

Sermon 12 July 2020

Good morning and welcome to our service this morning and we are continuing with trying something different this morning as we welcome you from Priory Street Church where 3 out of our 4 congregations at Corsham Baptist Church meet.

I would encourage you all to continue to lift our brothers and sisters at Church on the Green in prayer as they gather online this morning.

We are taking a one week break from looking at 1 Peter and again I would encourage you all to lift Eddie and Kathy in prayer as they take a well earned break, pray that God would refresh and restore them both physically and spiritually. Eddie will be back next week when we will again be looking at what God is saying to us in 1 Peter.

This morning we will be looking at the first 17 verses in chapter 15 of John's Gospel. As you may recall last year Eddie did a split series on John's Gospel but he planned to come back to look at some of the middle chapters. Well I thought I would grab the first part of chapter 15 which has been a particular encouragement and actually a particular challenge in my walk with God.

At this year's leadership retreat back in January we looked at these verses which reminded me just how challenging they are but also how amazing they are and in particular they show us what a loving God we have and how he never stops working in our lives making us more like Jesus and how this brings Him all the glory.

So let's look together at John chapter 15 verses 1-17. **READ**

PRAY

First a bit of context.

I think most people agree that these verses are a record of the events at the close of the last supper when Jesus met with his disciples. It was a sort of farewell talk where he taught his disciples as he prepared to physically leave them.

It is a parable in which the first 4 verses describe Jesus as the true vine and his Father God is the gardener. The second part of the passage continues the gardening illustration with Jesus as the vine and the branches as his disciples/followers.

Being all knowing and all caring Jesus knew that his disciples would face all sorts of trials and temptations in the coming days and was preparing them and encouraging them and showing them how to cope.

1. He knew that the disciples would be tempted to leave him, disown him and forget all that he taught them so here we see him teaching them the necessity of remaining with him, abiding in him.
2. Jesus knew the disciples would be tempted to go their own way so he encourages them to love one another and support each other when he was not physically around.
3. He knew the disciples would face all sorts of trials from a world that generally hated them which would test their willingness to do the work of being a disciple.

Does all this sound familiar?

Oh how the Lord knew his disciples, their frailties and their needs, AND Oh how our Lord knows us, our frailties and needs and Oh how wonderfully He supplies all that we need to abide in him and grow more like him each day which is what we are called to do and all for our Fathers glory.

There is so much in these 17 verses that a whole sermon series could be preached on them.

However, this morning we will look at **what** it means to abide in Christ, **how** we do it and **what** is the result of abiding in Christ.

The word remain is used in my translation but we can easily replace it with the word abide, which I think gives a sense of doing it for the long term.

1. What does it mean to abide in Christ and what does it look like?

The first thing to say is that Jesus clearly thinks it is important to remain/abide in him as he uses the word remain/abide 11 times in the first 10 verses. It is something he urges his disciples to do and urges us to do it too through his words to us in the scriptures.

There are 5 things I think we can see that abiding in Christ means.

1. Abiding in Christ means that we recognise who Jesus is. He is Gods son V1- read.

1 John 4:15 "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God."

2. Abiding in Christ means that we receive Him (Jesus) as our Saviour and Lord V 5/6-read.

John 1:12 "Yet to all who receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."

3. Abiding in Christ means doing what God says V10-read.

1 John 3:24 "Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the spirit he gave us."

4. Abiding in Christ means continuing to believe the Gospel V16-read.

1 John 2:24 "See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father."

5. Abiding in Christ means loving our brothers and sisters, the body of Christ V12-read.

Repeat 1-5 in the list.

So, What does abiding in Christ look like?

I think Jesus shows us in this passage what it looks like and he is our great example we should strive to follow.

Firstly: Jesus shows us that abiding in Him is about trusting him.

V4 “Remain 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 the vine”. This is a fantastic promise of our Lord that He will remain in us and we must trust this promise.

Have you ever wondered if you are truly saved, am I a true believer, am I a true disciple, after all look at Judas. Perhaps V2 has always puzzled you. “He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit”. Am I a branch that bears no fruit?

I am sure I am not the only one that has had these thoughts in the past and this verse is a great encouragement to me and should be to you. **“remain in me, and I will remain in you”**.

