

Abiding in Christ

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[0 : 0 0] The scripture reading today comes from the book of John chapter 15. Please follow along in your bulletin, on the screen, or in your own Bible. Starting in verse 1, we read, I am the true vine, and my father is a 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. And the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.

[1 : 1 7] 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 the word of God. Thanks, Ken.

Well, a very good morning to you all at Watermark. It really is a delight to be back. And a warm thank you to the leadership and elders for tolerating me in the pulpits a second time.

That's much appreciated. In John 15, and the verses that have been read to us this morning, there is a wealth of material that we could mine for weeks and weeks.

[2 : 4 9] But I really want to just focus on a couple of points, and I've tried to summarize it as I was engaging with the elders. They asked me, come and summarize it in seven to ten words, which is a wonderful discipline.

And really to say, you cannot live, nor be fruitful, without Christ. You cannot live, and you cannot be fruitful, unless we are in Christ, and not just positionally, but abiding in him, as Jesus has taught us, and instructed us.

In the chapters of 13 to 15, Jesus has again emphasized the great purpose of life, and the great way to live that purpose out.

In John 14, you would have covered it in, I am the way, the truth, and the life. The way to live life is by living the way Jesus has lived it, by the truth that Jesus represents, and to embody the life that he exhibited.

In John 13, earlier, he had told us the way to live, how to live life, was by simply giving us a new commandment, to love one another.

[4 : 18] So the great two themes of life, what's the direction, what's the purpose, what's the meaning, is to live like Jesus lived. And the way we do that, the way it gets worked out, is the way we demonstrate, in the ordinariness of life, loving, and preferring, and being patient, and kind, and gentle, and long-suffering, and hoping all things, and believing all things, of one another, for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

But in John 15, what Jesus is doing, he's now taking this macro perspective, and he's reducing it, in a sense, to the micro, how does this apply, at the personal level?

How does this apply, to you and me? And he's made the great statement, I am the true vine. There's a reference there, to Israel, had been, had been, is described metaphorically, frequently in the Old Testament, as God's vine, as God's vineyard, as what God had planted, as a, to be a representation, of a people group, then more specifically, a tribe, and then more specifically, a family, and then more specifically, a person, in the form of Aaron, of a group that was, committed to following him, and serving him, and obeying him, that this people group, would represent, an alternative, to the way, men and women lived, Tom Holland, in his book, Dominion, explains this, remarkably well, how the gospel, first century, burst in on the culture, as something, completely, counter cultural, the very fact, that the Jews, kept a day separate, holy to the Lord, was already, completely, adversarial, or different, from the, prevailing cultures, the fact, that they were to, treat their servants, properly, the way they looked, after their animals, was completely, separate, from the way, the world lived, and now Jesus, is saying, we know that the vine,

Israel failed, in representing God, Isaiah 5, speaks about, how God has tenderly, set the vineyard, and how, he nurtured it, and cared for it, and looked after it, but it yielded, no fruit, and Jesus, is saying, that I am, the true vine, the focus, and the meeting place, of God, is now, no longer, in a system, it's no longer, in a process, it's no longer, in a set of rules, it's no longer, in a creed, but it is, the meeting place, for man, with God, is found, in a person, and his name, is Jesus, and I am, that true vine, and then he, wants to, tease out, what that really means, being the true vine, and trusting in him, and relying upon him, he is saying, that he supersedes, everything that has gone before, and we are called, to abide in him, and when Jesus, is calling us, when Jesus, is describing himself, as the vine, he's not just, saying that the meeting place, with God has changed, which it has, from a process, from a system, to a person, but he's also saying, the way that we meet, with God, and he meets with us, is through, not so much, self effort, but, this word, to abide, to rest, to trust, and in a city, like Hong Kong, this is, very counter-cultural, and very, counter-intuitive, in a city, which represents, so much achievement,

I was talking, to a colleague, who was traveling, with me last week, a young man, from South Africa, his first business trip, to this part of the world, and I said, I think in a, square kilometer, of Hong Kong, we've got more, high-rise buildings, than in the, probably, nearly the whole of Africa, certainly, certainly South Africa, it's just, speaks of accomplishment, and effort, and achievement, which is wonderful, but the problem, is we tend, to bring, that kind of culture, into our relationship, with Jesus, into our engagement, with God, and Jesus, is giving us, a teaching here, which does not, easily rest, with our, restless souls, so anxious, to be busy, and achieving, in a culture, full of KPIs, and KPAs, and measuring, how good we are, about what we've, accomplished, Jesus comes, with a teaching, which is completely, different, and he is saying, that the vital union, the complete, dependence, and engagement, and relationship, is found, in abiding, resting, and the effectiveness, of Christian living, paradoxically, is resting, in the vine, not being, the vine, is allowing, yourself, to become, the branch, and living, fruitfully, beyond, anything, that you could, have imagined, by resting, and abiding, and trusting, in him, you see, all religion, offers, a subtle, sometimes, not so subtle, form of, self-redemption,

