

Abiding in the True Vine

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 15:1-11

Preached on: Sunday, April 26, 2015

As always, it is a wonderful privilege, certainly a joy of my heart, to be able to minister the word of God to you this morning so will you take your Bibles and turn to John 15 where we will examine the words of our Lord Jesus concerning what it means to abide in the true vine. Follow along as I read beginning in verse 1. We will examine verses 1 through 11 this morning. John 15, beginning in verse 1, Jesus says,

1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If 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. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."

May God add his blessing to the reading of his infallible inspired word.

We come now to what might be considered the beginning of the second part of Jesus' farewell discourse. It's the night before his crucifixion and he continues to instruct and comfort his very bewildered and confused, distraught disciples. They are wondering what is going on as they hear their Messiah speak of his imminent departure but Jesus' words are also meant for all of us who follow him so we need to listen very carefully. At the very heart of Jesus' message is the profound importance of what it means to abide in the vine, to remain in this vine which we are going to see speaks of Jesus. Of course, this is going to be what validates a believer's union with Christ in salvation, a union that originated from him, yet is completed by the believer, by his grace, those who love and obey him. We're going to see that in him we have spiritual life. We are sustained. We are nourished. We grow and we bear spiritual fruit. Indeed, he says in verse 5, "apart from Me, you can do nothing."

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So as we come to this amazing analogy that speaks so practically and profoundly to all who have ears to hear, we must ask ourselves some very important questions. Am I united to this vine? How can I know? What does Jesus mean when he says, "Abide in My love"? What does it mean to bear fruit? What does that look like? What does it mean to be pruned by the Father? And who are those who do not abide in him that are thrown away as a fruitless branch that dries up, withers away and then is gathered, cast into the fire and burned? And what does Jesus mean when he says he wants his joy, his joy to be in me and for my joy to be made full? Well, these are very important questions and, by God's grace, we will have some very encouraging answers for those who love and obey Christ, as well as some horrific warnings for those who don't.

I wish to help you understand Jesus' words by examining them under 3 categories. First of all, we're going to look at the meaning of the analogy of the vine. We need to understand the symbolism here. Secondly, we're going to look at the characteristics of branches that abide in the vine. And then thirdly, the characteristics of branches that do not abide in the vine. Now friends, it is the prayer of my heart that you will focus your attention on these life-giving, life-changing truths revealed to us from the very lips of the one who has created us and if you will humble yourself to these true this and embrace them with all of your heart, you will be forever changed.

First of all, what is the meaning of the analogy here that Jesus gives? Notice in verse 1, he says, "I am the true vine." The beginning of verse 5, he says, "I am the vine." In order to understand this, I need to give you some very important historical and theological background. In the Old Testament, the vine is a metaphor for Israel, God's covenant people through whom his blessings were to flow. Unfortunately, that choice vine failed to produce good fruit. We read about this, for example, in Isaiah 5. At the very beginning of that section of Scripture there is a song of mourning, you might call it a dirge. One member of the Trinity is singing to another concerning idolatrous Israel that was given every advantage, every opportunity to yield good fruit but it didn't do that so as a result, God is going to send the Babylonians to judge them and so forth. So in Isaiah 5, beginning in verse 1 we read this, "Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it And also hewed out a wine vat in it; Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones." In the Hebrew, be'ushiyim, sour, inedible berries. "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled

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ground. I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel And the men of Judah His delightful plant. Thus He looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress." In the Hebrew, the Spirit of God uses a play on words here. He looks for justice, mishpat, but instead he gets bloodshed, mispach. "I looked for mishpat and I get mispach." He goes on to say, "I look for righteousness, tsedaqah, and instead I get a cry of distress, tsa'aqah." Israel was to be the vine through which the blessings of God would flow to the world but because of sin, because of their idolatry, it did not happen.

