

I am the True Vine

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 0 0] We have a seat and let's pray together, shall we? Heavenly Father, we thank you for who you are today.

And we still ourselves now as we come to your word. And we pray that you would teach us as we listen to your voice. Father, thank you that you are good all the time.

Father, thank you that you are the God who has so outrageously loved us. And we know that you hear our prayer because we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's great to see you this morning.

And I'm glad to see that you survived Storm Alley. Storm Alley wasn't quite the beast from the east, was it? But she still packed, or he, I don't know, it could be either with Alley, couldn't it?

Still packed a fair punch. And I was walking to drop the girls off at nursery on Thursday. And I dropped them off and I was walking home. And on the walk home, via a park, I noticed that Storm Alley had actually caused a lot of chaos in this park.

[1 : 0 6] So all I could see everywhere in this park was dirt, was leaves, and was a little bit of branches everywhere in this park. And so you'll forgive me for this, okay?

I had John 15 in my head all week and it was Thursday. So what I did is I walked over and I picked up one of the branches, okay? So here's my branch that I found that had come off the tree.

And if you look at it, you can see it. It's got some little grapes there that are kind of dying out. We've got some leaves here. We've got some little buds as well that are part of this branch. It's a good-looking branch, isn't it?

But the thing is, this branch, its best days are probably behind it. And so my question to you this morning is, we'll put it on the screen, is what would it take to get that branch bearing fruit again?

I guess we've got a few options, haven't we? We could kind of pick up some grapes and kind of tape the grapes to it. Or we could find some of these leaves, couldn't we? And we could kind of staple the leaves to it. Or, my favorite, we could kind of stick it in the ground and we could cheer it on from the side.

[2 : 1 4] Go on, branchy, you can do it. Friend, what would it take to get this branch bearing fruit again? You see, as Jesus, as he speaks to his disciples in John 15, he wants them to think like that.

As they consider their lives with him, he wants them to know that they need him. That's why we chose that last song, Lord, we need you.

We need you. Every hour, we need you. Remember where we are in John's Gospel. Here we are, John 15. Jesus has just said to his disciples that he's leaving.

Remember, this is the evening before Good Friday. And Jesus has just told his disciples that his hour to go has come. And he is willingly going to go to the cross with the place where he will go to offer his life as a sacrifice for the sins of his people.

The place where he goes to bear the punishment that they deserve before a holy God because of their rebellion against him. And the place where he goes to reconcile them to God.

[3 : 30] And the place where he goes to prepare a place for them in his father's house. All the while telling them that one day he's going to return and he's going to take them to be with himself.

Now this is what I did this week when I was reading this. Just pause to consider all of that bit of information. I wonder if anyone has ever asked you that question. If you found out that you had 24 hours to live, what are the things that you would fill those 24 hours with?

Has anyone ever asked you that question? Remember there was a Simpsons episode about that years ago. What would you do if you only had 24 hours to live? If you knew that. You get the usual answers, don't you?

You get kind of skydiving or swimming with dolphins or spending time with loved ones and family or an all-expenses-paid trip to Disneyland or something like that. What would you do if you found out you had 24 hours to live?

Here is Jesus with less than that to live. And what is he doing? Is he thinking of himself? No, he is serving his people. Isn't that incredible? He is serving his people.

[4 : 36] He is lovingly assuring them. He is graciously preparing them for what life is going to be like when he is not physically there anymore.

And right at the heart of this, you see in verse 5, is his message to them, really simply. You are the branches. And I am the true vine.

You have a great need of me. You have a great need of Christ. But you have a great Christ for your need. That's what he's saying. Remain in me.

Abide in me. And the thing for us to understand at this point is that Jesus hasn't just delved into his imagination and thought, I need a really good metaphor to enable me to connect my disciples and for them to understand what I'm saying.

I know what will work. Horticulture. He's deliberately picked this image. You see, the vine is an image which is loaded with Old Testament significance.

[5 : 35] All the way through the Old Testament story, we're told that Israel are God's chosen vine. Now, perhaps you picked it up as Neil read to us those words from Isaiah chapter 5.

