

Abiding in Christ: The Key to Fruitbearing Pt 1

College Fall Retreat 2006

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Here is our Lord's great teaching on fruitfulness in a believer's life. There are so many truths in the analogy of a vine and a branch that can be brought into the context of the Christian life. And this passage has to stand in one of the greatest analogies our Lord ever used relative to living the Christian life by grace.

And what we are going to do over the course of this weekend is a little on high side, Brandon. If you turn it down just a little. What we are going to do over the course of this weekend is we are going to work our way through John chapter 15.

Now you might say, "Oh, I know this chapter pretty well."

You know what? I think I know it better than you do and I think I still need to keep reading and keep understanding it. You know, the Bible is like an orange. You know, you cut an orange and you take it and you squeeze some juice out of it.

Have you ever noticed something about an orange? You can always squeeze more juice out of that orange. And regardless of how many times you have heard a passage, how many times you have heard some verses, there are more things to learn. And, furthermore, depending on where you are at in your thinking and even your level of growth, you will receive certain conviction and understanding and discernment and insight and application to that passage because this is where you are at when you hear it versus where you were at the last time you heard it.

And so we are going to be working our way through John 15 verse by verse. Tonight there are two studies that we are going to really lay some groundwork as well as we are going to cover the first eight verses of John chapter 15.

So let's begin by just reading verses one through eight of John 15.

Jesus Christ is speaking and he says:

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit

He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Now before we begin looking at the nuts and bolts of the content of this passage, let us, first of all, observe the bigger picture as a text without a context is a pretext.

Now as we look at some crucial background to this book, the purpose of John's writing in this book is actually found in John 20 verse 31. So as we look at the big picture here, what is the book of John about? We need to go to John 20. For, you know, in some books of the Bible if you want to really open your understanding to it, the key is in the front porch. That is true in the book of Acts, Acts 1:8 is the key verse for the whole book. But in the book of John the key verse for the whole book is on the back porch.

You know, sometimes your parents put they key on the back porch so people wouldn't find it on the front porch and that you could get in when you need to get in. See, John had a very specific reason why he put it on the back porch here, because he wants you to really understand what leads up to this verse so that you would read in John 20 verses 30 and 31 these words.

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.

You see, the book of John is basically a gospel tract on a whole with a section regarding the Christian life about two thirds of the way back. And what is the key word to this whole book? It is found right there in that verse, verse 31, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

The word "believe" is found some 99 times in the book of John as this is the gospel of belief. God wants you through the book of John, first of all, to know for sure you have eternal life, to know for sure you are saved, to know for sure that absent from the body is present with the Lord.

You know, I was reminded of that this week. In fact, the reason I am somewhat dressed up tonight is I was at a funeral visitation before I came. There was a lady who is the mother of a daughter, obviously, that goes to our church. And this lady had gotten saved in the last couple of years primarily through the witness of her daughter. She died.

And, you know, as we are... before she died and even after she died as I was talking to the family, we just talked about where real comfort is found at a time like that. You know that absent from the body is present with the Lord. Precious in the sight of the Lord are the death of his saints.

You know, not only does God want you to have assurance of where you are going to spend eternity, but one of the greatest assurances that any mother could give to her kids is for them to know that when she dies she went to be with the Lord.

That is what the book of John is about, that kind of absolute assurance about one's salvation.

Now, to accomplish this objective the Holy Spirit directed John to select eight miracles to highlight Christ's deity.

See, John has written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ the what? The Son of God. That is a term for the fact that he is God who became a man. As the Son of God he has the same nature as his Father, that he is God. And there are eight miracles of the many miracles that Jesus did that are selected and set forth in this book. The one is turning the water into wine. That is the first one recorded. It shows that Jesus has power over creation. Then the healing of the nobleman's son, Jesus has power over space. The healing of the lame man, Jesus has power over time. The feeding of the 500, that Jesus has power over food. When Jesus walks on the water he has power over natural laws; healing of the blind man, power over physical laws; raising of Lazarus from the dead, power over death itself. And then the miraculous catch of fish.

And, by the way, we could really add another one or two to this list because one of his greatest miracles according to John two which he forgets and then is recorded in John 20 or 19 and 20 are his death and his resurrection from the grave. In fact, right before we read this verse—chapter 20 verse 31—chapter 19 is set forth how he died and cried out, chapter 19 verse 30, "It is finished." And then in chapter 20 how he rose victorious from the grave as death, hell and grave could not hold him.

"And these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name."

But along with these miracles there is the wise utilization of eight I am's as well in this book. Now that phrase, "I am" wasn't just pulled out of a hat. For you remember that when Moses approached the burning bush which was the theophany, an appearance of the Lord, he said, "Who should I say sent me?"

And he said, "Tell, them I am sent you."

And when Jesus claimed to be the I am the Jews knew exactly what he was talking about. For they picked up stones to stone him for blasphemy for he, being a man, claimed to be God, they said.

Well, the fact is, he is God. And, as we look at John chapter 15 we are going to see the seventh of those I am's. He says, "I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the door. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth and the life. I am the vine. I am who I am."