Now, in light of this Old Testament background, it is fascinating to see what is happening here in John 15 on the night of Jesus' betrayal. You must remember that prior to this scene, Jesus finished the Passover meal where he replaced the old covenant with the new. The new covenant is now being inaugurated and likewise through the image of the vine, unfruitful Israel is now replaced by the great I Am, the true vine, the Lord Jesus Christ as we read here in verse 1; the one to whom Israel pointed; the one that brings forth good fruit through the branches that are attached to him through genuine saving faith.

We also read about this in Psalm 80. Psalm 80 was written against the background of the Assyrians that had taken captive the northern tribes of Israel and in this Psalm, we read of the relationship between the vine and the Son of Man. In verse 7 we read, "O God of hosts, restore us And cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved. You removed a vine from Egypt," referring to Israel, "You drove out the nations and planted it. O God of hosts, turn again now, we beseech You; Look down from heaven and see, and take care of this vine, Even the shoot which Your right hand has planted, And on the son whom You have strengthened for Yourself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down; They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance. Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself."

Moreover, the Lord Jesus himself gave a parable, in fact, just a few days before, what he says here in John 15, a parable concerning Israel's unfaithfulness and how Jesus himself would become the true vine, the channel for God's blessings for all who were united to him by grace through faith. In Matthew 21:33, therefore Jesus says this. "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard and put a wall around it and dug a wine press in it, and built a tower, and rented it out to vine-growers and went on a journey." There he is speaking of what we read about in Isaiah 5. "When the harvest time approached, he sent his slaves to the vine-growers to receive his produce. The vine-growers took his slaves and beat one, and killed another, and stoned a third. Again he sent another group of slaves larger than the first; and they did the same thing to them. But afterward he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the vine-growers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him

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and seize his inheritance.' They took him, and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers? They said to Him, 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.' Jesus said to them, 'Did you never read in the Scriptures, "The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief cornerstone; this came about from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes"? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people, producing the fruit of it.'"

That is the fruit of righteous behavior like the fig tree that had leaves but no figs that Jesus spoke of in chapter 21. Israel had become spiritually barren. You could see no fruit on the vine of Israel so Jesus pronounces a curse on them. He says, "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing the fruit of it." This speaks of the church made up mainly of Gentiles, the new people of God that has temporarily, not permanently but temporarily replaced Israel as the custodians of divine truth, a union that was instituted through the blood of Christ that will be commenced at the inauguration of the church at Pentecost and will progress through the centuries, Paul says, "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in," Romans 11:25. He went on to say, "Then all Israel will be saved. Just as it is written, the deliverer will come from Zion. He will remove ungodliness from Jacob." So in other words, when the complete number of elect Gentiles has come to salvation, then God will return his focus once again to unfaithful, ethnic Israel at which time they will see by his grace who their Messiah really is and their spiritual hardening which began when they rejected their Messiah will finally cease.

So, with this historical background, we come to what Jesus says in John 15:1, "I am the true vine." This, by the way, is the last of the "I am" declarations where Jesus asserts his deity and he is saying that, "I am," in other words, "Ultimately I am the great I Am, Yahweh, the true vine." True meaning the perfect, the genuine, the complete, the essential vine. You must understand that Israel was the type and Christ is the superior antetype that bears the righteous fruit that satisfies the expectation of the vinedresser, the Father. No one can bear spiritual fruit that is pleasing to God apart from abiding in the vine of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are totally dependent upon him for our life, our spiritual life, and our fruit bearing.

Jesus goes on to say, "and My Father is the vinedresser." In other words, he is the husbandman. He is the cultivator or we might say, the gardener that cares for the vine. Of course, that includes the Lord Jesus as well as the branches attached to it, the church. We see this in the Father's tender love for his Son when he guarded him. Remember the Christ child was the one who, according to Isaiah 53:2, "grew up before him like a tender shoot and like a root out of a parched ground." But now we see that the vinedresser in the words of Jesus here, is occupied with 2 primary tasks: 1. Removing branches that bear no

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fruit. 2. Pruning branches that do so that they will bear more fruit. Jesus knew that it would be very important for the 11 disciples as well as all of us to be able to understand the distinction between these 2 kinds of branches which Jesus is going to go on to describe in this extended metaphor.

