

Our Identity and Union with Jesus

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[0:00] Thank you, Corey and Jonathan. Good morning, folks. It is lovely to see you.! It's strange to be here, in a sense. Having been here for a long time, I left three years! But it's wonderful to be back with you and wonderful to help us think through these wonderful scriptures that were read to us. But I want you to entertain me for a second and pretend that it is Easter Sunday morning. Great. Everyone got that? It is Easter Sunday morning. I've just stood up and I'm going to say, Christ is risen. Okay, we're going to try that again.

Christ is risen. Exactly. Now hopefully you see why I told you to think it's Easter, because that would not have happened otherwise. But at Easter and every Sunday throughout the year across the world, millions of people celebrate that same truth, that Jesus Christ is risen.

That the tomb is empty. Death has been defeated. Sin has been conquered. Hope is alive because our Savior lives. But here is the question we must all ask ourselves this morning. Whether you've been in church your whole life, or whether this is your first time walking into a church building, what does that actually mean for us? See, it's one thing to say we believe that Jesus died and rose again. But it's another thing entirely to see how that fact should change the way we live. See, it's the Bible's answer might surprise us. See, the message of Christianity is not simply that Jesus died and rose again, but that those who trust in him are united with him.

not just inspired by him, not just forgiven by him, but joined to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that truth, union with Christ, is the very heart of the gospel, and that's going to be our focus for this morning. Because to be a Christian is not simply to admire Jesus. It's not to follow Jesus. It's not to believe certain truths about Jesus. At the heart of salvation is the reality that if you are a Christian, you are united to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith. And through that union, everything that belongs to Christ becomes ours. Wrap your head around that. His righteousness becomes our righteousness. His death becomes our death to sin. His resurrection becomes our new life. And his future becomes our hope.

[2:51] Our union with Christ is the foundation of a Christian's identity. And that is important because in our world, identity is constantly being shaped by culture, performance, success, failure, relationships, personal feelings. But the Bible reminds Christians that our truest identity is found in Christ. The New Testament repeatedly calls Christians to remember who they are because of what God has done for us in Christ. So this morning, we're going to read those, or we're going to explore those two different passages that were read to us that show us what it means to be in Christ. And how that reality should shape how we think, how we live, how we struggle, how we repent, how we hope. The aim is not simply to understand a theological doctrine, but to help us see that because of our union with Christ, we can rejoice in security of the gospel.

We can understand who we truly are as Christians. We can live transformed lives, and we can fight sin and discouragement with gospel truth. So let's dive in this morning and consider union with Christ, which is the very heart of the gospel. The first thing I want us to see is the picture of union that Jesus gives us in John 15, the vine and the branches. Look at John 15 verse 1. Jesus says, I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener. And then in verse 4, Jesus says, remain in me as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself. It must remain in the vine. See, this whole passage is full of reference to that close relationship between Jesus and his people, which is why the picture of vine and branches is so helpful. And I think it is one of the most intimate pictures Jesus ever gives us. Because Jesus doesn't say, follow me like a student follows a teacher. He doesn't say, obey me like a servant obeys a master, although those things are true. But here he says something deeper. We are connected, inseparable. I am the vine and you are the branches. But what is he saying? Well, a branch has no life in and of itself. When you look at a vineyard in the height of harvest season, you normally focus on how beautiful it looks, don't you? You see the full of

vibrant colours, the big juicy grapes that are ready to be picked, and they taste wonderfully refreshing on a hot summer's day. But the real work of any vineyard is below eye level. Because the real reason that any vineyard can grow, the real source of all that fruit and growth is the vine. The bit that sticks out of the ground. Without that, the branches will not produce any fruit at all. And it is the same with us as Christians. If Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, then the only way we live, the only way we will produce any fruit is if we are connected to the vine. A branch only lives because it's connected to the vine. Cut it off. And what happens? Well, it withers, it dies, and it bears no fruit whatsoever. And Jesus says, that is what your relationship with me is like. Being a Christian is not fundamentally about trying harder or being better or earning God's favour. Being a Christian is about being connected to Jesus. Why is this so important? Because everything in our lives flows from this connection with Christ. Life itself flows from Jesus. Our strength flows from Jesus. Our growth comes from Jesus. And the fruit we produce in this life as we live for Jesus ultimately comes from him.

