

Remain in Christ

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[0 : 00] The reading today is taken from John chapter 15 verses 1 to 17. I am the true vine and my father is the vine dresser.

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away. And every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.

Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.

For apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers.

[1 : 04] And the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

By this my father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Abide in my love. 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, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing.

[2 : 16] But I have called you friends, for all 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 should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the father in my name, he may give it to you.

These things I command you, so that you will love one another. This is God's word. Thank you. Thanks, Kev.

Thank you. Okay. Good morning, Watermark. Good morning. My name is Dan, if you don't know me. I serve as an elder here at Watermark Church, and today is my first ever sermon.

Thank you. For a long time now, I've been able to evade the clutches of Kevin and Niels, under the pretext of work and other commitments, but I'm actually on a sabbatical at the moment, so that was a harder story to sell this time around.

You may have heard this passage spoken previously at Watermark as well, more than once. Whether you're a Christian or not, this message is for you today.

[3 : 38] It gives us God's very wisdom for a fruitful life, for the good life. It is worth repeating over and over, and so we'll look at it again today. It is such an honor, and it's so humbling as I look out over this community who's had such a big impact in my life over so many years, to be able to bring God's word to us today.

As we prepare to take a deeper look at today's passage, I wonder if you've ever had, or currently have, a mentor, or someone in your life that you really look up to.

It could be a parent, or a mentor, or a friend, someone with whom you've had a deeply personal relationship with, someone you turn to whenever you're in need, whether that be for advice, perspective, comfort, and other things.

Or maybe you are that parent, or mentor, for someone else, that you really care deeply about. Think of that person. Now let's take it a step further, and apologies if this is hard for some people, but I want you to picture yourself with that person, and for whatever reason, you'll never see them in the flesh again.

And the words they share with you, or the words you share with them, will be the last words that are shared face to face. I actually had that experience last year with a mentor of mine.

[5 : 00] These are the kind of words that hold great weight in our life. We want remembered, written down even, held onto in the future ups and downs of life. That's the scene we find ourselves in today's passage.

Jesus, Jesus, the very Son of God, is having supper with His disciples, His students, for the Jewish feast of the Passover. Jesus is their rabbi, their teacher, and the disciples have spent all their time with Him, living, learning, traveling, participating.

Among other things, they have heard Jesus make enormous claims about Himself, being equal to God, and they've seen Him back it up, by doing many miraculous signs, that no one else could do. The disciples had given up, the last years, the last couple of years of their lives, and their livelihoods, in order to do this, to follow Him.

If there was ever a significant person, in anyone's life, it would have been Jesus, to His disciples. Jesus knows, He is not going to be with His disciples, much longer.

He is preparing them, for when He will no longer be with them. And these words, that we're looking at today, are some of the final words, that He will share with them, and in many ways to us.

[6 : 17] What is Jesus actually urging, His disciples to do, in this most important conversation? And why? And how? And how does that relate to us today?

As we dive into the text, let me pray for us in that first. Father, we want, Your name to be glorified today.

We want to encounter You, and Your Son Jesus, in a personal and a powerful way. I pray that Your Holy Spirit, would be at work, through my words, in the hearts of everyone here today, that we would be able to see, the glory of Jesus, the true vine, and what it means to bear fruit, in our lives. Amen. There are two main, interlinked ideas here, that provide the focus, of Jesus' words. Remaining, and bearing fruit.

Jesus wants His disciples, to remain in Him, so that, they will bear fruit. Verse 4 says, Remain in me, as I remain in you, as I also remain in you.

[7 : 22] What does this mean exactly? The original Greek word, for remain, is mena, or mina, I'm not quite sure, how to pronounce it. And the translation, is quite literal, as we might understand it, in English.

Other similar words, could be, abide, await, continue, endure, stay. It is a verb, which means a doing word, which implies, there is an action, or an effort involved.

We are to make effort, to maintain a vital, active, constant connection, with Jesus. It is a picture of love, of trust, of obedience. We need to be connected, with Christ.

This is what it remains, this is what it means, to remain in Jesus. We are not, first and foremost, to make effort, to do the right Christian things, like live honestly, work diligently, give to charity.

Though these are, really good things. We are first and foremost, to make effort, to remain in Jesus. We need to be connected, to Christ. Let me just take a quick, but important detour, before we go any further.