Notice in verse 2, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit." These 2 distinctly different branches symbolize the 2 kinds of disciples that outwardly professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. One would be the true disciple, the fruit bearing branch that abides in him but the other is the false, non-fruit bearing branch that does not abide in him. In my humble opinion, this is not as some will argue a reference to 2 different kinds of Christians, namely true believers who bear fruit and true believers who sin and apostatize and then lose their salvation or true believers who fail to produce any fruit. The reason why I would argue against that is because it is the testimony of Scripture that all true believers will bear some fruit because they are attached to the vine of Christ whose Father is the vinedresser. John the Baptist challenged his hearers to "bear fruit in keeping with repentance," Matthew 3:8. Then he went on in verse 10 to warn, "every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

Now, in this context, Judas is the most visible example of all of this. Outwardly, he was like all the rest of the disciples. He seemed to be a part of Christ, in fact, the other disciples had to ask Jesus, "Who is the betrayer? We don't see it." Matthew 13, Jesus used another analogy to describe this same thing when he spoke of the tares that grow up amongst the wheat. They look identical until it comes to the fruit that they will bear. So indeed, there has always been and there will always be false professors of the Lord Jesus Christ who have attached themselves to the church but not to Christ and there is a huge difference. They wear the garments of Christianity. They have a superficial attachment to the vine of Christ but it's all talk. It's just outward conformity and our culture is filled with this kind of hypocrisy. This is pandemic in the institutional church which is thoroughly apostate and this kind of hypocrisy also makes up the majority of the cultural church that now dominates evangelicalism today. Most of them are self-deceived. The Lord speaks of this in Matthew 7:21, he says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." In fact, Jesus made a very clear distinction between true and false teachers on the basis of the fruit that they bear in Matthew 7. Beginning in verse 17, he says, "So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits." Similarly, in Luke 6:43, Jesus says, "There is no good tree which produces bad fruit, nor, on the other hand, a bad tree which produces good fruit."

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Now, we all understand this when it comes to the plants that we see outside, the plants in our gardens and so forth. Plants produce fruit consistent with their nature, according to their DNA which is the genetic information stored in those DNA molecules that provide the instruction used in the development and the function of every living organism.

Beloved, the same is true spiritually and this is Jesus' point. Just as plants produce fruit in keeping with their nature, so too do people. True believers have been given a new nature, right? We are new creatures in Christ. Peter says we are partakers of the divine nature. I like to call it the spiritual DNA that we now have. We are going to, therefore, manifest characteristics in keeping with our divine nature. We are going to look like Christ and as we mature, we're going to look more and more like him, by God's grace, until we finally bear his image. Some will look more like him than others.

So Jesus is not referring to true disciples who do not bear fruit but to false disciples who don't bear fruit because they cannot bear fruit in keeping with repentance. It's contrary to their spiritual DNA. Grapes simply will not grow on thistles. Moreover, this does not refer to believers who lose their salvation. That is contrary to so many passages of Scripture and Jesus has promised in John 6:37 that he is not going to cast out any true disciples. There he says, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out." So again, I would humbly argue that Jesus is not describing 2 kinds of Christians in this analogy, he is making a distinction between the true and the false disciple.

So, let's examine the characteristics of branches that abide in the vine and here we see this at the end of verse 2, down through verse 11, excluding verse 6. And as we look at this text closely, we're going to see there are 6 prominent characteristics of true branches, true disciples of Christ that emerge from this analogy. This would be a great opportunity for you to examine your own heart, your own fruit. This is very encouraging for all who truly know Christ and, certainly, a dire warning for those who do not.