And so there is this emphasis in the book of John again on the fact that Jesus Christ is God who became a man, who proved it through his miracles, proved it through his teaching, who then died for our sins and rose again so that through faith alone in Christ alone we could have eternal life because it is not a matter of your amount of faith, but who you have your faith in that will determine where you spend eternity.

Now that we have observed some crucial background to this book, let's take a few more minutes to highlight some overall direction in this chapter in John chapter 15 as we turn back there.

[?] looking at this weekend. John 15 breaks down into three parts. Verses one through 11 instruct us about the believer's relationship with Christ and the key term is abide. In fact, the word "abide" is found some 10 times in this chapter. For example, verse four. "Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine. You are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, bears much fruit. For without me you can do nothing."

And so the first emphasis of the chapter is when it comes to your relationship with the Lord, believer, you need to learn how to abide in Christ. For without him you cannot bear fruit.

Then verses 12 through 17 instruct us about the believer's relationship with other believers. And the key term is the word love, agape love. We are not speaking of some emotional gush or sappy sentimentality. We are talking about the mental attitude which motivates us to choose to do what is best for another in light of eternity no matter what it costs us. And the word "love" here is found some four times in these verses.

In fact, notice verse 12 with me, "This is my commandment," Jesus said, "that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this that he lay down his life for his friends."

And so, first of all, there is the vertical, our relationship with the Lord. Key word, abide. Then there is the horizontal one direction, towards believers. The key word is love.

And then in verses 18 to 27 our Lord instructs us about the believer's relationship with the world. And the key terms are hate, used some eight times, which is how the world responds to Christ and also responds to you if you are in Christ. And then the second key

word is the word “witness” or testify, same Greek word. That is found two times. And this is how you are to respond to a world that hates you.

In fact, if we could diagram it, this is what we are looking at in John chapter 15.

Again, our relationship to the Lord, key word, abide. The believer’s relationship to other believers, key word, love. The believer’s relationship to the world, witness. The world’s response to the believer, they hate believers because they hate Jesus Christ and they want to do their own thing.

And so this is the overall direction of this chapter.

So we see what this book is about and then we have narrowed it a little more. We have seen what this chapter is about. And now let’s look at what this passage is about in John 15 verses one through eight.

And let me underscore a couple of things that are very important here to begin with. This is how your passage is for believers only, believers only.

Now this is no insignificant point, but is an important ingredient in the right interpretation of this section. There are some people who misinterpret John 15 right off the bat because they are not sure this is talking to genuine believers.

They say, “Well, how do you know it is speaking to believers?”

Well, for at least three very good reasons. First of all, historically let me put this in context. When John 15 is written or being spoken, what has happened? The Christ was born into this world. He then at the age of 30 began his public ministry. He began to display his miracles. He resisted the temptation of the devil. He took on the Pharisees. He exposed religion. He talked to people about the fact that he was the Messiah and that they needed to repent, change their mind and accept him as their rightful king.

He also assembled followers and he sent them out two by two preaching that same message, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

But as time went on, the nation of Israel, the only nation that had been promised that king, their leaders made a very decisive decision to reject Jesus as the Messiah and, in fact, claim that the miracles he did, he did through the power of Satan himself. And after that happened, Jesus’ ministry begins to shift and he begins to say some things that he had never said before. First of all he started to say, “I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Furthermore, he began to predict that he would suffer and die and be raised from the dead. And you remember what Peter’s response to that was? “We will never let that happen to you.”

And he said, “Get thee behind me, Satan. The things you are saying are the things of Satan. They are not the things of God.”

For Jesus Christ not only came to be Israel’s Messiah and a rightful offer to Israel was made. But based on their rejection which would ultimately culminate in the crucifixion, Jesus Christ also came to be the Savior of the world and upon the cross he would die for our sins and be raised from the dead to offer eternal life and salvation to all who would simply believe in him.

Now when we are reading John 15 where on the night in which he is betrayed, the next day he is going to die on the cross. In between he is going to be illegally arrested, illegally tried. He is going to be beaten to a pulp. He is going to be scourged and whipped and mocked and eventually crucified between two thieves. And so it is night in which he is betrayed. Judas Iscariot already has left to betray him. We know that from John 13. He is gathered with his disciples, then, first in an upper room—and that is why this often times called the upper room discourse, John 13 through 17—but most likely he has left the upper room and he is making his way to the Garden of Gethsemane and he comes upon a vineyard or, perhaps, he came across the door of the temple which had a big vine and branches with fruit on it. And he takes the opportunity like any teachable moment, to teach his disciples a very important truth, in fact many truths that would be needed after his death, resurrection and ascension. He predicts his death. He predicts his resurrection. He predicts his ascension. He predicts the coming of the Holy Spirit and the importance of his ministry in our lives. He predicts all of this. And so in John 15 Jesus Christ is only speaking to believers because Judas is gone. Only believers are there. For the other disciples were genuine believers. We know that historically.

Secondly, the reason it is only believers is contextually. Though John is primarily a gospel apologetic, chapters 13 through 17 are directed towards believers. And then doctrinally this is spoken to those who are branches in him.