[10:17] I can, save myself, through repentance, through good works, through effort, through denying, through sacrificial giving, none of which are wrong, but they become wrong, when we start, to rely upon that, as the method, and the, and the basis, for our confidence, and engagement, with God, and especially, with Jesus, and the revelation, of himself, and we are inclined, to take, into our own, Christian living, this concept, of pleasing God, and working, and trying, to satisfy him, and Jesus, is teaching us, Jesus, is teaching, undercuts, everything, simply, by saying, apart from me, please listen, church, carefully, apart from me, you can do nothing, and in a city, which has accomplished, so much, we say, but this is nonsense, how can this be, and really, because what Jesus, is speaking of, is a kingdom, that's not just, shaped by what we see, and feel, and can measure, but he is speaking, in terms of a kingdom, from which he's come, which is eternal, everlasting, and ever expanding, and in a sense, it's like trying, to make a comparison, if you can see it, between this, tiny pea pod, between my finger, and thumb, and we are, scrambling to build, we're scrambling, for a piece of the action, we're scrambling, to make a statement, in this small item, when what the kingdom, of God is, is the whole hallway, into which he has, invited us to move, and to live, and to have our being, into something, much grander, than what, we might be able, to touch, and feel, into that which is, not necessarily, that which is invisible, that which might be inaudible, that which we might not, be able to touch, and feel, but which we are, able to experience, through his, profound, immeasurable greatness, the greatness, of his power, which works, within us, and in a fast pace, losing out culture, and in a, restless generation, this concept, of resting, is so confusing, now, let me say, in this abiding, and resting, we must not, confuse this, with an attitude, of, c'est la vie, okay, that's life, he's not saying that, it's not, the buzzword, that was popular, a few years ago, let go, and let God, it's not, a fatalistic, kind of, well,

God's in charge, which he is, what Jesus, is saying, is that, abiding in him, means that we make, a faith based decision, decisions, consistently, that affect, the way we think, when we are, when our thought life, wants to take us, in a position, in a direction, of, which is completely, or marginally, contrary to scripture, and our hearts, are maybe, fearful, or raging, in anger, or anxious, and our volition, the choice, between, what our hearts, and our minds, are suggesting, and what we know, to be true, is, is, is being bent, towards what's wrong, we are, choosing to abide, in Jesus, as divine, and trusting, the power, and the person, of the Holy Spirit, to infuse, into our beings, the character, the life, the person, the way, the truth, of Jesus, so that, in these mortal, jars of clay, there might be, an expression, of another world, of another kingdom, which comes, from his birthing, his fruit, within us, and so, to the, to the one, who is restless, to the one, who is anxious, to the one, who is stressed, to the one, who is fearful,

Jesus, instructs us, not to be careless, not to, just, let go, and don't worry, he calls us, to make a decision, to say, I'm going to, prioritize, the person, of Jesus, who he is, what he's taught, what he teaches, what he practiced, and I'm going to, base, my decision, and response, to all of life's, challenges, on, who he is, and trust, for him, to work his grace, and his power, and his authority, in these situations, in, and through, me, by trusting, and abiding, in him, we draw, all that we have, for life, and godliness, through Jesus, and through the ministry, and the person, of the Holy Spirit, you see, what Jesus, is saying, is that our focus, needs to move, from being, the achiever, being the one, who accomplishes, to being an instrument, through which, his achievement, and his accomplishment, flows, and I think, intuitively, we know, which is the more, gratifying, the more satisfying, and the more enduring, you see, the grandeur, of your city, as wonderful, and as beautiful, as it is, in a hundred years, time or less, someone's going to be saying, how do we, replace these buildings, with something else,

