

September 12/13, 2020

Jesus, One Another and the World
These Things are Written that You May Believe Series
John 15:1-27
Pastor Bryan Clark

So I don't know what's going on in your life this morning. I don't know what's heavy on your heart as you walk through the doors. But I do know life can get really, really hard. So let's imagine you're in one of those difficult seasons of life, and Jesus says to you, "*These things I have spoken to you, in order that you might know My joy, and that your joy may be full.*" It would raise an interesting question, wouldn't it? The question would be, "What are the "*these things*" that He has spoken that would allow us to have joy in the midst of the most difficult moments of life?" Well, that's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to John, Chapter 15. If you're new with us, we've been working our way through the Gospel of John. We took a break for the summer; we're back at it, and we'll finish the book somewhere in the early part of November.

To really understand this passage, you have to understand the context or the background. We are now hours away from Jesus' arrest. The disciples are fearful. They are confused, and they are hours away from an event more horrific than they could have possibly imagined. Jesus has been talking to them in the Upper Room. Their great fear is that now that they've become dependent upon Jesus, Jesus is leaving. "Now what do we do?" So He has assured them, "I won't leave you as orphans. I'm not going to leave you and forsake you. I want you to know I'm going to go ahead and prepare a place for you, and we'll get together. I'll come get you; we'll be together forever. But as soon as I go, I'm going to send my Spirit. My Spirit will be with you and will be with you forever. I'm going to be with you every step of the way. You have to trust Me."

According to the end of chapter 14, they have left the Upper Room and they are en route to the garden of Gethsemane. So chapters 15, 16 and 17 happen somewhere en route between the Upper Room and the garden of Gethsemane. That's where we pick it up in chapter 15, verse 1:

"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 it so 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, so 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, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." (*NASB, John 15:1-8)

So as Jesus has often done, He's using a metaphor—an image—in order to teach something. Jesus doesn't say, "I am the vine." What Jesus says is, "**I am the true vine.**" That would tell us that the disciples understood some sort of vine imagery.

The nation of Israel, through the Old Testament, was referred to as the vine. They were the vine, and out of the branches, they were to bear good fruit from God. The problem is that according to the Old Testament, they were a wild vine and consistently produced bad fruit. So this vine imagery was familiar. As a matter of fact, it was an imagery they so embraced that some of their coinage actually had a vine on it because it symbolized Israel. So there are probably a couple of things going on here. En route from the Upper Room down toward the Kidron Valley, to cross to go to the Garden of Gethsemane, all along the valley there would have been vineyards. This would have been after dark, and there would have been fires burning that the farmers would have used to throw their dead sticks and wood into the fire. So it's likely this was a pretty vivid imagery that they could obviously see. But probably even more than that is a lot of scholars guess that they had stalled in their journey somewhere around the outside of the entrance into the temple area. There were several large gates that entered into the temple area, and this would have been pretty much right on course between the Upper Room and the Garden of Gethsemane. Around several of these gates was a vine made of gold. These were massive gates, vines made out of gold, that from them hung golden clumps of grapes. So according to the first century historian, Josephus, he identified that these vines were so massive that the clumps of grapes were actually the size of a man. So that gives you some sense of the scale of these vines around the gates, all of them made of pure gold. So it is likely that Jesus has paused somewhere outside of one of these gates.

I'm going to speculate that chapters 15, 16 and 17 were all in this area, and then chapter 18 tells us they cross the valley and go into the Garden of Gethsemane. So, with the vine as the background, Jesus identifies, "**I am the true vine.** I am the fulfillment of that imagery." Now this was common teaching. When Jesus identified Himself as the fulfillment of these feasts, Jesus said, "I am the water." Jesus said, "I am the bread." Jesus said, "I am the light; I am the temple. I am the Sabbath. I am the good shepherd. I am the gate." So this was a common way of teaching for Jesus. So ultimately the true vine was not Israel; it was Jesus. And all those that believed in Him were branches that were grafted or abiding in the vine.