If an unbeliever would ask you, “What must I do to be saved,” would you tell them, “Abide in Christ?”

No. What would you tell them? They need to believe in Jesus Christ and his work on the cross. In fact, go back with me for a moment to John chapter three, John chapter three. Jesus in verse three tells Nicodemus, “You must be born again.” In verse 13 he says, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Now using illustration that an Old Testament Jew who was learned in the Old Testament Scriptures would readily identify with. Where in back in numbers the children of Israel were in rebellion against God. God sent serpents into the land to bite them and they were dying.

Like what should we do? And Moses cries out, “Lord, what do you want?”

And he says, “This what I want. I want you to take a brass pole and put a brass serpent on it, a pole with a brass serpent. And I want you to lift it high. Lift it up. [?] looks they will live. And whoever refuses to look they will die.”

Now, if you stop and think about that for a minute and you went to a doctor and you were bit by a snake and you said, “What should I do?”

Well, look at a pole.

You say, “You are nuts. What do you mean, look at a pole? How is that going to help me?”

Well, obviously there was nothing saving efficaciously by way of that pole. But, you see, that pole was God’s provision and just like Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness and whoever looked lived, so in the same way the Son of God was lifted up on the cross that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

[?] it is so simple to be saved that the average person misses it. And that is why the Bible makes it clear that the majority of the world is on the broad road to lead to hell. But, you see, before we are saved we are in Adam, in the Adam’s family as it were. And in Adam all die. We are sinners. We are deserving of hell. We have all broken God’s law. And if God gave us what we deserved he would have to condemn us all forever and ever and ever for he is holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts.

This is the bad news. But the good news is that God loved us, that Christ died for our sins, past, present and future and rose again and, thus, God offers to us as a gift salvation. And the moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ plus nothing we are then transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s dear Son. And for the New Testament Church age believer we are said to be in Christ. And remember John 13 through 17 is all in anticipation of the Church age.

Because the Bible makes it clear that while there is a barrier that separated God from man, though Jesus Christ broke through that barrier. And while the penalty for sin is death, that God punished his own Son Jesus Christ in our place so that the wrath of God that should have fallen upon us, instead fell upon our substitute.

When you think about Christ, again, think that’s what I deserve. I deserve to be separated from God. I deserve to die, but that Jesus Christ took my place upon the cross and then cried out, “It is finished,” having paid in full for all of my sins.

And so I haven’t echoed. There is nothing to pay. The debt has been paid by another. Jesus paid it all. All to him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, but he washed it white as snow.

And, thus, it is not a matter of getting your good to somehow outweigh your bad, as while your sins make you deserving of hell, your good works can never get you to heaven. And that is why God sent his Son. That is why Christ died for your sins. And that is why the Bible says salvation is a gift. And the moment you put your faith in Christ alone that gift becomes yours and you can then know you are saved because Christ did it, you believe it and that settles it. And therefore you can know it regardless of how you might feel because God cannot lie. See, God has promised this to you.

And, thus, the Bible says that thou wilt cast all of their sins into the depths of the sea and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. What a wonderful plan of salvation, something that religion could never think of, nor any human ever came and developed. Only God would do this. Only God would give a Son. Only God would provide salvation by grace which means you don't earn it or deserve it or work for it. But it is received through simple faith in him.

And the moment you put your faith in Christ while your sins were already paid for, they then become totally forgiven, forgiven. And you are now qualified to go to heaven not because you are good enough, but because Christ's work on the cross was good enough for you.

Now, let me make this clear once again. When you talk to the average person about how to get in heaven they think like the top diagram. What are you trust in or relying on to get you to heaven? And they will say things like, "Well, you have go be a good church member or you have got to get baptized or you need to ask Jesus in your heart. Avoid big sins."

And didn't Jesus have something to do with it, too?

And that is how they respond often times, isn't it?

They say, "Yeah, we got to throw Jesus in there somewhere."

And yet before I was saved I had a little place for Jesus. He was about one of seven things I thought that you needed in order to go to heaven.

You see, that is Satan's recipe to go to hell, the first one. See, the real issue that the Bible says is what are you trusting in or relying on to get you into heaven? And if it is not Jesus Christ and his work alone apart from your works, you will never go and it is just that simple.

That is why John three verse 17 says what? "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but the world through him might be saved. He who believes in him is not condemned, but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Verse 36. “He who believes,” I told you that was the key word in the book, “in the Son, has everlasting life. He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Look at chapter five and verse 24. “Most assuredly I say to you he who hears my words,” Jesus said, “And believes in him who sent me,” in other words, what God says about his Son, “has everlasting life and,” in addition “shall not come into judgment,” You will never go to hell, “but has passed from death,” spiritual death, “into life,” spiritual life.

You say, “Oh, you don’t know what I have done, though. You know, I have done some terrible sins. I have sinned repeatedly against God. I have done some horrendous things. I certainly don’t deserve to go to heaven.”