First of all, we see from what Jesus says, all true believers bear fruit. It's very simple, unlike false disciples who cannot bear spiritual fruit. As part of this chosen vine, genuine disciples will bear fruit in keeping with the source of their life. They will look like Christ. John has already given us examples of this. Like Christ, they will do the will of the Father. This will be the pattern of their life, not that we would do it all the time but the pattern of their life will be doing the will of the Father. They will obey the word of Christ. John 8:31, Jesus says, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine."

Now, you will notice, for example, in verse 7 of John 15, Jesus says, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you," look at the concept of the term "word." The term is *rhema* in the original language. It speaks of the specific utterances of the Lord Jesus Christ where he commands us to do certain things. For example, just a few minutes before he's

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given these words in John 15, he has told them to, "Love one another as I have loved you," and so forth. So we must remember that Jesus is the divine Logos. He is revelation incarnate and every believer united to him enjoys a mutual fellowship that produces the fruit of obedience, obedience to his words which proves a person's love for Christ and brings glory to the Father. You just don't see this kind of concern in a false disciple, even though they may attend a church all their life, even though they may even be a pastor of a church. I know pastors personally who really care very little at all about the word, certainly the specific words of Christ. It's just simply not a priority.

So, this fruit is going to be characteristic of those who abide in the vine and these truths concerning fruit are found all through Scripture. Let me give you some examples of what the fruit looks like. There is, for example, the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. The first one is love, this is the love of choice. This is what you're going to see in a true believer, a love of choice that manifests itself in joyful sacrificial service to others. Then there is joy which refers to that soul-satisfying happiness that is anchored in a faith that is confident in the work of God, knowing that he is up to something in our life regardless of circumstances. He speaks of the fruit of peace, that is that inner tranquility where a believer knows that come what may, he is confident that God has saved him and that God will bring him to glory. There is patience which speaks of one's ability to endure injuries inflicted by others and the willingness to accept them. He speaks of the fruit of kindness which speaks of treating others with the same tenderness that the Lord treats all believers. He speaks of the fruit of goodness which refers to moral and spiritual excellence that manifests itself in active kindness toward other people. It speaks of the fruit of faithfulness which is just simply loyalty, trustworthiness. It speaks of the fruit of gentleness or meekness. This refers to patient humility that causes a person to endure even offenses with no desire for retaliation or retribution. In fact, the term is used in the New Testament to describe a person who is submissive to the will of God. It's used to describe a person that is teachable, a person that also is considerate of others. Then finally, the fruit of self-control which refers to that Spirit-empowered ability to restrain our passions: the lusts of our flesh, the appetites of our flesh, and so forth.

Well basically, all behavior that is God-honoring will be the fruit of this vine, what Paul called in Philippians 1:11, "the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God." In fact, it is interesting that praise itself is considered to be a fruit. The writer of Hebrews exhorts us to this end saying in Hebrews 13:15, "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." So every genuine disciple of Christ is a branch that is attached to this vine which is Christ and each branch, then, becomes a conduit through which flows all of the fruit-producing spiritual molecules, if you will, that will manifest

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these magnificent clusters of grapes on the vine of our life that bring glory to God. Again, I would ask you to search your heart: do I bear this kind of fruit?

Well, not only does a true disciple bear fruit, secondly, they abide in Christ's love. Notice verse 9, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." Now, this phrase, "abide in My love," is one that Jesus uses repeatedly in this extended metaphor and it means to remain or to continue. Bear in mind there is a mutual indwelling of the believer in Jesus which Jesus stated earlier in chapter 14, verse 20, "You in Me, and I in you." Now, be careful: do not confuse being in Christ with abiding in Christ. They are distinct; they are different. We are in Christ permanently as a result of the union affected by God in our justification but we are exhorted, as Jesus does here, to abide in Christ, in other words, to remain in fellowship, in sweet communion with God in Christ. To put it differently: to have a sustained, conscious communion with him because sometimes that fellowship gets broken because of our sin. Sometimes our disobedience grieves and quenches the Spirit of God in our life. It can cause us to forfeit blessing and to subject ourselves to the Father's chastening. These types of things diminish our ability to bear fruit. Often destructive things become the preoccupation of our heart rather than the Lord Jesus Christ. So if I can put it this way: to be in Christ is a matter of grace, to abide in him is a matter of responsibility.