Now, sadly, this text has been used to teach things that I don't think are correct. I think, because of our own insecurities, we're always wrestling with this thought that if we don't produce, if we don't do well enough, then God's gonna kick us out and throw us in the fire. So we come across a passage like that—and that's where people's minds go—that if you aren't bearing fruit, then He's gonna throw you away and throw you in the fire. Now stop and think about this. First of all, Jesus knows that they're fearful. Jesus knows they're confused and hurting. He's already told them that they're secure in their relationship with Him; He's got this. He's also told them that, "Hey, I'm going to prepare place for you and I'm gonna come back and get you. I'm gonna bring you back and we're gonna be together forever. So He's already done much to assure them that He's going to take really good care of them. Imagine what it would be like to teach a theology in this moment, that, "Men, if you don't produce enough fruit, I'm going to detach you from the vine, and I'm going to throw you in the fire and you're going to burn up." That would be super comforting in a moment like

this, wouldn't it? That theology would be abusive! It's like, "Of course He's not saying that." This is not complicated. Even though we're not familiar with vineyards, at least most of us are not, but if a branch is disconnected from the tree, the branch won't live. The branch has to be connected to the tree in order to bear fruit. So the basic imagery is not complicated. And that's what Jesus is wanting to say. So He's the true vine. The Father is the vinedresser. We would use the word *farmer*.

“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every *branch* that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you.” (Vs. 2-4)

So the idea of **in Me** is not a reference to salvation. When you get to Paul's language in the New Testament, Paul talks a lot about being *in Christ*. But at this point, Jesus hasn't even died on the cross; that theology would make no sense to these disciples. What would make sense is this idea that Israel is the vine, and the Jews then are the branches. And Jesus has dealt with this again and again, where the people think, "Because we're Jews, we're connected to the vine." And Jesus has had to tell them again and again, "It's not enough to be Jewish. What saves you is you have to be attached to the vine. You have to get your life from Jesus. And if you aren't attached to Jesus, you're not going to bear fruit."

When He says, "**He prunes it,**" the word **prune** is the exact same word that's translated *clean*—to prune it is to clean it. This was common language for them. So think back when Jesus was with His disciples in the Upper Room, and Peter thinks they need a bath. Jesus says, "You don't need a bath; you are already *clean*." That's the exact same word; you're already *pruned*. You're already connected to the vine. He said, "...but not all of you," referencing Judas, and it's at that moment then that Judas leaves the Upper Room. So when Jesus says in verse 2 that *every branch that bears fruit He prunes*, He's not saying this is something that will happen in the future. They're already pruned. They're already clean. That's exactly what He says in verse 3, "**You are already clean.**" It's the same word; you're already pruned. He's saying that as a Jew and as they've come to believe in Jesus their Messiah, it's on that base that they're clean and attached to the vine.

What Jesus is saying is in these difficult moments—and the disciples at this point have no idea how difficult it's about to be—that the only way you're going to get through this is you have to remain attached to the vine. It's Jesus that's going to be your life. It's Jesus that's going to be the source that allows you to bear fruit. It's Jesus that's going to get you through the most difficult moment. "You have to trust Me. I'm going to get you through this. Apart from Me, you can do nothing." It's entirely possible to be the most sincere person in the room, to sincerely want to please God, to sincerely want to obey, to sincerely want to do what Jesus wants you to do. But we must understand, if you're not attached to the vine, you can do nothing. It's the life of Jesus in us and through us that gives us what we need. This is not a "try harder" religion. Jesus is not saying, "I'm about to go; try harder, or else." It's not a threatening message. It's a message that says, "I'll give you what you need. I'm going to be there for you. But you have to trust Me, and you have to stay attached to the vine."

One of the challenges when we go through very difficult seasons of life, is Christians have a tendency to pull away from Jesus. We get angry; we get frustrated; we get hurt; we get confused.