And that is true. You don’t. But do you know what John six says to you in verse 37? Jesus said, “All that the Father gives me will come to me and the one who comes to me I will by no means cast out.” He will never cast out. He will never turn you away. “For I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of the Father who hath sent me, that of all he has given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up on the last day. And this is the will of him who sent me that everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have everlasting life and I will raise him up at the last day.”

Notice, Christ will never kick you out of his family once you put your faith in him. And he never loses anything which means he keeps you saved forever.

Look at John chapter eight with me and verse 24. Jesus, again is speaking, “Therefore I said to you will die,” not because of, but “in your sins,” in other words, unforgiven. “For if you do not believe that I am, you will die in your sins.”

Look at John chapter 10 with me. In contrast to that, here is the wonderful promise that is given to everyone that puts their trust in Christ alone, verse 27.

“My sheep here my voice, and I know them, and they follow me,” or they trust me. “And I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one.”

Now, you know, it could be that you have grown up in a Bible teaching church and you have heard the gospel and you have heard the wonderful truth of eternal security. But you know that there are scores of people all over the world who do not know this and do not understand this. There are many who claim to be born again who think that you can lose your salvation. Because in their mind sin is still the issue, it isn’t really finished and good works and a whole life are really still necessary. It is not fully by grace.

You know, we have had a ministry to El Salvador for at least six years now and also to Myanmar for several years. And, you know, as we talk to people who are, quote, so called Christians and in many cases pastors and leaders, you know, they have told us time and time again, it wasn't until they heard the book of Romans verse by verse that we taught them that they knew for sure they were saved by grace forever. They thought you could lose it or they had the gospel all screwed up.

And it wasn't because they want to know. They had been poorly taught.

And I just want to just really impress upon you: Value the teaching of the Word of God that you have. Appreciate the great teaching and the wonderful message of the gospel. May your heart never tire of hearing about the wonders of God's grace and the work of Jesus Christ and the simplicity of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and the wonderful assurance that once I am saved I have been saved forever. For eternal life by its very definition cannot stop in one year, three years, five years or whatever.

Look at John chapter 11 verse 25 and 26. And what does Jesus say? "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live," by way of resurrection. "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die," spiritually or eternally. "Do you believe this?"

And Martha said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

And so as we go back to John chapter 15 let's make it clear again this passage is for believers only.

You know, when it comes right down to it—and let me just say this to you, every one here tonight, you are either saved or you are lost. There is no such thing as kind of saved for kind of lost. Either you are on your way to heaven or you are on your way to hell. You are either on the broad road or the narrow road. You are either in Adam or in Christ. And if you do not know for sure you have been saved, you can get saved tonight. For, you see, what it all boils down to, the bottom line, it is an issue on whether you rely on the work of another or whether you are still relying on your own works to get you to heaven.

And, you see, those whom Jesus is talking to in John 15 have put their trust in him alone for eternal life.

Now there is another thing that I need to emphasize in John 15 before we break these down to brass tacks. These verses—in verses one through eight—center on the connection of abiding in Christ resulting in fruit bearing, fruit bearing, not salvation. That is by way of justification.

In John 15 look with me at verse two. “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” The word “fruit” is found time and time and time again in this passage. You see, this passage is talking about abiding in Christ resulting in fruit bearing. It is not talking about how to be saved and know that you are saved. That has already been covered in the book of John.

Now let me just ask, “So how does this apply to you?”

Well, first of all, if you are not saved you can’t bear fruit.

Imagine if you could for a moment, a mannequin up here. You know how they have CPR classes and they have mannequins. Usually they call them Annie if I remember right. Just imagine if Annie was sitting up here on the table and you say, “Well, you know, Annie, we are going to fix you up.” And you manicure her fingernails and you put nice clothes on her and comb her hair and you do all of those things and when it is all said and done Annie still has a terrible problem. What is it?

Dead. She doesn’t have any life. You can have all those things and have no life. And in the same way until someone is saved you can change their behavior, you can change their outside, you can do all these kind of things, but they need something that nothing externally can give them. They need life and only Jesus Christ can give life. And if you have never been saved, if you don’t know for sure you have eternal life, it is not an issue, first of all, of bearing fruit. It is an issue, first of all, of having life, a new life, eternal life in Jesus Christ.

But then if you are saved I want to just ask you this. Are you becoming a fruitful believer? Is there real fruit going on in your life?

Now just think about fruit for a minute. See, fruit can’t develop through external pressure. If you are outside of a tree and you are blowing on the apple, will that help? No. Nothing externally will cause that apple to become more fruitful. It has to come from within. And in the same way just like no one can save you, nobody else can make you a fruitful believer. Only the Lord can.

I want to ask you a question. Do you want to be a fruitful believer? Do you want your life to count for Jesus Christ? Do you want to grow? Or are you just rearranging the furniture this weekend in your because you really have no intent of really letting the Lord make an adjustment because in your mind that is not what you really want to live for anyhow. So you are here just kind of for a good social time. And though there is a lot of fellowship available, this is a valuable, spiritual time if you are willing to take advantage of it because in your heart you are saying, “By God’s grace, I want to be fruitful. By God’ grace I want to grow. By God’s grace I want my life to count for Jesus Christ.”