Look at verse 4 and you see the emphasis on grace, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me." But then you see more of an emphasis in responsibility in verse 5, "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." The implication is those who do not abide don't bear this fruit and they can do therefore nothing that pleases the Lord.

Now, there are going to be times in each of our lives where there doesn't seem to be a lot of fruit. We all know that and for some people who are quite immature spiritually, this unfortunately will seem to be kind of the pattern of their life; they will bear some fruit but not a lot. It's sad to see some believers that seemingly never grow up. It's kind of like they're in youth group their whole life and many times they attend churches that are nothing more than kind of a big youth group. Paul spoke of this when he addressed the Corinthians, remember in 1 Corinthians 3, beginning in verse 1, he says, "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ." The flesh here, speaks of worldly Christians, those that have an attitude that pursues the things of the flesh and the things of self, people that are constantly succumbing to the things of the fallen flesh in the world, that yield to the pressures of the world and they have very little care for the word in the will of God. Many churches today

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cater to these very kinds of people and unfortunately they banish them to an island of spiritual infancy and a life that bears little fruit for the glory of God. It will bear some but not much.

Paul says to them, "I gave you milk to drink, not solid food," in other words, they could only handle easily digestible truths of doctrine. You might say, "All they could eat was baby food for new believers." He said, "for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" So this speaks of the kinds of believers that will not only remain in a state of spiritual infancy but they will cause divisions within the church, there will be jealousy and strife and certainly they are going to bear very little fruit and often they will look more like unbelievers. I've seen these kind of people at Calvary Bible Church before and you've seen them as well.

But because they bear some fruit and are truly a branch that is dependent upon the vine, even though they are not bearing much, because the Father loves them, the Father is going to do something: he is going to prune them. He is going to prune that vine and that's the third thing we see that's a prominent characteristic of a true branch: the Father will prune spiritually unproductive branches and, folks, sometimes this can be rather painful. Jesus says at the end of verse 2, "every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit."

Then he tells them, "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you." Now, let me explain that. The 11 disciples had already been cleansed by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit as Paul tells us in Titus 3:5. The instrument of that cleansing was the word of Christ, Colossians 3:16. So in other words, it is the word of Christ, it is the Gospel of grace which a person hears that results in this cleansing in our regeneration and justification when we are born again. Faith comes by hearing, hearing comes from the word of Christ. So Jesus is basically saying this: like every good vinedresser, the Father will cut away those things that restrict your ability to bear fruit. He is going to prune those things that sap your spiritual energy. He is going to remove those things that inhibit your growth and many times he will do this through divine chastening. The Father chastens those that he loves, right? And when he sees us moving in a direction that is dishonoring to him and that is inhibiting our ability to bear fruit, he is going to intervene and he is going to use the word of God as his pruning shears. This is why it is so important to sit under accurate, sound, biblical teaching, to submit to biblical counseling and so forth because the Father is ever vigilant to make you a more productive branch and he is going to use his word in concert with his providence as he brings good and bad circumstances into your life and by the power of the Spirit, he is going to help you bear more fruit for his glory and for your joy. "He causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are

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called according to his purpose," and his purpose is to make us more conformed into the image of Christ. And so he's going to use even our sin, he's going to use trials, he's going to use suffering, he's going to use even persecution to prune the branch so that we will bear more fruit.