Israel were God's people. They were the people that he had chosen for himself. They were the people that he had rescued, that he had taken, and who he had planted in their own land.

With the idea that as they lived in loving relationship with him, as they radically obeyed him, as they were different from the watching world, that the watching world would look in and see everything that's going on and think to themselves, isn't Israel's God wonderful?

And through Israel, God would do what he said he would do through Abraham. He would bless the nations. This is what he was going to do. But Isaiah, more often than not, we find when he speaks about Israel and the other Old Testament prophets that they do as well, they speak about Israel being the vine, and it's a negative thing.

Okay? It's a negative thing. God looks for good fruit. What does he find? He finds bad fruit. Israel, instead of being marked by fruitfulness, are marked by fruitlessness.

[6 : 54] And because of that, they deserve God's judgment for the rebellion against him. Israel meant to be God's true vine, but he looks for good fruit, he finds bad fruit.

And that's the backdrop that Jesus comes with into John 15, and he declares to his disciples, I am the true vine. Do you see it? In other words, he is being everything that Israel failed to be.

Unlike Israel, the fruit of his life, the one of his God-glorifying obedience, the fruit is going to be love, righteousness, and faithfulness. And if his disciples are going to bear any fruit in their lives, they need to be found in him.

He is the true vine. And so as Jesus prepares his disciples for life in his absence, he wants them to know that he is this true vine, and they are the branches. And what Jesus wants them to do, I don't think we can miss.

It's already been a lot. I love it when people give your sermons away before you even stood up. It's great. Don't need to do any work. You can't miss what he's saying, can you, in these verses? You can't miss it. He says it 10 times in these 11 verses.

[8 : 04] Remain. Or, Maggie, I assume you're reading from the ESV. It says, Abide. Abide in me. 10 times in these 11 verses. Now, from this point on, okay, because I realize we're living in a Brexit-filled world, we'll talk about abiding rather than remaining.

Okay? So just so you're not sitting there thinking, I told you Jesus was all about remaining. Okay? He wants them to abide in him. So everybody hold up 10, 10 fingers, two hands, okay?

This is what he's doing here. You can't miss it. Count with me. Okay? Abide. Say it. Okay? Abide. Abide. Abide. Abide.

Abide. Abide. Abide. Abide. Abide. Abide. You can't miss what he's saying. Sounds like some kind of French verb test, doesn't it? You can't miss what he's saying. He wants his disciples to abide in him.

That's what he wants them to do. Now think about it logically. Jesus, what has he done? He's drawn his people to himself. Right? They didn't choose him. He chose them.

[9 : 08] He's drawn them to himself. He's paid for their sin on the cross. He's made them clean. He's taken away the barrier to God that existed because of the rebellion against him.

And he's made a way for them to be adopted as sons and daughters of the living God. And he's given them his spirit. And every believer is united to Jesus.

That's our identity. It's the one that the New Testament says all the time. In Christ. That is the believer's identity. In Christ.

He has made us his own. He is ours and we are his. This is what he's done. He's made us his own. And so Jesus says, stemming from that union with him, every day live in a fruitful and joyous communion with me.

And I've been walking with Jesus for something like 16 years. And I know that many of you have been walking with him way longer than that. Probably way longer than I've even been alive. And I've read these verses of John 15 countless times before.

[10 : 22] And every time I read them, I'm struck by both the beautiful simplicity of what Jesus says here. And also how these words are wonderfully profound. This is the Christian life, is it not?

What Jesus says here. And invite you afresh to let these words from John 15, as God would speak through his word as we hear his voice, let these words impact you afresh.

Because some of us here, I know, may have grown cold spiritually. Okay, we've just stopped thinking. We've just stopped in our affections for the Lord Jesus. Some of us will be here and we've drifted spiritually.

Jesus used to be a massive deal, but as life has gone on, he's just going to move to the periphery. Some of us may have settled spiritually. Some of us may be nowhere spiritually.

And everything probably in between those four. But friends, I hope that as we look at this passage together now, as we look at the claims that Jesus makes about himself, and as we think about the claims that Jesus would make about all those who would follow after him, that we would be struck once again by how beautiful he is, but also how much we need him.