And if you are not there in your thinking, you just need to admit that to the Lord. I am not there in my thinking. And, Lord, I know this isn't good. You are going to have to work in my heart and I have to be willing to respond.

Like I was thinking yesterday of this illustration. Imagine for a moment I came up to Jim and I said, "Jim, you know, I have got a great gift here. It is called a million bucks. Jim, you know, you are a needy guy. You know, I would like to give this million bucks to you as a gift."

Jim says, "Thanks." He takes the gift and it is his.

Then a year later I come along and say, "Jim, how's that million bucks?"

"Oh, really good. I am so glad to have it. I am so thankful that you gave me that million bucks, really."

"So, have you spent any of it?"

"Oh, no, no. No, I haven't spent any of it, but I sure am glad that one day when I die I will have that million bucks."

"Why you haven't used any of it?"

"No, no. But I am sure glad I have it."

"Well, let me ask you. Have you shared it with anybody?"

"No. I haven't shared it with anybody, but I am sure glad when I die that I have that million bucks."

You say, "Oh, wait a second. That million bucks cannot only help you when you die, in a sense, but it is of great value to you now. What are you doing with the million bucks, Jim?"

"Well, I am just really glad I have it, you know. You know and every so often I pull it out from underneath my pillow and rub it in my chest and I ... it just makes me feel really good to know that, you know, I have a million bucks, you know. That is just so nice."

And you know where I am going with this, don't you? And that is like with some of you your salvation. You know you are saved and you go, "You know, when I die I know I am going to heaven."

And God says, "Well, what are you doing with it in the meantime?"

Oh, nothing, but It sure really feels good to know that I have salvation."

“But are you sharing it with anyone else?”

“Well, no, not really. But you know, it is really nice. I am really glad that when I die I know I have got it.”

Thinking, you know, you are really missing the boat because, you see, salvation isn't the end of everything, it is the beginning of a brand new life in Christ and though God saves you just as you are, he doesn't want to leave you just as you are. He wants to make you like his Son and he wants to produce in your life fruit that brings honor and glory to him, that gives real blessing to others and is a real joy in your own life as well.

And I can assure you when a believer dies and they are about to go home to be with the Lord, that they are not only glad they have a million dollars, they are glad they have their salvation and their riches in Christ. But over and above that do you think they have any regrets that they have walked with, grown in, served the Lord and been fruitful for him?

No, that's a life of no regrets.

And yet I can tell you there are believer who when they die they know they are going to heaven. They are glad they are going. But when they stand before the Lord and they give an account of their at the judgment seat of Christ, the Bible says they will be ashamed, ashamed because they absolutely wasted the years of life that God gave them.

And I am appealing to you tonight on the basis of grace, to not waste your years, to not take that million dollars and put it in a hole somewhere, but instead, allow this relationship we now have with the Lord that is going to last forever, to manifest itself in some very practical ways in your life in the meantime. And I can assure you, it will be worth it all when you see the Lord.

But [?] disciples [?] I am leaving. I am going to heaven. One day you will see me. It is really good. See you later. Hope things go well for you.

Oh, no. He emphasizes to them that in my absence and with the coming of the Holy Spirit and your position in Christ that you are going to have, you would have tremendous potential to be fruitful believers. And, you know, as you look at your life...

In fact, let me just do what I did at our church here a couple of weeks ago. I want you to just take a look at the person next to you for a moment, one way and then look at the person the other way, ok?

I know that some of you like looking at the person next to you. Some of you really don't want to look at the person next to you. But you understand. Now I want you to look. Now, the person you looked at, did you know that some of those people are going to be fruitful believers and their lives are going to count for the Lord and God is going to use them. And then some of them that you looked at, they are going to waste their life. They

are going to blow it big time. In fact, they might have been blowing it for a long time already.

And by the grace of God may this weekend encourage them to not continue to blow it and waste it like the prodigal son who wasted his life in riotous living. You have great potential to bear fruit for the Lord that brings honor and glory to him. Will you be wise or will you be a fool in wasting the opportunities the Lord has given to you.

Now in verse one of chapter 15 we read this. Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser."

Now, we need to understand these three persons. It is vital to understanding the passage. There are three persons that are going to be highlighting the passage. The first, by way of an analogy, is the true vine. And who is that? Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. He is the first person mentioned. He is the primary key to all fruit bearing as it all centers around him. And in the Greek it is very emphatic. "I am the true vine."

And, again, the I am means he is God and as God he is capable of producing fruit in your life. And if the vine is the source of life and fruitfulness for a branch, for the Lord Jesus Christ is the source of life and fruitfulness for a believer.

Secondly, he is the gardener or the vine dresser. Jesus tells us, "I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser." So the gardener or vinedresser is God the Father, God the Father. And as the gardener and directs and oversees a vineyard, so God the Father directs and oversees the process of fruit bearing in the believer's life.

Thirdly, in this passage is the mention of branches. And the branches refer to genuine believers, genuine believers.

You say, "Well, how do you know?"