Look at verse 5. 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. Jesus doesn't say you might not be able to do some things.

He doesn't say you'll be able to do less things. No, he says apart from me, you can do nothing. Nothing of eternal value. And Jesus repeats that word remain. But a better translation or translation I prefer is the word abide, which I think conveys the importance of sticking close to Jesus just that little bit better. See, the word abide speaks more of a constant active remaining in Jesus. Jesus is saying, if you're a Christian, live or dwell in me and I dwell or as I dwell in you.

Abiding in Christ means that as Christians, we need to be conscious every single day of our need for him in our lives. We need to recognize that without his work in our lives, we have nothing.

[8:15] Abiding in Christ means staying connected to depend on, to trust in, to live in relationship with Jesus. See, it is not just a one-time moment. It is a living, ongoing, constant union.

And here is the beauty of it. Verse 5 again. If you remain in me, Jesus says, and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Not you might bear some fruit if you're good enough.

Not if you're especially spiritual, you will bear fruit. No, it is a promise. You will bear fruit. Why? Because the power is not in us. It comes from the vine.

And this closeness that we have with Jesus is a result of that living, vibrant, nurtured relationship with him. But he is the initiator of that relationship.

Why? Because, well, what did we bring to the table? We brought our sin. Our sin that blocked us from God. It was our wrongdoing that caused God's wrath to be on us.

[9:20] But out of love, God sent his son to live the perfect, sinless life that we never could. To die a sinner's death, the death that every single one of us deserves, and to be raised to life again.

All of that was done so that we could be in union with Christ. So that we can abide in Jesus. Which means that after we accept Christ as our Lord, as Lord of our lives, and the Holy Spirit enters into our hearts, we will bear fruit for him.

That's an image of intimacy and of deep union that Jesus gives us to illustrate the relationship that he has with his people. The second thing I want us to consider this morning is that every Christian is united with Jesus in his death and resurrection.

Turn with me to Romans 6, where the Apostle Paul unpacks this a little bit more. Paul writes in Romans 6 verse 4, This is astonishing.

Paul is saying, if you're a Christian, what happened to Christ has happened to you. When Jesus died on the cross, bearing the full weight of our sin and shame, and the full extent of God's wrath against the sins of his people, Jesus wasn't just dying for you, you were, spiritually speaking, dying with him.

[10:58] That's why Paul goes on to say in verse 6, For we know that our old self was crucified with him, that is Jesus, so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

See, the point that Paul is making is that in the life of every Christian, something dramatic has happened, and our lives will never be the same again. Because you cannot die and rise again without your life being utterly transformed.

And the same is true for us. We are not the same people we used to be. Through Christ, we have died to our old self. We have been raised to true, lasting life in the Lord Jesus.

And if you are here this morning and you are not a Christian, or you are a Christian, sorry, you will know that the old you, before you became a Christian, was guilty before God.

Enslaved by sin, unable to fight temptation, and you were under judgment. But that doesn't define you anymore, does it? A Christian is no longer those things because they have died with Christ.

[12 : 18] But what does that glorious truth, as mind-blowing as it is, actually mean for your day-to-day life? Well, it means that all the sins that you have ever committed and will ever commit have been paid for.

Everything. God has entirely blotted out, erased every single sin, not simply by forgetting them, but by nailing his perfect son to a cross for you.

It means that your guilt has been removed. You are no longer identified with your sin, your guilt, your shame, which made it impossible for you to approach God. It is gone like a courtroom.

If God were to sit as judge and Satan were to come with accusation after accusation against us for the sins we've committed, and that list would be very long, wouldn't it?

You would rightly stand there condemned and judged. The verdict could be no other than guilty. But in that moment, Jesus steps in.

[13 : 27] And he says, No. They have been declared innocent. My blood was shed for them. Jesus was treated as guilty so that we, the guilty ones, could be declared innocent.

And that means that there is no condemnation for Christians. Romans 8 verse 1. Therefore, now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

God the Father does not condemn his perfect son. And therefore, he will not condemn his people because we are in his perfect son.

We are not condemned. We will never be condemned. We cannot be condemned because we are in Christ. So if you are a Christian this morning, marvel at that truth.

Your sins have been paid for. Your guilt removed. Your condemnation gone. Not because you improved. But because you are united to Christ in his death.