[11 : 37] So let these words impact you afresh from John 15 this morning. It was Puritan Andrew Murray who famously said, A soul that is filled with large thoughts of the vine will be a very strong branch.

And all I want us to do this morning and the time we have remaining is just to walk through these 11 verses together. There's so much in here, so can I encourage you to go home after this and read these for yourself?

Go to your small group this week, having read them, and bring fresh thoughts. We don't have time to cover everything this morning, but we're going to make a few pit stops as we walk through these 11 verses this morning. But here's the question that I want us to really get to grips with today.

What does it mean to abide with Jesus? What does it mean, rather, to abide in Jesus? Because I think as we walk through these three verses this morning, I think we kind of can categorize them under three headings.

Okay, here's the first one. Abiding means knowing. Look at verse 1. I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

[12 : 44] So you see that Jesus doesn't want his disciples simply to know his identity. He wants his disciples to know the identity of his Father as well, because his Father is intimately involved and committed to the lives of his people.

And who is the Father? What does he say? He is the gardener. If you have an ESV, he is the vine dresser. And he does two things. Verse 2. Firstly, he takes away fruitless branches.

As a loving gardener, he will see to it that the branches who are not living will be cut away and thrown into the fire and burned.

See, it's a great warning in these verses as well, isn't it, when we think about what it means to remain in Jesus, abide in Jesus. Because John's gospel is full of followers of Jesus who would start off keen, who would appear to be following him, but as time goes on, and as they come to terms with the cost of what it means to follow Jesus, they turn away.

Of course, in the immediate context of John 15, who's just left the building? Judas. And I assume that as the days go on, as the disciples live their lives when Jesus isn't here, and they watch many people claim to follow him, but decide after a while that it's not worth it anymore, I assume these words are meant to give them great confidence, because they shouldn't panic, because what is going on there is the Father being the vine dresser, that they can leave it with him.

[14 : 15] He's the Father. He's the good vine dresser who cuts away, and secondly, he is the vine dresser who prunes branches that are producing fruit, so that they will produce more fruit.

So good is God this vine dresser, so committed is he to his people, and so sovereign is he over all things, that he will use every means possible to achieve the goal for those who are abiding in Christ of pruning them, so that they will produce more fruit for the glory of God.

Now, I don't know how you react when you hear that word pruning, but as I study John 15 this week, again, it reminded me of how painful a word that is.

And it's often painful, isn't it, when it happens in our Christian lives, when God exposes my faults, when God questions my desires, as God puts his finger on things in my heart, the thorns that need to go.

It's painful. But it makes all the difference in the world that as I seek to follow him, as I seek to abide in Jesus, that I know that the vine dresser is my loving Heavenly Father, and he wants me to be pruned so that I can bear fruit in my life for his glory as I'm transformed more into the image of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 46] There's a godly American woman called Joni Erikson-Tada. Some of you may have heard of her. At 17 years old, she was involved in a tragic diving accident that left her a quadriplegic.

She was consigned to life in a wheelchair, and she's consigned to not being able to use her hands for the rest of her life. And someone once asked her what she says to God each time she wakes up every morning.

I imagine you might be thinking two things. Is she going to say, I hate you, God? Or is she going to say something else? Here's what she said. She responded to that question. My weakness, that is my quadriplegia, is my greatest asset because it forces me to run into the arms of Christ every single time I get up in the morning.

I hate you, God. No, no, no. I need you, God. You know, in John 15, I wonder if in the hours to come whether that will be Peter's experience. Is he painfully comes to terms with his own failings as he denies Jesus three times.

And remember, at the end of John's Gospel, we get this wonderful scene as Jesus reinstates him, restores him, teaching him, Peter, don't rely on your own strength.

[16 : 57] Don't look to your own understanding to figure life out. Look to me. Look to me. Come to me. Because that's the sting at the end of verse 5, isn't it?

It's the warning. Without him, we can do nothing. It's a love and warning about the complacency that can so easily creep into our Christian lives. That is, we run around prayerlessly trying to accomplish things, even religious things, you know, doing job after job, running from person to person, running from meeting to meeting, trusting in our own skills and abilities, all the while failing to abide in Jesus' words.