You look at verse two. "Every branch in me, in me..." Very significant prepositional phrase, "In relationship to me, in union with me." And that would only be said of a believer. These branches are not superficial Christians who look like they are related to the vine, but are not. These are genuine believers who are said to be in Christ. And if Jesus Christ is your vine and God the Father is your gardener, you as a believer have great potential to be a fruitful believer for the Lord.

But what must you remember about the Christian life after you come to faith in Christ? You really need to come to grips with this. The Christian life isn't, first of all, mechanical. And by that I mean just doing the right things, some behavior.

I notice my friends carry a Bible, I should carry a Bible. I notice they go to church. I should go to church. You know, they seem to pray. I should probably pray. Some of them witness. I should probably witness. And if I can just do the right things maybe I will live the Christian life.

You have missed it totally. The Christian life is not mechanical. And while some of those things may be the outflow of a true Christian life, that is not really what a Christian life is all about.

It is not mechanical. Secondly, it is not mystical. If I can have just the right experience and the right feeling, well, I know I will live the Christian life. You know, and I have got a friend who says he speaks in tongues. Maybe I [?] speak in tongues. Well, I just really... I know I am close to God and well, that will be something, you know, And that is not what the Christian life is about either.

After you are saved living the Christian life isn't mechanical. It is not mystical. It is relational. It is a relationship you now have with Jesus Christ and God the Father, like a branch does to a vine and a gardener to a vineyard. It is a living, vital relationship with Jesus Christ provided solely on the basis of God's grace and enjoyed by faith, enjoyed by faith.

But now I want you to think for a moment about branches. What is the purpose of a branch in a vineyard? The whole purpose of the branches in this passage centers around one thing, to bear fruit. These branches are not for decoration, nor are we as believers who are on planet earth to decorate the world, these branches were not for beauty nor are we left on planet earth to beautify the world, nor were these branches left or nor were these branches designed fuel and we are not left on planet earth to let our lives go up in smoke.

Now the result of abiding in Christ is to bear fruit for the glory of God. And as a believer is practically useless... excuse me, if the branch is practically useless if it doesn't bear fruit, the same is true of an unfruitful believer.

In fact, the book of Ecclesiastes teaches us this, that apart from a right vertical relationship with the Lord, man is miserable and life is meaningless and some of you are proof of that because as you walk out of fellowship with the Lord, you know what? Your life is miserable. And that is why you turn to booze and other kinds of things, to desensitize your brain because you are so miserable you have got to find your joy n something else.

And I understand drinking isn't sin if you are of age. Drunkenness is sin. But it is also true they call it the happy hour for a reason. They call it the attitude adjustment hour for a reason. You know, it is like [?] are you feeling sad and blue? Stop at [?] and have a few. That is exactly the thinking of the world right there because when you don't have joy and peace because of enjoying a personal fellowship with the Lord, you have got to get some external fix. But apart from a right vertical relationship with the Lord, man is miserable and life is meaningless. And do you know what I found with some believers? They have a great tolerance for misery.

[?] Now I am going to turn to the Lord, right?

No, they don't.

And then they blow out this and they make this bad decision and now they are going to [?].

No, they don't.

[?] eat oatmeal out of a vase. They are going to turn to the Lord.

No, no. They won't turn to the Lord. They are just miserable and they keep running down dead end streets. Maybe I can... you know, if I only get my [?] together, you know, and only if I can get married only if I can get the right job and only if I can get the....

Aren't you catching on yet? That the flesh is never satisfied.

You just think about it for a minute. Remember when you were 16 and you got your first car? Maybe at 18 or whatever. Maybe 16.

Man, that was great. Yeah, I look at that...

[?] later you wanted a better one, you know. [?] you know, when you were first married, you know, you have a trailer, you know, a mobile home. You know, that is what we lived in at first. And we were happy in that mobile home.

Yeah, but, you know, you have your mobile home. And then later one, you know, you get your duplex and your triplex and your condo and your whatever. You look back at that trailer and say, "I'll never live in a trailer home again, you know."

[?] never satisfied, always want more. And it is not wrong, in a sense to better your status in life, but if that is what you are living for, if that is where you find your joy, if that is your objective in life, you totally missed it as a believer. Do you know why? Because when you got saved you got transferred from being in Adam to being in Christ. You are no longer a citizen of earth, really. You are a citizen of heaven. And [?] Christ seek those things that are above. You have got a potential to enjoy a dimension of life that the unsaved will not [?] about.

And do you know what? It is so obvious at a funeral. What a difference when a believer dies and the response of the believer to the family versus an unbeliever to the family. Unbelievers have pious platitudes and the best they can do is bring over some cookies or something, you know. And I am not saying that is wrong. But that is about the best they can do.

What do believers do? Oh, they share promises. They tell them to pray for them. They can understand and there is a comfort that they can pass on that the unsaved know nothing about, very, very [?].

The whole purpose of a branch is to bear fruit and if you are not abiding in the Lord you won't bear fruit and, therefore, you will be fruitless as a believer and miserable [?] in your life.

You know, I have met some believers that they are just getting older and older. They are so aimless. You know why? Because they are not thinking this way. "For to me to live is Christ, to die is gain."