We feel let down and betrayed. We feel like somehow Jesus has not been there for us in our hour of need, so we pull away. What Jesus is saying is, “You're not going to make it if you do that. The only way you're going to make it through these most difficult moments of life is you have to remain connected to the vine. I'll be your strength. I'll give you what you need. But you have to trust Me.”

In verse seven, when Jesus says, **“If you abide in Me, and my words abide in you, you can ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you,”** Jesus has already said something very similar to this. This is not Jesus saying, “This is a blank check; live it up.” Their great fear is that Jesus is leaving. They've become used to this idea that as long as Jesus is there, everything's gonna be okay. But now He's told them, “I'm leaving,” and they're getting in panic mode. So what Jesus is saying is, “I'm gonna be there. I'm gonna be with you every step of the way through my Spirit, and if you need anything, just ask. I'll be there just like I have been.” That's the heart of what He's saying to them.” And in verse 8: **“Through this My Father is glorified because by this the disciples demonstrate, (I think is a better translation.) to be the disciples of Jesus.”** Verse 9:

“Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. (How do we do that?) If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.” (Vs. 9-11)

Jesus says to them, “I love you just like the Father has loved Me. And I'm asking you to trust Me and to obey Me, just as I have obeyed the Father.” In these most difficult moments, when there's a tendency to panic, a tendency to be afraid, a tendency to pull away, Jesus is saying, “Hey, man, you've got to remember this. I love you. I love you just as much as the Father loves Me, and I want you to trust Me and obey Me, just as I have trusted and obeyed the Father.” In essence He's saying, “I've modeled this for you. I'm going away, but I'm going to take good care of you. You have to trust Me.”

So when Jesus says the way to abide in His love is to **keep His commandments**, specifically what commandment does He have in mind? Well, He says in verse 12:

“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. This I command you, that you love one another.” (Vs. 12-17)

So Jesus says, **“Abide in my love.”** How do you do that? **“By keeping My commandment.”** What is the commandment? **“That you love one another.”** In the most difficult moments of life, we want to experience the love of Jesus. But how do we do that? It's not some mystical feeling that

we're searching for. It's actually far more practical than that. How do we experience...how do we abide in the love of Jesus? By loving one another!

This is very similar to what we talked about last week. If you're going to dance with Jesus in the light, the only option is we dance with Jesus together. There are no solo dances with Jesus in the light. In the same way, Jesus is saying, "If you're going to abide in My love, you do that by loving one another as I have loved you." He identifies "*There's no greater love than one who will lay down his life for a friend,*" which is what Jesus is about to do. Jesus identifies, "*I'm not calling you my slave; I'm calling you my friend.*" This is quite a remarkable moment! In the Old Testament, there are only two people that were called the friend of God: Abraham, and Moses. What Jesus just said is, "I want you to trust Me. I want you to listen and do as I say. You're going to experience My love by loving one another, I'm asking you to do this because you're My friend." He identifies that a slave doesn't get big explanations. A slave is just told what to do. "Do this...do that...do this." This is the basis of religion. This is what was happening with the Judaizers. They'd just do as they're told.

Several years ago, Patti and I had friends that were of a different religion. On one particular day, this person was practicing something he was taught in his religion, and Patti asked him the question, "Why do you do that?" and his answer was, "I don't really know. I guess it impresses God." This is the stuff of religion. "Just do as you're told." What Jesus is saying is, "That's not what this is. I'm asking you to do this because you're My friends, and friends trust each other." And He's saying, "I've told you what the Father has told Me. I've explained this. I've taught this. I'm asking you to trust Me and, as my friends, to love one another—and that's how you will experience My love."