Friends, we need the comfort that we are Jesus's and he will never let us go. And we need the warning here that without him, we can do nothing. We need both. There's someone that once asked Charles Spurgeon, famous Baptist preacher, how he dealt with the trials and hardships that came his way in the Christian life.

And he famously replied, I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me back against the rock of ages. Friends, abiding for us will mean knowing. And secondly, abiding will mean doing.

Look at what he says to his disciples at verse 7. If you wish, and it will be done for you. Again, he asks them to do two things. Firstly, to abide in his words. As they abide in him and as Jesus's words abide in them, this is how they will abide in him.

[18 : 25] This is what he's saying. So Jesus wants them to build their lives upon his words and to allow his words by his spirit to shape how they live, to inform how they think and to guide how they act.

So in his absence, it's by living in and by living by his words that his disciples will abide in him. See, later on at verse 10, Jesus says, if you keep my commands, you will remain in my love just as I have kept my father's commands and remain in his love.

So do you see what Jesus is calling for here from his disciples is nothing other than an all-out radical obedience and a joyous commitment to his word.

And of course, that's going to be the primary means by which the father shapes and prunes his children. As his word does its shaping and moulding and convicting work in our hearts.

Jesus says, abide in my words. Friends, I think we need to ask ourselves this morning, as followers of this man, what are we doing and are we abiding in his words?

[19 : 39] You know, Sunday night in the Shanks household is omelette night. Okay? I take a turn at the cooking, light cooking omelettes. If I'm honest, it's because it's easy and it's quick. Okay?

It doesn't taste great but we just do omelettes in the Shanks household. I remember the first time I ever tried it. I remember Alex sitting there and she's screwing up her face and it's a lovely bit of shell.

Okay? A lovely bit of shell. Contrast my cooking to Alex's cooking. The best meals that she makes are the ones that she makes in the slow cooker. She makes a big batch of it and we normally have it, puts it, it cuts up the meat, marinates it, puts it in the slow cooker.

In the morning, we have it in the evening. She normally makes enough of it that it can last two or three days. First night when we have it, it's brilliant. Second night that we have it, the day after, it is incredible.

See the third night that we have it, it blows your mind. Do you know why? Marination. Marination. This is what happened. The flavor has gone from just being on the meat to being in the meat.

[20 : 43] The flavor has permeated and has transformed everything about the meat. Now, I don't know what you think of as you think about Jesus as he says, abide in my words, but it seems to me that what he's saying here is a lot more slow cooker than it is Omelette.

Right? Abiding in his words. And it challenges me and it's convicted me this week that how often that I just settle for Omelette. Friends, are you abiding in his words?

You're abiding in his words. It was John Bunyan, the man who wrote Pilgrim's Progress, whose peers used to tease him that every time you would cut him open, every time you would cut him, he would bleed Bible.

Incredible thing to say. Imagine if somebody, wouldn't it be lovely if somebody joked and teased you about that? That there was a man who bled Bible. Friends, are you abiding in his words?

The second thing at verse 7 he asks them to do is ask. Can I go back one? Is that right? Is to ask. Is to pray. That as Jesus' words abides in us and as it shapes us and it hones our desires, our hearts should be more and more conformed and in harmony with his desires.

[22 : 01] And it's with that attitude and possessing that heart that Jesus invites his disciples to ask their Heavenly Father to pray to him. This is a wonderful invitation. And to come before this loving Heavenly Father with confidence that he hears because you make your prayers through the name of Jesus Christ.

I don't know about you, but I want God's desires. I want God's word to shape my prayers. Now what I've found has really helped me recently and I give it to you this morning is to use scripture to base your prayer life on.

Now Paul's letters for example are full of prayers. Great exercise to do this week. Maybe take one of them that you find in Ephesians or Colossians or Philippians or something like that. Take it and use it to order and structure your prayers.

Tim Keller in his great book in prayer says our prayers should arise out of an immersion in scripture. The wedding of the Bible and prayer it anchors your life down in the real God.