"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."

So they are just aimless and meandering like a river downstream.

Where are you going?

I don't know.

Why are you...

I don't really know.

You know...

And I am not saying you have to have your life totally [?], but what I am saying is that God, because of your relationship with Christ, you have a direction and a purpose and a meaning and a significance and a potential in life that can only be realized as you learn to abide in Christ.

Now, as we think of this issue of fruit, this passage emphasizes both the volume of fruit and the variety of fruit. Some believers in Christ are described here as those that are minus fruit. Saved, but minus fruit.

Look at verse two with me, the beginning of it. "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit."

First of all, can you be genuinely saved and not bear fruit? The answer is yes. There it is right there, verse two. They are saved, but they are minus fruit. Now I want you to imagine for a moment walking in a vineyard and you see this branch that is lying way down, sucking, as it were, up against the ground. The sun isn't getting to it. The air is not getting to it well and you look at it and you pick it up and you say, "This is a branch, but it is totally [?]."

Now what would you do? What would you do with a branch like this? Well, one of two things. What does it say in verse two?

“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He...” What? He takes it away, right? He takes it away. Now that particular Greek word ἀίρω (ah'-ee-ro) means one of two things and it is translated both ways in the book of John. In one case it means to take away. So what could that mean? This means this, that sometimes God sees a believer's life and says, “You know, you have been so fruitless for so long and you are not going anywhere fast. I am just going to take you home to heaven early.” And God does that sometimes. Ananias and Sapphira, Acts eight, 1 Corinthians 11 tells us God was doing that with some of the Corinthians. God sometimes does.

But I am not suggesting that any time a believer dies at the age of 20 it must have been an act of divine discipline we knew all along, you know, kind of a deal. No. I am not suggesting that, you know.

But it is also true. I was visiting someone in the hospital a few months ago and the person was having some heart issues, heart rhythm issues and I said, “Would you pray for me that the heart rhythm would straighten out?”

And I said to him, “Why should I pray for that so you can get better and just keep doing your own thing?” I said, “You know, if you are honest with yourself, you haven't been walking with the Lord for a long time.”

Then why would God want to answer that prayer and set you on your heart so you could waste more time? Now that isn't exactly the response he was looking for, but it was [?], you know. The fact is it was true.

And [?] I don't do that in every hospital visit. [?] you know.

But in his case he needed [?].

Why would God let you [?] waste more time? Why?

I said to him, “I'll tell you what? I will pray that your heart rhythm gets straightened out and that through this God would get your attention so that you would start walking with him and growing in him and serving him and serving him and letting your life go.”

He says, “Ok.”

So I prayed. I think he got better and I haven't seen him since.

Some believers are minus fruit, causing God... in some cases taking away is the second meaning of that word ἀίρω (ah'-ee-ro). It means to lift up. And I think in this context that is what it means because [?] vine dressing, you saw a branch that wasn't bearing fruit, would you immediately cut it off or would you lift it up first and give it another shot? And, you know, knowing the God that we have and the God of grace he is, that I think it means to lift up.

So if God comes along and he sees, here is this branch, he is unfruitful, though he is mine. I am going to lift him up. I am going to try to encourage him, expose him to the Word of God. I mean, [?] believers [?] and such and encourage him in such a way that he could bear fruit. And, you know, if you are honest with yourself, some of you would have to realize that is what God has been doing to you. He has been trying to lift you up for a while and encourage you. He has been so patient and so gracious and so merciful to you and he keeps [?] grace to you even though you have got one foot in the world and the other foot in the church as it were. Believers that are minus fruit causes God to lift them up or lift up him.

But that is not all, verse two. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away and every branch that bears fruit he what? He prunes that it may bear more fruit.

So we have a believer who is minus fruit. Secondly, we have a believer that bears... I am just going to keep the word [?] here mere fruit.

Kurt is going to go over the parable of the soils, it is like a 30 fold believer. And when you are a gardener you come along and you find this branch and it is bearing some fruit, what are you going to want to do? You are going to prune it. And why do you prune it? Because there are sucker shoots and insects and [?] on that branch that are going to hinder that branch from being as fruitful as they can. And in the same way God knows there are sucker shoots in our lives and there are insects in our lives and there are things in our lives that are distracting us and bothering us and bringing us down and causing greater fruitfulness, causes God to prune that believer. Why? That it may bring forth... here is our third one, more fruit.

In this case it is like the 60 fold as you are going to see [?] more fruit.

Now is the vinedresser finished when you bear more fruit for Jesus Christ? The answer is no. For verse five goes on to read, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears..." and here is our next one. Much fruit, much fruit.

Is much fruit important to God? Verse eight says, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples." This is like the believer who bears 100 fold fruit, much fruit."

We see here a progression of minus fruit, to mere fruit, to more fruit, to much fruit. But since God doesn't simply want you to be fruitful for only a day or a week we need verse 16 as well.

"You did not choose me," to bear fruit, to be a disciple in this context, "But I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should..." Here is another one. Remain.

He is looking for you to have maintained fruit, maintained fruit.