We should also remember the promise in John 6:39 “ And this is the will of him (his Father God) who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day”.

Also look at V8 “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples”.

So the fact that you have been chosen by God to be one of his children and God has given you to Christ and Christ promises to remain in you and not let you go and we remain in Christ and in doing so we bear much fruit **that should encourage us even more to abide in him.**

As John Piper said in his thoughts on John 15, “Abiding in the vine, does not make you a true disciple. **It proves you are one**”.

Secondly: Jesus shows us that abiding in Him is about **love**.

V9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love”. Jesus’ love for us never fails and he loved us so much that he gave his life for us. We may not have to die for someone but there are so many other ways we can follow Jesus’ example and show sacrificial love.

By helping a brother in trouble, by listening to a sister going through a valley of despair, by encouraging a brother being overwhelmed by doubt and by giving generously to the work of missionaries to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

J C Ryle in his commentary on this passage says this “Sound views of doctrine, and knowledge of controversy, will avail us nothing at last, if we have known nothing of love. Where there is no Christ like love, there is no grace, no work of the Spirit, and no reality in our religion. Blessed are those who do not forget Christ’s commandment! They are those who shall have the right to the tree of life, and enter the celestial city. The unloving professor is unfit for heaven”.

Third: Jesus shows us that abiding in Him is about **obeying his commands**.

V10 “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”.

Jesus calls us to obey his commands just as he set the example by obeying his Father's commands.

Now we know that we are still sinners and that we will not always keep his commands perfectly but that should not stop us trying to be faithful. Also we should be careful and not fall into the trap of not trying at all. Don't believe the lie that says "God loves me with an unconditional love so I can do what I like". His love **is** unconditional but our love for Him will mean that we are keen to obey his commands.

Again J C Ryle has really wise words on this subject. As you may have gathered JC Ryle is a favourite of mine and he said this when talking about someone who wants to obey Christ's commands:

"Let him hold on his way, and never be ashamed of diligence, fruitfulness and jealous watchfulness, in his obedience to Christ's commands. These things are perfectly consistent with salvation by grace and justification by faith, whatever anyone may say to the contrary".

And that brings us to the second question;

2. How do we abide in Christ? Let's look at three areas.

- a. By letting God do his work in us.
- b. Reading his word.
- c. Prayer.

Let God do his work in us.

I think one of the main things to remember is that God does not leave us alone and to our own devices. He is active in our lives and enables us more and more to abide in Christ but we must be open and willing to his working in us.

One of the ways God works in our lives is to be sovereign over the things that happens to us, he is sovereign over our external life experiences both good and bad which I know is very hard to get our heads around and sometimes even harder to accept.

John Piper in a talk on this passage at a conference said this. "What Jesus wants us to see is that our union with him (abiding in Christ) is not isolated from our external life experiences? And he wants us to know: His Father governs these experiences".

V2b "while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful".

This means that sometimes God disciplines us to strengthen our character and faith. Sometimes persecution, hardship and many other valley experiences happen. What we must remember when we face such times is two things:

That God will be with us and will be our strength and shield during these times and That he will bring good out of these situations i.e more fruit in our lives.

As many of you know I love my allotment and growing vegetables and we also have a few apple trees in our garden. I am less keen on these and over the years they have suffered from lack of attention and have not been as productive as they could be.

However, I have begun to learn the art of pruning my apple trees. In simplistic terms the aim is to prune the branches to a bud that is facing outwards so that it will grow outwards. Also to cut off any branches in the middle of the tree or that are growing towards the middle of the tree and also to cut off at the trunk any diseased or dead unproductive branches. The aim is to have the middle of the tree open and uncluttered and so that air can circulate. And do you know what, it works and we get bigger apples and more of them. More fruit.

It is the same with God, his pruning work in our lives will not always be painless and sometimes it will be really hard and cause us suffering but it will always produce fruit indeed it will produce much fruit and it will be for our ultimate good and His glory.