I retired, from my first job, nearly 20 years ago, and it was, a salutary lesson, because my successor, had no interest, in perpetuating, my legacy, the first thing, he wanted to do, was to remove, any sign, of Steve Murphy, and replace it, with his own name, and his own edifice, I get that, and I very quickly, learned, that what I built, and what I treasured, had very little, lasting impact, for succeeding generations, unless it was, making money, but what did endure, and what did last, far more than, I ever dreamt, or imagined, was the love, and affection, and support, that had been shown, and sown, into people's lives, the opportunity, that the, oppressed, or depressed, or the one, who had been sidelined, had been given, and life had been changed, for them, and they moved on, those folk, kept coming back, with a word of thanks, you see, when we build, for the invisible, when we build, for more than, just this kingdom, we do build eternally, a pastor of old, said to us, frequently reminded us, he said, what you build, into people's hearts, and what you build, into their lives, lasts forever, the infrastructures, that we build, are simply put up, for another generation, to take down, and so, what we're called, to do, is to rest, in our intimate, and permanent, oneness with God, and the amazing design, the genius, of the father, is that this is, for our good, because this enlarges us, as we'll see in a moment, and simultaneously, it brings glory, to the father,

Jesus said, abide in my love, and in my words, and in my commands, abide, abide, and the call, to abide, in Jesus, is frequently, drowned out, by the call, of an alternative, easier option, the siren scream, of the now, of the instant, of the immediate, or the voices, of self-protection, and what will happen, to me if, and what Jesus, is saying, is will you just, trust me, and abide in me, but where, are those voices, the siren scream, and self-preservation, they ultimately, leave us, washed up, as flotsam, on the beaches, on neglected beaches, but if we abide, in him, he works, his life, in and through us, so that we bear, much fruit, Paul understood this, he said to the Galatians, he said, the life I now live, in the flesh,

[19 : 37] I no longer live, the life I live, in the flesh, I live by the, power of the cross, I have been crucified, it is no longer, I that live, but that Christ, that lives in me, what was he saying, essentially this, that I'm not living, this life, any longer, in the strength, of what I can muster up, but I'm depending, upon the person, and the life, of the Lord Jesus, to produce, to produce his life, in this vessel, that's a far more exciting, and enlarging life, to live, than the life, of the flesh, will ever offer, you see, because we are united, by faith, we share in his death, and resurrection, I know you know this, all that was ours, our sin, our death, our pain, our self-deception, our heartache, our shame, condemnation, our guilt, has been swallowed up, in the death of Christ, and all that was his, his life, his righteousness, his peace, his goodness, his grace, communion with the Father, is provided to us, and is ours, subject to us, abiding, you know, there is a truth, to those who said, you know,

I tried Christianity, and it didn't work, I used to be offended, by that, but as I reflected, on this, I thought there is a truth, to that, because Christianity, isn't something, that we try, it's a relationship, into which we enter, and which we nurture, and the real challenge, and the real question, is how intimately, are we involved, in the person of Jesus, how closely, and how frequently, and how intimately, can we talk with him, can we share with him, do we do that, as Kevin shared earlier, about the importance, of daily devotions, if you look at the, at the, at the story, of all men and women, in ministry, who have failed, the common cause, the common cause, over 80, 90 percent, ask them about, their daily devotions, and the mouth closes, the eyes droop, and there's an awkwardness, in the conversation, and what, God is calling us to, invites us to, beckons us to, just abide, just enjoy me, and commit, yourself, and your decision making, to what,

I, have, to share, the tragedy, is this, when we're not satisfied, with Jesus, and we don't embrace him, our restless souls, will look, for something else, a man, by the name of, Flavio, describes this, he was a 17th century, preacher, and he put it this way, the believer, is in spiritual danger, if he allows himself, to go for any length, of time, without tasting, the love of Christ, and savoring, the felt comforts, of the Savior's presence, when Christ, ceases to fill, the heart, with satisfaction, our souls, go looking, in silent search, of other lovers, and it's not, because Jesus, can't fill the hearts, it's that we're not, putting ourselves, in the position, to allow him, to do so, you see, he says that, because the soul, is constituted, in such a way, that it craves, fulfillment, from things, outside of itself, and will embrace, earthly joys, for satisfaction, when it cannot, reach, the spiritual ones, for which, it was designed, and it gets worse, it's not just, it's not just, that our lives, get filled, with the wrong, decision making, and we become, absorbed with the wrong, idols, but we become, progressively, more and more, isolated, from those, who are able, to point us, to Christ, we become, we become, stragglers, it's not comfortable, to be with, with those, who are already, enjoying relationship, with the one, with whom we, know we should be, working closely, and walking with, and so the purpose, of abiding, resting, trusting, is that we be, fruitful, that's what Jesus, was saying, he said apart from me, you can bear, you can do nothing, you can bear, no fruit, and fruitfulness, is the injunction, right at the beginning, of Genesis, be fruitful, and multiply, and the injunction, to Noah, after the flood, was to be fruitful, to be fruitful, and the character, of God, is that he is fruitful, the nature, of our father, the son, and the holy spirit, are they, are fruit creators, they are creationists, they are multipliers, they build, they create, look at this, the wonder, of the stars at night, if you can in Hong Kong, somewhere you can,