See, the Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. There are days of sunshine and days of rain. And it is easy to begin to slip to regress to get the spiritual yarn. In fact, I have known believers who at your age were walking with the Lord and growing in the Lord and if you need them today they aren't anymore. There has been this regression that has occurred in their life. They were fruitful, but that fruit was not maintained.

Like I was reminded of that in my garden this year. My wife and I put together our first garden this year and we did not do a real good job. And we planted different things and that wasn't the problem. The problem was it was a really hot summer and a great growing season, but the problem is we did not keep the garden wet enough, not wet enough. And, as a result, it just kind of dried up. You know, we ate some zucchini. It was really good. And, you know, after we didn't water it for two weeks we [?] zucchini and you had to take a hatchet to cut it, you know. I never knew that zucchini could get so hard. That was the problem, not enough rain, not enough water going on there.

It looked good. It looked like fruit. But you can't hardly eat it because you see, there is something about fruit that is [?]. It has to get maintained, maintained. And in the same way the Lord not merely wants you to be a believer who is growing much fruit, but he wants that fruit to remain.

Now you might ask, "Well, what do we mean by this fruit?" And this is where the variety of fruit comes in. And we are not going to look at all these passages. I am just going to mention them here before we break. But in the New Testament the word "fruit" refers to at least six things. It refers to Christ like character. And this is the one we are most familiar with. Galatians 5:22 and 23. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, temperance and so forth. Against such there is no law." Contrast with the works of the flesh.

And then Christ certainly has God in mind here in this passage. So I believe he has more than that in mind. It is also used in the Scripture to refer to what I am going to call purposeful praise.

Hebrews 13:15 says, "By Jesus Christ [?] offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually even the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name."

See, as we abide in Christ the fruit of the Spirit can be produced in our life. As the fruit of the Spirit is being produced in our life and we are enjoying the fellowship with the Lord, out of our [?] is to come purposeful praise. And I want to say purposeful because, you know, there is a lot of praise today that is mindless, aimless, repetitive. It is not purposeful praise. It is not scripturally praise. In fact, it is just saying the same things over and over again like someone said to me once, it is the 7-11 song.

I said, "What do you mean?"

Seven words 11 times, you know.

But there is purposeful praise.

Here is a third way the word fruit is used of generous giving, of generous giving.

In Philippians four Paul says, “Not that I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. And he is talking about how the Philippians had generously given to him to support the work of the Lord in his missionary trips. And he called that fruit because they did it as unto the Lord responding to the Word of God to support the work of the Lord, generous giving.

And, you know when you are abiding in Christ and you are enjoying God’s grace, you realize how gracious God has been with you and, therefore, what a privilege you have of generously give to him to support the work of the Lord.

A [?] fruit is used in the New Testament is in referring to effective evangelism. And it is used by our Lord in John chapter four in the context of the woman of the well speaking to his disciples and how they had the privilege of bearing fruit by way of leading others to Jesus Christ. But the key is not programs. It is abiding in Christ. It is abiding in Christ and being equipped to give out the gospel.

A fifth the way the word fruit is used is what we would call Christian conduct. Not merely character, but conduct. Colossians chapter one and verse 10 says this and I will just read it to you [?]. Colossians 1:10 we read, Paul prayed, “That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

And when you are abiding in Christ, when you are filled with the Spirit, when you are walking in the light and all of those terms are used interchangeably in Scripture referring to the same issue, what is produced in your life is divine good by way of Christian conduct and good works that bring honor and glory to the Lord.

The last way the word fruit is used in the New Testament is what I would call meaningful ministry.

In Romans 1:13 Paul says he wanted to visit the saints at Rome that he might have some fruit among them. And by that he is talking about that he would have a meaningful ministry by spending time with them and teaching them the Word of God.

And so when Jesus is talking in this passage about bearing fruit he is talking about these kinds of things that are not externally produced, but internally produced. They are not arrived at through pressure. They are not arrived at through external conformity. They are arrived at through eternal abiding in Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God enabling us to see fruit produced in our life. And after the break we will look at how we can abide in Christ and be fruitful believers.

Let's pray.

Father, thank you for this time in your Word now. And I pray that even in this first session we would take your Word seriously, we would desire to not waste our lives as believers, but instead to be fruitful. May our heart's desire be that I want to walk with the Lord, I want to grow in the Lord, I want to bear fruit for the Lord. I want my life to glorify him who loved me and gave himself.

And we do so with the acknowledgement that we are not sufficient of ourselves. Our sufficiency is of God. But, oh, may that be our heart's desire and passion tonight. And if it is anything less, may we be honest about that and even admit that to you. And thank you that if we confess our sins you are faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

And, Father, should there be anyone here tonight who is not sure that they are saved, may tonight be the night they make that decision to put their trust in Jesus Christ and his work alone to get them to heaven that they might tonight be redeemed out of the slave market of sin, that they might tonight have their sins forgiven, receiving eternal life and knowing that one day when they die they are going to go home to be with you and that all by grace. So we thank you for the God that you are for this passage of Scripture. Give us insight as we study it further tonight in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.