The other way we can abide in Christ is to read his word. It is not too much to say that our union with Christ is maintained by the word, by reading the Bible. The Bible surprisingly is all about Christ! So if we want to know more about Him, receive from Him, and understand His will for our lives then perhaps we should read it on a regular basis. The commentary by Matthew Henry on this passage says "It is in the word that we receive and embrace him; and so where the word of Christ dwells richly there Christ dwells. If the word be our constant guide and monitor, if it be in us as at home, then we abide in Christ, and he in us.

Prayer is also key to our union in Christ, after all abiding in Christ means being in close communion with him, leaning on Him, resting in Him, pouring out our hearts to Him. So when we come to Him in prayer we are coming to a friend, someone we know and in doing so we get to know Him more. Also our prayers start to be more in accordance with his will and amazingly are answered by Him.

John Knox the great Scottish theologian and leader of the reformation in Scotland was such a man of prayer with an intimate union in Christ and Queen Mary allegedly said, that she feared his prayers more than an army of twenty thousand men.

In addition to the pruning work of God in our lives, the reading of his word and spending time with him in prayer we are also strengthened in our abiding in Christ by the **work of the Spirit**. Indeed it is the work of the Spirit that encourages us to pray, to read the word and to faithfully obey the Father's commands. It is the Spirit who opens our eyes and helps understand scripture and intercedes for us in prayer when we don't know what to pray, without him it would all depend on us and that would get us no where.

And now we come to our final point.

3. What is the result of abiding in Christ?

V8 and V16 talk about bearing fruit indeed V8 talks about **much** fruit. So the result in abiding in Christ is that we bear much fruit and Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruits of the spirit., list them. I think in this passage the key fruits that are evident in our abiding in Christ are **Joy and Love**.

V 11 Joy, true joy comes from a consistent relationship with Christ. The footnote in my bible says this on verse 11. "When things are going well, we feel elated. When hardship comes, we sink into depression. But true joy transcends the rolling waves of our circumstances. When our lives are intertwined with His (Jesus) he will help us walk

through adversity without sinking into debilitating lows and manage prosperity without moving into deceptive highs. The joy of living with Jesus Christ daily will keep us level headed, no matter how high or low our circumstances”.

And verse 11 says that “my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete” This is truly amazing and here Jesus is saying that our joy is full and complete because when we abide in him we share in his joy and we are one with him.

V12 Love. A growing love for Christ and each other is a direct result of abiding in Christ. Brotherly love means encouraging a brother who is struggling, and helping a sister who is going astray. True love means giving wise counsel to a brother or sister who is about to make a bad choice.

EXAMPLE You can picture the scene where a brother asks your advice on whether he should take up the offer of a new job, a big promotion. The new job, lots of money and able to give more to church, but will mean being away more from family and church family. We need to be honest with our brother and tell him it is not a good idea. We are called to help in the pruning process.

If you ever need a reason to challenge a brother or sister in their wayward walk surely these verses are all that we need. They will help us overcome our fear of rejection and give us all the courage we need to step up and challenge our brother no matter how uncomfortable it might be. Why? Because we want our brother to feel the cut of the pruning knife and gain all fruit that it brings, joy, love, fellowship and avoid the pain of the separating knife and all the eternal consequences that will bring. It is the most loving thing you can do for a wayward sister and we are called to do it and we must do it.

Finally Effective Prayer is a result of abiding in Christ. Look at **V7** and **V16** again if you ever need a reason to reach out and pray for non-believers to come to him these verses should encourage us to do so. These verses remind us that if we abide in Christ then our prayers will be more in tune with his will.

V16 also reminds us of the doctrine of election. It reminds us that Jesus made the first choice, to love and die for us and to invite us to live with him forever. We made the next choice, to accept or reject His offer. Oh how that should drive our prayers for those we know who don't know Christ.

We should daily pray that they will accept the offer of our dear Lord Jesus and invite him into their hearts not only to avoid the cutting of the separating knife but to fully accept the cutting of the pruning knife. To accept his offer of salvation, the forgiveness of sins and the joy of abiding in Him forever. **There is no greater thing.**

Let us pray

Questions

1. During these lockdown times how has your abiding in Christ been? What have been the main challenges?

2. Which of the three areas (Letting God do his work in you, reading the word, spending time with Him in prayer) do I need to be work on that will help my abiding in Christ?