Again, one of the challenges when we go through difficult moments of life is, not only do we tend to pull away from Jesus because we're angry or we're hurt, but we also tend to isolate ourselves from other people. This is a huge problem for hurting people. We pull away and we isolate and what Jesus is saying is, "You're never going to make it that way. When you go through the most difficult moments of life, Jesus said, "I'm the vine and you've got to attach to Me, because I'm the source of the strength and the life that you need. But to experience that love, you have to love one another. If you're going to get through this, you're going to get through this together." Jesus goes on to say, "These are not pesky groupies that won't leave Jesus alone." Just the opposite. He says, "You didn't choose Me; I chose you. I chose you and I called you and I want you to be My friends. But friends trust one another; friends love one another, and you have to trust Me. And you have to do what I'm asking you to do if you want to experience this life."

It is really interesting in verse 16 that He basically says, "*Abide in Me and love one another, in order that you might bear fruit that will remain.*" One of the things we talk about a lot is living for the things that matter...living for the things that will remain. The word **remain** is the exact same Greek word translated *abide*. So it's a bit of a play on words: "Abide in me; abide together, and the fruit will abide." So Jesus is saying, "If you want to live for what matters, you have to stay connected to the vine. You have to stay connected to one another, and the fruit will abide forever." It's so important! He repeats verse 17—the command that we love one another. Why is this so important? Because what He's asking them to do, is going to be very, very hard. Verse 18:

“If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.” (Vs. 18-19)

Now this isn't exactly what you want to hear when you're already scared and you're already confused and you're already hurting. “Oh, by the way, the world will hate you!” But Jesus is trying to get them to understand that what He's called them to is going to be very difficult. The world hated Jesus; so the world is going to hate the disciples of Jesus. He identifies that the world would love you **if you were of the world; the world loves its own**. Now, a couple of things here. John uses the term **world** three different ways in his gospel. One is like chapter one, **world** as *in the universe*. Or as in chapter three, verse 16, “For God so loved the **world** as the **world of people**. But it's often used as *the operating system of this world* that is opposed to Jesus. That's how it's commonly used in the New Testament. So it's really interesting to stop and think about the **world** that Jesus is referring to here, is not primarily the secular world. Those who would hate and persecute the disciples of Jesus would be the religious Jews. They are behind the crucifixion of Jesus, and they will be behind the persecution and ultimately the death of these disciples. So Jesus is saying, “They hated Me; they're going to hate you. They persecuted Me; they're going to persecute you.”

This whole idea that **the world loves its own** is very interesting. We hear a lot in our culture today about acceptance, about tolerance, about social justice. “Let's just all get along as one big happy family.” But I think we all understand there is a cultural narrative—a script if you will—and as long as you follow the narrative, as long as you read from the script, everything's fine. *The world loves its own*. But if you step out of the narrative, if you don't follow the script, you are bullied, you are put down and you are persecuted. This is not new. This is what Jesus was talking about. “*The world loves its own, but you're not of the world,*” and the world is not going to like that.

Sadly, more and more Christians, more and more preachers, are so desperate to be loved by the world that they choose to compromise the message. I accepted years ago, when I understood what God was calling me to, that the world would not accept me. I don't fit in here. Rather than trying to live life with one foot in both worlds, it's actually very helpful to just come to grips with the fact, “I don't fit here. I'll never fit here, because the message I proclaim is offensive to the world.” Jesus said, “*I'm the light of the world.*” The light shines into the darkness and exposes people's rats and people don't like that. This isn't just a preacher thing; this is a Christian thing. If you're going to be faithful to what God has called you to, you have to come to grips with the fact we don't fit. The message is not welcome in our culture. That's what Jesus is saying. “I've called you out of the world.” Verse 20:

“Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.” (Vs. 20-21)

Again, remembering that the persecutors are going to be the religious Jews. So it's interesting that Jesus again said the reason they don't know Jesus is because they don't know God. Just because

someone is religious doesn't mean someone knows God. If they don't accept Jesus, they don't know God. That's what Jesus just said. Verse 22:

If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin (meaning this sin), but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; (meaning this sin) but now they have both seen and hated Me and My Father as well. But they have done this to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.' "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you will testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning." (Vs. 22-27)