I'm sure that if we were to take time, I could ask some of you to give testimony to times of pruning in your life and I'm sure, if you're like me, you would be able to say, "Boy, I remember when I was caught up in some sin and, oh, how God revealed that to me and, oh, the pain of all of that and to see how I grew through all of that." Or, "Yes, I remember that great trial in my life, that great period of suffering. Although it was breaking my heart, I can see now how that out of that came a better understanding of God and his attributes and I can see how that I grew immensely through all of that." This is the Father's work of pruning.

Well, a fourth characteristic of a true branch is that they will be blessed by answered prayer. Oh, this is a magnificent truth, dear friends. He says, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." Now, I want you to notice there are 3 conditions for answered prayer: 1. They must be offered by those who abide in him. Well, now we understand what that means: you've got to be united to Christ through repentant faith; you have to be born again. Unless it accomplishes his sovereign purposes, God is simply not obligated to answer the prayers of unbelievers. But not only must these prayers be offered by those who abide in him, secondly, they must be offered in Jesus' name, he says, in other words, to ask what is consistent with God's will and his purposes for his kingdom. We approach God on the merits of Christ alone. We acknowledge our utter dependence upon him and we express a sincere desire that God will be glorified in the answer that he gives to our prayer. Then finally, they must be offered by those in which Christ's words abide, in other words, those who decisively commit themselves to the words of Christ, to the word of God. Those people whose lives are controlled by the word and the will of God, not the sinful passions of the flesh. If you are living according to the flesh, if you are in some season of your life where you're out of fellowship with the Lord, he is simply not going to answer your prayers because there is a high probability that your prayers are distorted and the answer would not bring glory to him. It stands to reason, does it not, that those who abide in Christ and are therefore controlled by his words, will not ask anything that would be contrary to the will of God and therefore they are going to receive whatever they ask.

A fifth characteristic of a true branch is they will have the privilege of living lives that glorify God. I hope you understand that. This is a privilege, not just a responsibility. It is a magnificent privilege that we have. Notice verse 8, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." Yes, he is glorified if you bear a little fruit but he is glorified a whole lot more if you bear a whole bunch and this is what

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he wants for you, for his glory, for your joy. You see, friends, the spiritual fruit that adorns the true disciple will reflect the person of Christ and it's the person of Christ that gives glory to the Father, especially when our fruit is bountiful and as he says here, "This proves the genuineness of your faith. If you tell me you are a Christian, let's see the fruit. If you say, 'This is an Apple tree,' I want to see some apples." It makes sense.

The final characteristic of a true branch is that they will experience the love and joy of intimate fellowship with God. I mean, folks, this is the crowning glory here. Verse 9, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love." This is the command and he tells us how in verse 10, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full." In other words, "I'm not telling you these things to be up on you, to make you feel bad, to make you feel guilty, to make you feel pressured. I'm telling you because I love you and I want the joy that I have with my Father, the joy of the Triune Godhead, to be something that you experience deep within your soul and if you will keep my commandments, this will happen." This is what I like to call a felt Christ, that soul-satisfying joy of experiencing the living God deep within our soul. As we look at Scripture, we see that the Spirit generates a felt joy, an exhilaration in the consciousness of every abiding believer. If you don't experience this, it's because you're not abiding in some way, assuming you know Christ.

This is the love of God that has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who is given to us as Paul tells us in Romans 5. Peter described it as joint inexpressible, full of glory. Have you ever tried to explain to a person that doesn't know Christ the joy that you have in Christ? It's like trying to explain to a blind man who has been blind from birth what a sunset looks like. They are clueless. You know, it's not some emotional giddy stuff that anybody can whip up. I mean, you can get monkeys to do that stuff. I mean, this is the stuff deep within the soul that you experience even when tears are flowing down your cheeks because your heart is breaking. This is what the Lord wants for us if we will but abide in the vine by keeping his word. This is the kind of joy that permeates and controls the life of every believer. In fact, soon, probably within an hour or so, Jesus is going to pray to his Father in John 17:13, "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves." What a magnificent prayer for our benefit.

