington. Oh well. The thing is, though, that the apples hang from branches, but those branches are not trying to grow apples. Think about it, the branch grows apples because they are part of the tree, and are attached to the trunk. No matter how it might try, if a branch is disconnected from the larger tree it will not bear fruit, but will dry up and die. Fruit is a byproduct, a natural result of a healthy tree and healthy branches, they just grow. And the nature of the fruit is not determined by the branch, but by the tree to which it is attached, or in other words, a red delicious tree will not grow fuji apples. No matter how much I wish it would.

John 15 is one of the clearest passages about the nature of Christian discipleship and how we change as followers of Jesus. Jesus compares our lives to a fruit production plant (yes, I know, the illustration is grapes, but in this case any fruit will do). Jesus tells us that He is the vine, we are the branches, and that God is the farmer. The whole point of growing the vine is the production of fruit, but in order to grow fruit in a vineyard the farmer does not focus on the fruit, but on the health of the vine and the relationship of the individual branches to the vine. Now, we can be sure that Christ is a healthy vine. And the goal is for us to bear fruit in the Gospel. So the point of this illustration is that the way we bear fruit is to stay deeply and intimately attached to Christ as a branch is attached to the vine or tree.

What is the fruit being produced in the illustration. I think it can refer to several things, including the fruit of our prayers, Gospel witness, life change, inner heart desires, and love. But I think the best answer lies in Galatians 5:22-23 and the description of the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Christian life is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control. In other words, the fruit borne in the life of the believe is the character of life-change developed in us through the power of the Holy Spirit as we are attached to the vine of Christ. But fruit is a byproduct, a natural result of being attached. If we focus on trying to develop fruit we will actually find ourselves unfruitful. But if we focus on being attached to Christ then fruit naturally comes.

So Jesus explains this in several ways. First, if a branch is not bearing fruit it is an indication that the branch itself is actually disconnected from the vine, and dead. Jesus is referring to people to seem connected to Christ as cultural Christians. They may go to church, know theology, and do Christian service. But their lives are devoid of the growth of the fruit of Christian character. Eventually the farmer will pull those branches away and burn them. This is a picture of judgment and a clear call to us to look at the fruitfulness of our own lives. But here is the point, if we are not bearing any fruit, the issue is not the fruit, it is the attachment to Christ. But the illustration does not end here. We are reminded that there is a sovereign farmer who loves the vineyard and desires the beauty of fruit. To grow fruit he must prune the good branches, cutting them back at the right time so that they will be more fruitful. This pruning is a reference to hardship, suffering, persecution, struggle, and loss. For the one attached to Christ, this is a helpful and beautiful point, that God is sovereign and purposeful when we are pruned, and eventually it will produce greater character in us. We need to be reminded that fruit-bearing is seasonal. The goal is not to get grapes every day, but to get grapes in the harvest for a long-period of life (for grapes it is actually generations of people who will harvest from the same vines). Eugene Peterson said that the Christian life is made up of long obedience in the same direction. The bearing of fruit is a long process, doesn't happen over a weekend. In the same way, God prunes us and develops us in Christ and we will eventually bear fruit. But not at once, and not all the time. As we fruit inspect, we need to look at the long-term.

The point of this entire passage is that the essence of our Christian life is not primarily doctrinal, religious, or spiritual. The essence of our Christian life is relational, to be so deeply connected and inter-dependent on Christ that is like a branch that is attached to a tree or vine. It

is to be deeply loved and known, and to stay connected to Christ in a passionate and clear way. This passage uses the word “Abide” many times. The word means to remain, dwell, live, stay connected. In verse 4 it is a command, in the imperative voice. In other words, Jesus starts this by telling us that we are to stay connected to Christ, to do it now! But in the rest of the passage it is in the subjunctive voice, which is a way of saying that if we are connected and abiding in Christ we will bear fruit. If this, then that language. So the point of the passage is that life-change will take place, fruit will grow in our lives naturally if we are attached to Christ, if we stay intimately and deeply connected to Him. This is the key to discipleship, and the call to us as followers of Jesus. To know Christ deeply and be known by Him.

In the passage Jesus gives us a few clues as to how this happens. First, it is a Gospel thing. Jesus is so consistent, and he is clear here that we are not saved by our fruit, and our fruit does not attach us to the vine. Our faith in Christ attaches us to Christ, and we are to keep believing the Gospel to stay there. But Jesus also points us to the importance of abiding in His Word and teaching, and to prayer and asking God to do this work in us. Jesus also commands us to abide in His love, which is a wonderful call to relational intimacy and beauty. I abide in someone’s love by spending time with them and being known. And He tells them that abiding in Him is connected to their obedience to His commands. So, yes, there are things to do, but they are pathways to abiding, and this is the key. We will never change by trying to change. But we will change when we stay deeply connected to Jesus. And then God grows the fruit in us.

Bible Reading for the Week

Daily Bible Readings

Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Genesis 23	Genesis 24	Genesis 25	Genesis 26	Genesis 27	Genesis 28	Genesis 29

Reading from this past week: John 15:1-11

Reading in preparation for this coming Sunday: John 15:12-17

Family Worship

Come and Welcome

<https://youtu.be/rnB9k2pHvLA>

Gospel Project Main Point and Big Picture Question

Story: Jesus Gave the Great Commission

Main Point: Jesus gave the disciples the Great Commission. 11

Big Picture Question: What is our mission as believers?

Answer: Our mission as believers is to make disciples of all nations by the power of the Spirit.

Scripture: Matthew 28:16-20

Scripture

John 15:1-11

*What is the basic illustration here and what does it mean?

*How do we abide in Christ like a branch abides in a vine?

*What is the fruit of the Christian life and how does God grow it in us?

Prayer

*Ask God to help you bear fruit in your life.

*Pray for Eric Burnley and our worship leadership team.