[14 : 40] John Calvin, the famous reformer from the 1600s said this. The spirit sprinkles our souls with the blood of Christ. Not only to cleanse us from the stain of sin.

But also to sanctify us to true purity. Which is life giving. And that leads us to the life giving part of this section in Romans.

Christians are united with Christ in his resurrection. See Paul continues in verse 5 and says, For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Now we gather this morning as we do every Sunday to celebrate the glorious truth that the grave is empty. And we do not serve a dead savior. Jesus Christ is alive.

He is reigning. He is ruling over everything. Jesus did stay dead. And if you are united to him, neither will you. What does that mean?

[15 : 41] Well it means that as Christians, we have new spiritual life now. See the good news of Jesus isn't just a message of good news for the future.

It is good news for all people in this life. The blessings of our union with Christ start the day we become Christians, not the day we die. In this life we have every spiritual blessing in Christ.

It means that we have the Holy Spirit within us who changes us and transforms us from the inside out to be more and more like Jesus. And it means that the future that awaits us is an eternity in the presence of God that will be so amazing, so unfathomable and so spectacular that we cannot even begin to describe or imagine its greatness.

But if you want a glimpse of it, listen to the words of Revelation 21 verse 3. God's dwelling place is now among the people.

He will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. And if that wasn't amazing enough, he will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

[16 : 54] There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

Do you long for that day? Because as a Christian, it is yours. Because it has been secured for you through Christ's death and resurrection.

See, Christianity is not just about forgiveness. As wonderful as that is, it is about new life. And that new life is found only in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that presents us with a new reality. Look again at Romans 6 verse 11. Paul says, Count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Notice that word, count. Paul doesn't say, make it true. He doesn't say, work really hard to be saved. No. He doesn't say, you need to be on your best behavior and stick to a whole bunch of rules so that I'll like you.

[18:01] No. He says, no, this is true. As a Christian, your identity has changed. You are no longer defined by your past.

Owned by your sin or condemned before God. You are in Christ. You are alive in Christ. You are a new creation. Isn't that incredible news?

But just as we leave this point, let me say that if you are here this morning and you are not yet a Christian. If you have not yet surrendered your life to Christ and trusted in the Lord Jesus for your forgiveness.

Then you are still dead in your sins and trespasses. Under the wrath of God. But the offer of the gospel is there for you to go through the transformation that we've talked about.

It is still possible for you to be united with Christ in his death and resurrection. Do not put it off. But investigate the gospel for yourself and consider what the Lord Jesus did on that very first Good Friday.

[19:06] As he was killed on that cross and rose again on that first Easter Sunday. Do not put it off. Because your eternity hangs in the balance. So if this is true for you this morning.

If you are united with Christ in his death and resurrection. If you are united to him like a branch is joined to the vine. Then it changes everything. So let me just draw out some final implications of these wonderful truths before we close.

The first is your identity. If you are united to Christ your identity is no longer based on your success or failure in this life. It is not based on your status in the world.

Your current or past mistakes or failures. Your identity isn't based even on what people think about you. If you are a Christian here this morning your identity is that you are in Christ.

Which means you are loved with an everlasting love. That you are accepted fully into the family of God. No questions asked. Not begrudgingly but gladly.

[20:15] Because once we were far off but now we have been given a seat at the table of the king. And counted as his son or daughter. And it means that you are seen as righteous in God's eyes.

You have Jesus is right standing before God. Not because of anything you have done. But because of everything Jesus has done. Second implication is arguably one of the most freeing truths in the Christian life.

That you are standing before God does not depend on your performance. It depends on your position in Christ. See maybe you are a bit like me and you come into church.

And you are reminded of the great cost that Jesus paid on the cross for your sins. You remember the sins that you continue to commit every single day despite being saved.

You are reminded regularly of just how much you need to change to become more like Jesus. And you think of the gospel. And you cannot help but ask yourself why?

[21:22] Why me? Why save me? Well the wonderful truth is that the answer really has nothing to do with you.

It is all to do with God's grace and God's goodness. If you are in Christ, his righteousness is yours. His death counts for you. His resurrection guarantees your future. That is a promise you can take to the bank. Because we live in a world of broken promises.