So these are the characteristics of branches that abide in the vine and then in conclusion, what are the characteristics of those who don't? In verse 2, at the beginning, he says, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away." Verse 6, "If 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." Now, I believe in this context the phrase, "in

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Me," cannot as I said earlier, refer to believers who are united to Christ because they will always bear fruit and they will never be taken away. So here the vinedresser is taking away those branches that have outwardly, have superficially attached themselves to Christ, again, Judas Iscariot being the quintessential example of a false branch. The disciples needed to understand these things because they were going to experience it as their ministries began to blossom. As I stated earlier, false professors who outwardly look like true believers will often attach themselves to the church but they are not attached to Christ.

But it is not a man's superficial, external, religious behaviors that validates genuine saving faith. What proves genuine saving faith are those Christ-like virtues of the heart that produce spiritual fruit, the kind of fruit that we have been discussing here this morning and notice, the branch that does not bear fruit, he takes away. Jesus said in John 6:37, he casts out. He goes on it to say, "He is thrown away as a branch and dries up." I've seen this with phony believers. Of course, we don't know the heart of a person but as you begin to look at some people's lives, you begin to see them withering away, drying up. Often you will see them little by little distancing themselves from people who really love Christ, distancing themselves from true believers. They don't want to be around sound Bible teaching. They don't want to hear the word of God. They begin to wither away. Why? Because there is no real joy in hypocrisy. Because there is no legitimate peace like Jesus promises in being a pretender. They are as Jude 12 says, "like an autumn tree without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots."

So Jesus says, "Such branches are gathered up and cast into the fire and burned," and we know that in the day of judgment, these people will protest saying, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? And in your name cast out demons? And in your name perform many miracles? Lord, didn't we do all of these religious things?" But the Lord will respond and say, "I never knew you. Depart from me you who practice lawlessness." Folks, what an unspeakable horror awaits those who refuse to truly embrace Christ in genuine brokenness and repentance. Jesus warns in Matthew 13:49 and following, "at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Dear friends, I challenge you to examine the fruit in your life today. Is it in keeping with repentance? Does it manifest that the character of Christ for the glory of the Father? To give you some examples other than the ones that I have given you: do you have a real love for God that others can see and others can hear from your lips? Does that love rule your heart? Do you find yourself wanting to be in communion with the Lord in prayer and longing to hear his voice through his word? Do you find yourself having a profound sense of gratitude to him, to the one who has bought you with his very blood? Do you

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enjoy the comfort and even the restraint and the conviction of the indwelling Spirit? Do you love other believers? Do you trust in the Lord, come what may? Do you yearn to see sinners come to faith in Christ? Does the terror of men and women walking headlong into hell move you to tears? Move you to evangelism? Move you to prayer? Do you long to see your Savior face to face? Do you pray that his kingdom will come and his will be done?

Dear friends, please hear this if you hear nothing else today: if these spiritual fruits are not evident within your soul and within your life, you are a pretender. You have attached yourself to the church but not to Christ and unless you repent and embrace him as the only hope of your salvation, your pretending will be exposed and you will be a branch that will be thrown away. You will dry up. You will wither away and you will be gathered and cast into the fire and burned.

But I don't want to leave you today with a bitter taste in your mouth. I wish to leave you with the sweet taste of saving grace. Isn't it wonderful to know that we can come to Christ in the blackness of our sin and cry out to him for forgiveness as we fall before him at the foot of the cross, as we believe that only by his grace we can be saved and then as we plead with him for that undeserved mercy, what does he do? He saves us and instantly we become forever united to the vine of saving grace which is Christ himself. Oh, dear friends, what a blessed hope we have in Christ but without him, there is no hope.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for these truths that speak so profoundly to our hearts. I pray that by the power of your Spirit you will cause these truths to bear much fruit in the lives of all who hear them. To the praise of the Father that in all things Christ might have the preeminence, for it is in his name that I pray. Amen.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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