Jesus invites his disciples to dedicate themselves to abiding in his word and he asks them to commit themselves to seeking the Father in prayer. Read your Bible and pray every day.

[23 : 17] Someone should write a kid's song about that. That's what he's saying here. And thirdly abiding means bearing. See it? Verse 8 This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples.

See the goal of the Christian life God's ambition for our lives and our hearts is that we would know him and that from that glorious relationship we would bear more fruit so that through us God's name would be glorified in the sight of the world.

Friends, Andrew said that is what always encourages me most as your pastor to see some of you grow. Now it never looks spectacular does it? Never looks spectacular in your life but I hear some of you talk about how you're telling your friends about Jesus and two years ago that's something you could never have thought about doing.

That I see some of you loving somebody in a quite selfless way and I know that wouldn't have happened two, three years ago. I see some of you growing. And this is what he's talking about here.

When your whole life becomes worship your whole life becomes bearing fruit for the glory of God and as the world looks in and as it sees the fruit in our lives fruit that's only explainable because of the life-giving sap that is running through the vine to the branches that the world looks in and exclaims I don't get that.

[24 : 40] Isn't there God great? Because I think that is the thrust of the fruit here that Jesus is talking about I think that's what it's supposed to lead to. That as his disciples abide in him as his disciples just in the verses after this as they radically love one another and as they bear fruit the world will see this radically counter-cultural community in action and they will sit up and take notice about how glorious this God is.

You know I've got a friend called Nick I studied with him last year and Nick goes to Govan Free Church over in Glasgow if you've never been to Govan let's just say it's a little bit different from Brunsfield okay?

A little bit different and Nick was telling me recently when I was speaking to him about a guy who's been coming along to his church who's called Robert and Nick described to me how Robert in his former life was a very dangerous guy and Nick is bald head 35 he looks mental okay?

If he's saying Robert is a dangerous guy I'm going with he's a dangerous guy but he told me how Robert from a life of drugs and gangs had become a Christian and Nick said that as he looked into that man's life the transformation was absolutely and I quote breathtaking and if you want to check it out after this Robert's testimony is on the Free Church website at the minute let me just read you just a snippet of it as we work towards a close this morning and particularly listen for how he describes the Christian community that he came in touch with okay?

He says this as I attended lots of recovery groups in Glasgow I heard about the Free Church work in Govan there's a lot of respect for what is happening through this fellowship and right away I felt as if I had come home up until six months ago I had been addicted to street and prescription drugs as well as alcohol for a period of 30 years 30 years but now I'm free and I'm working hard at building new godly habits into my daily life given the epidemic of drug abuse in our scheme I see that my own background actually helps a wee bit in getting alongside others who are enslaved to using like I was Govan Free Church is like a family to me and it is a community I have come to love and one that I see God is working through and a wonderful story a testimony and a wonderful example of the attractive fruit that Christ produces through his people as they abide in his word this is to my father's glory that you bear much fruit showing yourselves to be my disciples abiding means bearing now as we close friends

[27 : 24] I know our time is gone let me take you back to my branch okay here's the branch not going to take some grapes not going to staple some leaves not going to jab them in the dirt okay how is he going to grow how is it going to bear fruit again the only hope for this branch is it gets connected and receives the life giving sap from the vine and Jesus says to his followers this morning abide in me if you are going to produce fruit God glorifying eternal fruit in your lives then it's only going to be by abiding in me that that's going to happen friends I wonder what that's going to look like for us in our own lives this morning so before we finish and before the busyness of the rest of the day and the rest of the week kicks in let's just be still for a moment and let's pause to reflect and absorb everything that God has been saying to us in his word this morning let me just put the verses up in the screens

Jesus says I am the vine you are the branches if you remain in me and I in you you will bear much fruit apart from me you can do nothing let's be still for just a minute our heavenly father so often we find abiding to be so difficult and so it's my prayer for us this morning as you are people that you would help us to abide in the words of Jesus and I pray that this week in every situation that you would help us know you and that through us you would do your work in our hearts and bear fruits for the glory of your name in this nation father thank you that this is only a possibility because you first loved us so we pray and ask today that Jesus would become even greater as the days go on in our sight in his name we pray amen