[8 : 31] I've just spoken about, the effort, involved in remaining in Jesus. The first thing, we may be thinking here, in Hong Kong, is great. Another message, with a bunch of things, that I have to do.

I've already got, so much to do. But let's look at verse 3, if you have the, the passage in front of you. Verse 3 says, you are already clean, because of the word, I have spoken to you.

You see what Jesus, is saying here? The disciples, are already clean, because of his words.

Because they have, trusted in him, and in his teaching. For us as Christians, as we'll see later, Jesus is also the word.

And he has made us, who trust in him, clean, through his death, and resurrection. Everything we do, is merely a response, to what Jesus, has already done for us. This is what allows us, to remain in Jesus, to start with.

So today's message, is not a message, of having to do, a bunch of things, having to earn anything, through our own efforts. This is a message, of rest, of respite, of peace, in an otherwise, chaotic

world.

[9 : 40] Remain, in Jesus. Got it? Alright. Thanks for listening, to the sermon. Of course, that's not it. The next question, from here, has to be, why?

Why is remaining, so important? Why is Jesus, urging his disciples, to remain in him? And why do we need, to hear it again today? Maybe, we've been a Christian, for a while, and we have an idea, of what it means, to remain already.

But to be honest, it's just hard, in 2024 Hong Kong, with all it's competing, pressures, and struggles, responsibilities, expectations. You're tired, and you're just not feeling it.

Why do we need, to do it? Well the answer, is fruitfulness, and revealing God, through that fruitfulness. God's chosen method, of revealing himself, to the world, has always been, through his people.

And his desire, for his people, has always, been fruitfulness. Remain in Jesus, so that we bear fruit. You may get sick, of that statement, by the end of the sermon, I'll be repeating that a lot.

[10 : 45] As we'll see later on, this fruitfulness, is a deeply attractive picture, of a life, able to flourish, in the midst of all circumstances. Even 2024 Hong Kong.

Right from the start, in verse 1, Jesus says, I am the true vine, and my father, is the gardener. This particular statement, has a powerful link, back to the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, the picture of the vineyard, was used to symbolize, the nation of Israel. God's chosen covenant people, who were to bear fruit. Isaiah chapter 5, illustrates this, in some detail.

I'll be reading the text, in yellow. My loved one, had a vineyard, on a fertile hillside. He dug it up, cleared it of stones, and planted it, with the choicest vines.

What more, could have been done, for my vineyard, than I have done for it? This is God speaking. When I looked for good grapes, why did it only yield bad? Now I will tell you, what I am going to do, to my vineyard.

[11 : 48] I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed. The vineyard, of the Lord Almighty, is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah, are the vines, he delighted in.

You see, God's intention, was that the Israelites, his vineyard, by their remaining in God, would in turn, bear good fruit. However, as we may know, the Israelites, did not remain in God.

They responded, in unfaithfulness, in abandonment, of God and his commands. And because of this, they yielded bad fruit, and judgment ensued. Jesus, by saying, he is the true vine, is claiming, that unlike the Israelites, he was the only person, who perfectly remained in God.

Therefore, for his disciples, and us, it is only by remaining in Jesus, that we can bear, good fruit. That we can enjoy a life, characterized by fruitfulness.

Now, it should also be noted, that in verse 5, what is also said in verse 5, is quote, apart from me, you can do nothing. Jesus is making, an exclusive statement here, about himself.

[13 : 03] If we desire, a truly fruitful life, the only way, to experience that, is through remaining in Jesus. And guess what?

We will experience, ever increasing fruitfulness. Verse 2 says, God the Father will prune us, so that we bear, even more fruit. And even further, this increasing fruitfulness, is what God uses, to reveal himself to others, and to bring himself glory.

This is what we see, in today's passage. Verse 8 says, this is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves, to be my disciples. What is this fruit, exactly?

Be useful to know that. Well, the passage touches, on two types of fruit. The first type, we see in the first set of verses, in verses 2, 4, 5, and 8.

It is a direct result, of the individual branches, or disciples, remaining in the vine. Jesus here, is not talking only, about specific things, like fruits of the Spirit.

[14 : 11] Although, it would include that. It is more than that. It is the godly, it is the output, of a godly character, in life, over a long period of time. He is not promising, that life will suddenly, become easy.