What Jesus just said is, "If God had not become flesh and stood before these religious leaders and explained all this to them, they would not be guilty of rejecting their Messiah." But He did come. He explained this to them multiple times. Jesus said, "If I did not come and do these miracles right in front of them, they would not be guilty of this sin. But I did; I came and I spoke to them. I came and did these miracles—and they reject Me. They reject the Messiah because they do not know God—that this is in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. But there is a reminder that He's sending the Helper, the Holy Spirit, who will continue to teach them, continue to reveal truth to them, and they themselves will testify the truth concerning the person and work of Jesus.

So 2000 years later, is it possible for people to say, "I just didn't know."? But the reality is we have the luxury of living in a country where there is easy access to the truth—on the internet, in the Bible, in churches. Anyone hearing my voice could never say, "I didn't know." John himself says, "*These things are written that you might believe. And by believing you might have life in His name.*" We are called as the people of God to proclaim, to testify of the person and work of Jesus. "This is what Jesus has done for you." Most of the world will reject the message. They don't like it because the light of Jesus exposes people's rats. But there will always be those who will listen and will hear and believe—and their lives will be changed forever.

Jesus is sending them out on a mission that is so difficult, that all except for John will ultimately be executed because they testified of the person and work of Jesus. They will literally die for this cause. So Jesus is saying, "This is going to be really hard. You think this is hard? It's going to get even harder."

So how do we get through it? How do we find joy in the midst of such a difficult journey? Number one: You have to **stay connected to the vine**. Apart, you cannot bear fruit; apart, you can do nothing. You're not going to make it. In the most difficult moments of life, we can't pull away. Rather we need to cling to the vine. Jesus is the only hope we have. He's going to be our life. He's going to be our nourishment. He's going to be our strength. He's what we need.

And we have to do this together—to **love one another**. If we don't do it together, you're not going to make it. We celebrate one another. We love one another. We strengthen one another. And sometimes we carry one another. But it's a commitment that we're going to trust Jesus, and believe as friends of Jesus, we're going to love one another all the way to the finish line—together. That's

the only way we're going to make it through. And Jesus says, “If you do that, even in the most difficult moments of life, *you will experience My joy, that your joy may be made full.*”

Our Father, we're thankful for the truth of Your Word that reminds us that if we're going to make it and thrive in a difficult world, it requires that we're deeply connected to Jesus and deeply connected to one another. Lord, may that be true of us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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Introduction

Welcome to Life Groups Renewed! Over the next 10 weeks, it's our hope to come to know Jesus better as we share, discuss and pray together. As you show up ready to engage with each other through God's Word, we'll provide relatable questions to help you apply key points from this week's sermon in the [gospel of John](#).

Getting to Know Each Other *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

- 1) If this group is a new start, allow each person to share one reason they signed up for a Life Group this session.

- 2) Can you remember your first childhood friend? Share something you recall about what made that friendship special.

- 3) Share a memory you made with friends or family this past summer.

Getting Started

Begin to transition into group discussion.

- 1) Hosts can pray to open the group or ask someone else to lead out. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For openness to what you're learning together
 - c. For friendships to deepen and grow

 - 2) Invite someone (or a couple of people) to read John 15:1-27 to the group.
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- 4) This chapter closes with a timely reminder for us today. Jesus states clearly that the world will hate His followers.
- a. What are some examples of the ways Jesus responded to hatred?

 - b. Whether they are directed toward you or to others, how do you respond to acts of hatred?

 - c. What have you learned about abiding from the passage this week that might help you to respond with the love of Jesus when you come face-to-face with hatred?

Prayer *(Suggested time: 10 min)*

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request. What did the discussion cause you to notice about your own relationship with Jesus?

A significant part of “coming together” is being open and honest with our lives. Sitting in a group of people for prayer may be new or it may be familiar to you. Whether or not you choose to verbalize your prayer, everyone is a participant in sharing this time before God together.