A time where truth is questioned and security and certainty are not always guaranteed. But this is. Our salvation, our forgiveness, our relationship with God.

Our future eternity in his presence. His help in our darkest of times. His enabling every single day to live. The life we are created to live and called to live.

[22:25] Is absolutely secure in Christ. Your salvation is not fragile. It is secure. And it is secure because it is rooted in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Not our efforts. Not any kind of religiosity. But it is rooted in Christ. And then the final implication is that of all that we have seen this morning.

Is that union with Christ doesn't just change your status before God. But it changes your life. See we are not told only to come to God when you have got your life sorted out.

Where you sin less. Where everything seems fine. No. We are to come to God. In Christ as we are.

And the reality is that we won't stay the same. We will change. Because we are connected to Christ. Sin no longer has the ultimate power over you. Change is possible.

[23 : 26] And growth is inevitable. If you stick with Christ. It won't be done in an instant. You will never be perfect. But the Holy Spirit will transform you to become more like Jesus.

As you abide in Christ. Like we thought from John 15. His life flows into yours. Christ through the Spirit of God is making you more like Jesus.

Who is the image of God. Now don't get me wrong. We are not going to be perfect in this life. But we will certainly be transformed until that day we meet him. And live in his presence for all eternity. And so here is the application for you this morning. If you are a Christian. If you know that all of this is true in your life.

The application is rest. See I'm not going to give you a job to do. The Bible doesn't give you a checklist of things you can tick off in order to be holy.

[24 : 28] The application of your union with Jesus is rest. Rest in the truth that you are standing for. You're standing before God is not based on how many times you've read your Bible this week.

Don't get me wrong. Please read your Bibles. But you're before. It's not based on that. You're standing before God is not dependent on how strong your faith feels on any given day.

Or even on how consistently obedient you've been this week. You need to ask yourself the question. Am I a Christian? Am I in Christ? If you are.

Then everything you need is already yours in him. So stop trying to earn what you have already been given. Instead, abide in him.

Rest in him. Trust in him for everything you need in this life. And depend on him every day like your life depends on it because it does. And let his life, the life of the Savior of the world, bear fruit in you.

[25 : 37] And if you're here and you're not a Christian, let me speak directly to you again. The Bible says that apart from Christ, you are separated from God. Under sin and facing just punishment for the sins that you've committed.

And you deserve the judgment of God. That sounds incredibly uncomfortable. But it is real. But there is good news.

Jesus lived the life that you never could. The life of perfect obedience. He died the death you deserve and rose in victory over the grave. Proving that all he said and did was true.

And now he offers you something extraordinary. Union with himself. Not just forgiveness. Not a second chance. Not wiping the slate clean.

He offers you a whole new life in him. How do you receive that? Not by trying harder. Not by doing more. Not by straining to be better. Even though those things are our tendency.

[26 : 39] Not even by being religious. No. We become, we accept Christ by turning from our sin and repentance. Trusting in Jesus.

That his sacrifice on the cross was sufficient for you. And relying on him alone. At that moment you are united with him. His death becomes your death.

His life, your life. His future, your future. Everything that we've thought about this morning is yours in Christ. If you trust in him. Do not put that decision off.

I want us to end this morning where we began. Think with me that we are again on Easter Sunday morning. The tomb is empty.

Which means that Jesus is not just a teacher to admire. He is not just a savior to thank. But he is the living Lord that we are united to. And that changes everything.

[27 : 38] Because if you are in Christ, you are never alone. You will never be condemned. And you will never be without hope. So whether you follow Jesus for years or you are hearing this for the first time.

Come back to him. Abide in him. Rejoice in him. And rest in him. Because there is nothing greater in this world than to be united with the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we come this morning and we recognize that we still sin. We recognize that we make mistakes.

We recognize that we are not perfect. We recognize that even our following of you is not perfect. And yet we thank you so much that we are in Christ if we are Christians.

And we have every spiritual blessing in him. Father, as we go into this week, as we go into the rest of our lives, would you help us live for him? And rest in him knowing that the work is done.

[28 : 45] Because it was done on the cross for us. Jesus, we thank you for your life, death and resurrection. Holy Spirit, we thank you that you have opened our eyes to see the truth. And would you help us live for Christ every day until we meet him face to face.

In his name we pray. Amen.