That we will experience, financial prosperity, or relational peace, or even good health, and the like. But he is promising, a holistic picture, of our lives, that more and more, reflects, a deep life-giving, relationship with Jesus.

In all circumstances, even for us, in 2024 Hong Kong. To give an illustration, of this, I think of a time, in my old CG.

We had, two members in our CG, and they had recently, been made redundant. Their companies, were restructuring, they were let go. Both of these, people were well tenured, in their careers, so they couldn't easily, just bounce, to another job.

Both had significant, financial responsibilities, to their families. The first, the first member, sorry, was very negatively impacted.

[15 : 23] Their attendance, became even more sporadic. Their social media posts, became more desperate. Their awareness, or concern for anything, apart from their own, predicament, and situation, completely disappeared.

The second member, on the other hand, was so different. I still vividly, remember them, sharing in our CG. I can still, hear how the situation, was a real struggle.

But instead of, feelings of despair, and hopelessness, dominating, there was, what I heard, and saw, was someone, who still had, an obvious contentment, and joy, in the midst, of the situation.

The person, was still giving glory, to God. They were growing, in godly character, flourishing even. It was so inspiring, to see God at work. Now while these situations, are never black and white, or apples to apples, and it's ultimately, not for us to judge, who do you think, was more obviously, bearing the good fruit, indicating, remaining in Jesus?

The second member, of course. It doesn't have to be, about huge, amazing, miraculous displays, of fruitfulness. It can just be, trusting in God, when you don't have a job.

[16 : 42] Some of you, may now be asking, what if there is, a lack of fruitfulness, in my life? What if that picture, of the second member, is not really, what I see, at the moment? After all, verse 6, is a strong warning, that fruitfulness, renders us, like, a quote, like a branch, that is thrown away, and withers.

Such branches, are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned. There is a real seriousness, here that we need, to take note of. The context, of the passage, makes it clear, that this warning, is leveled, towards people, who think, they are Christians, but perhaps, never have been.

That might be, a little bit confusing, let me unpack that, a little bit for us. The ultimate example, of that, would have been, the disciple Judas. By all accounts, to onlookers, as one of the 12 disciples, living and learning, from Jesus, Judas may have looked, like a model Christian.

But as we eventually see, he never was. The fruit of his life, ultimately testified to that. For a relatively, meager payout, Judas would betray Jesus, over to the authorities, and to death.

It is possible, that there are people here, or that we know of, that look like Christians. They appear, to be doing the right things, attending church, and other activities.

[18 : 10] But they have, a consistent lack, of any godly fruit, in their lives, over a long period of time. I'm not making, a black and white statement here. It is not for us, to ultimately judge.

God is the judge. But we can't escape the test, and the consequences, are really serious. Are we warning ourselves, and others, when we see this pattern, in our lives, in other people's lives?

Do we really love them that way? To also be clear, this is absolutely, not directed at Christians, who know, and realize, they are going through, dry periods in their faith.

And there is a struggle there. Or those who are, genuinely struggling, or have doubts, in their faith. Jesus loves you. He is urging you, with outstretched arms, to remain in him, the true vine.

He does not pick up, and throw away people like that. That's the first type of fruit. The second type of fruit, is seen later on, in verse 16, which says, you did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, so that you might go, and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

[19 : 21] Jesus says, that he chose, and appointed his disciples, so that they would go, and bear fruit, fruit that would last. Jesus here, is talking about mission, and evangelism.

Specifically, this new fruit, this fruit, is new Christians, who result from, sharing the gospel, with others. After all, this is part of, what the disciples, were to go and do, once Jesus was gone.

If we are also, disciples of Jesus, we cannot escape, this call on our lives, to go and share, the gospel with others. You'll notice, that Jesus is not, promising here, that when we do this, new Christians will result, but we can step, into this calling, and we must step, into this calling, knowing that he, the true vine, is with us, the branches, every step of the way.

You may now be, also be thinking, this is all well, good in theory, Dan, remain in Jesus, bear fruit, but how can we, remain in Jesus? How can we maintain, this vital connection, with it?

What does it look like? How can we apply, this to our lives? There are many, many ways, that we can do this. One of those ways, is the Holy Spirit.

[20 : 38] Jesus talks about that, before and after this passage. And it, and the Holy Spirit, is actually what enables us, to do these things, that I'm going to, talk about it now. But we are going to look, at three main ways, from the passage today.

Remain in word, remain in prayer, remain in love, remain in word. In verse seven, we see that for the disciples, again, part of remaining in Jesus, involves having his words, remain in them.

If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, is what it says. If we know a little bit, about the book of John, we know that, we know that the linkage, between Jesus, and this idea of the word, is very important.

Right at the very start, of the book, we see Jesus, describe himself, described as the word. Chapter one, verse one says, in the beginning, was the word. The word was with God, the word was God. He was with God, in the beginning. That is why, Jesus can say, in verse seven, that remaining in him, must involve, remaining in his words. He is the word.

[21 : 49] They are the same thing. Watermark family, are we remaining in Jesus, maintaining that vital, connection with him, by spending time, in his word? Do we enjoy, reading our bible?

Do we revere it, as the very wisdom of God, for a fruitful life, from God himself? Jesus is urging us today, to remain in his word. Number two, remain in prayer.

Closely linked, to remaining in Jesus, is prayer. We see prayer, mentioned in verses seven, and sixteen. Verse seven, as we've read, if you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you, and it will be done for you.

Verse 16 again, you did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you, so that you might go, and bear fruit, fruit that will last, and so that, whatever you ask in my name, the father will give you. In both verses, Jesus alludes, to us receiving, whatever we ask for. That is an astonishing promise. Is Jesus really saying, that all Christians prayers, will come true?

[22 : 58] That would be great. Well, yes and no. Jesus is not a vending machine, if that's what we're thinking. We input our payment of prayer, back comes the prayer item, that we prayed for.

Jesus is saying, to the disciples, and also to us, that if we remain, in Jesus' words, our prayers, are going to naturally align, with Jesus' desires.

And those prayers, would be more and more linked, to his desire, for the promised fruitfulness, we spoke about earlier. For example, taking the CG example, that I shared earlier.

If we're in a situation, of unemployment right now, we may start to pray more, for godly character, in the midst of the unemployment, rather than only solving, the unemployment situation.

Don't get me wrong, God cares about both things, the material, and the spiritual. But it's so obvious, that he cares about the spiritual more. It is so easy for us, in 2024 Hong Kong, to only focus, on the physical, on the material.

[24 : 05] If we remain in Jesus, through prayer, the promise, is the fruitfulness, of godly character, and an increasing desire, to pray for that more. I'm aware at this point, that this may sound, a little bit like Sunday school.

Read your bible, pray, we know. But to illustrate, from a more everyday perspective, do we remain, in a relationship with someone, for example, our spouse, our children, our family members, our friends, if we ignore them, if we don't listen to them, if we don't hear, what they have to say, if we don't communicate, with them in any way?

Of course not. How can we then, expect to remain in Jesus, if we are not reading our bible? If we are not praying? It just doesn't make sense. Of course, this desire, comes from the heart.

But if we are finding this hard, there are also practical tools, that we can be exploring, to help us in this. The bible reading plan, we put together, the corporate prayer evenings, that we have, and many others.

Come speak to us, if you are finding this hard, and you don't know where to start. It is of utmost importance. Number three, remain in love. Depending on your translation, love, or loved, appears at least nine times, in the second half of this passage.

[25 : 31] Verses nine and ten, if you look with me. As the father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my father's commands, and remain in his love.

Verses twelve and thirteen, my command is this, love each other, as I have loved you. Greater love has no wonderness, to lay down one's life, for one's friends.

Verse seventeen, this is my command, love each other. Jesus demonstrated his love for his father, by obeying his father in all things, even in obedience to becoming human, and suffering a humiliating death, on the cross.

For us to remain in Jesus' love, therefore, is similarly through obedience, to his commands. And what is this command? Love one another.

You see, love is the beginning, and the end. We could spend a full sermon series, on this wonderful thing. But Watermark family, do you see Jesus' love for you?

[26 : 38] In his word, in his life, in the cross, through prayer? Do our lives, as a result, reflect obedience, loving obedience to Jesus? To love, self-sacrificially, in the same way?

If we ask those around us, as a church, and as individuals, who know us, what would they say? Jesus is urging his disciples, and us, to remain in his love, through obedience, to his commands. And what about our efforts, in bearing fruit? How do we do that? We've talked about, how to remain, but not really about, how to bear fruit.

That's because, fruitfulness, is the promised result of, not conditioned for, remaining in Jesus. We don't try, and bear more fruit. We don't try, and become more kind, or humble, or gentle, or loving. In response, to being in Jesus already, we make effort, to remain in Jesus, through word, through prayer, through loving obedience, by the power of the spirit.

[27 : 50] We look, to remain in Jesus. And in so doing, Jesus promises us, that we will, bear fruit. I can share, from personal experience, that this promise, is so true.

Earlier this year, I decided to go on sabbatical, for a few months. I'm in the middle, of that now. If there is one, area of my life, that I've always found, it hard to remain in Jesus, is my work.

In my previous job, over time, I had gotten to a point, where it was the number one, priority in my life, not too long ago. It wasn't purely, that I was working long hours, though I was.

It was that work, was meeting me, deep-seated desires, like value, control, security, identity, to the point, where in many ways, it had taken over, Jesus, as the true vine, in my life.

But instead of being, life-giving, and bearing good fruit, it was life-taking, and the fruit was so bad. My relationships with God, with my wife, with my kids, family, friends, the church community, were all suffering.

[29 : 05] Emotional, and physical health too. And this is with the title, of elder at church. I'm supposed to have it, all together, right? Wrong. I always had, a justifying reason, why I had to work harder, longer, more.

And it was God, not me, who broke through, in a couple of, powerful events, earlier this year, to shake me out of it. I won't go into, the exact detail. But part of it, was God's word.

It was a scripture, that really convicted me. It catalyzed me, to take this decision, to take a sabbatical. I'm also aware, of how lucky I am, to be able to do this.

I'm not saying, the sabbaticals, are the way we should all go, if work is getting overwhelming. But I can say, hand on heart, making the decision, to remain in Jesus, this way, has truly been fruitful, and life giving.

I can see the start, of new fruit, being born in my own life, that has never been there before. In my character, my relationship, and understanding of Jesus, and other close relationships, especially my wife.

[30 : 15] Jesus, is faithful, to his promise, of fruitfulness. Let's come into lands. The big idea today, has been to remain in Jesus, so that we bear fruit.

Remain in Jesus, the true vine, so that you would be, the fruitful branch, that is further pruned, to give more fruit, bringing God, the Father glory. Don't we want this?

Don't we want this, truly fruitful life? Don't we want the good life? The idea, is so important, that Jesus, in this pivotal moment, of history, in the history of the world, sought to highlight it.

The disciples, were the men, who were to continue, and establish his church, after he left. In the face of stiff, and often times deadly, opposition, they would not, have been able, to carry on this mission, without remaining in Jesus.

And the same goes for us, as Christians today. We are so prone, in the performance oriented, culture of Hong Kong, to think that we need, to remain in other things, for life, and for fruitfulness.

[31 : 25] Work, education, family, finances. The Bible doesn't say, don't be good at these things. The Bible says, that if we trust in those things, above all, in the context of eternity, those are worthless.

Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. Whether you've been a Christian, recently, or for your whole life, remain in him, so that you will bear fruit.

In Jesus. If you are not a Christian today, I wonder if anything has resonated. If anything has spoken to you. Whether it be, the exclusive claim of Jesus, as the one and only true vine.

Whether it be, his promise of fruitfulness, if you remain in him. Or judgment, if you don't. Or something else. If that is you, Jesus is extending, an invitation to you today.

No matter how far off you feel. To trust in his claims. Connect yourself, to the true vine. And experience this life, of eternal fruitfulness. Come and speak to me, or anyone else, you know who is a Christian.

[32 : 34] Don't let another day pass, without doing so. And let me pray for us all in this. Father, thank you, so much for your son Jesus.

For this true vine, that gives us, rest, and respite, in the chaos of 2024 Hong Kong, or wherever we may be. This true vine, that gives us life, that allows us to bear fruit, in the midst of life's ups and downs.

By the power of your Holy Spirit, would you, convict us, to read our Bible more, to pray more, to desire the things, that you desire more. Help that promise, of a truly fruitful life, sink deep in our hearts.

That we would hold on to it. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.