I think, okay, and just pause, and reflect, on the hugeness, of who he is, the design, and the wonder, of the body, and he's calling us, to be fruit bearers, for him, because when we bear, the fruit, that he's calling us, to do, we are making, a statement, in a world, which is wracked, by sin, in a world, which has gone wrong, in a kingdom, which is dominated, by the God, of this world, we are saying, there is an alternative, way of living, there is an alternative, kingdom, a stronger kingdom, a better kingdom, when we are, fruit bearers, of Jesus, now of course, being fruitful, in the Old Testament, was very much aligned, was represented, not exclusively, but was representative, of lands, and cattle, and expansion, of families, but in Galatians, Paul writing there, makes it very clear, what the fruit, of the spirit is, love, joy, peace, kindness, and when, we allow, when we are, abiding in Jesus, when everything, in us, wants to become, defensive, when everything, in us, wants to attack, when everything, in us, wants to be, self opinionated, when everything, in us, wants to preserve, self, and we are, willing to abide, and follow him, we are making, a statement, in the kingdom, of this world, the darkness, of this world, we are lighting, a light, every time, to say, there is, another kingdom, there is, another way, of living, and this is, enduring, forever, and forever, how was it, that the culture, of Rome, was broken, within three centuries, and the gospel, which had been, planted, in probably, every little, every small town, across, the Roman Empire, within 50 to 60 years, of Jesus' death, read death, and resurrection, how did that happen, because, ordinary men, and women, were living, the gospel life, of caring, for the poor, of the children, who had been, abandoned to die, taking them, and then caring for them, the old, and the infirm, of loving their enemies, and praying for those, that despitefully use them, and treating women, with respect, and treating them, with dignity, it changed, the culture, it lit a light, to say, there is another way, of living, and so, the New Testament, focus, has moved, fruitfulness, from the external, symbols, of achievement, and accomplishment, to that, which is written, on our hearts, by the new covenant, the internal, and we must be careful, when we're thinking, about fruitfulness, and accomplishment, that we're not just, thinking, in terms of abundance, and materialism,

Jesus taught, that it was this aspect, of fruitfulness, that brought glory, to his father, and what glorifies, the father, in a world, bearing the fruit, of sin, and worshipping, something other, than God, is a, of God, sensuality, idolatry, enmity, strife, bitterness, and resentment, are his people, who are pointing, in another direction, and to another kingdom, in the enemy camp, God lights, through a thousand people, who love his son, and serve him, a light, that says, this is not, what it's all about, there is, another way, of living, and so, once we've received Jesus, as our savior, the Holy Spirit, lives within us, and as we abide, in Christ, the Holy Spirit, teaches us, and leads us, and guides us, and the Holy Spirit, transforms us, it's the presence, and I just want, to spend a moment, or two, just talking about, the transforming power, of what God does, in and through us, now, and so, the evidence, and the accomplishment, in the kingdom, is not so much, what we think, can measure, and see, but how we allow him, to accomplish, in our, in our, accomplish, sorry, how we allow him, to accomplish, and represent himself, in, and through us,

[29 : 28] Psalm 1, made this very clear, blessed, is the man, that sitteth not, in the counsel, of the scornful, nor standeth, in the way of sinners, nor delights, in, delights in the counsel, of the ungodly, but his delight, is in the law, of the Lord, and in his law, he meditates, day and night, he shall be, like a tree, planted by, rivers of water, and, and his leaf, it goes on to describe, and his leaf, shall not wither, the gospel, fruitfulness, is transformational, it's not just, about being more effective, it's not about, being better, it's not about, Jesus is not, in the business, of panel beating, broken bodies, into newer ones, the more attractive ones, he's in the business, of transforming, and making, that which is old, completely, and refreshingly, new altogether, just, think of, two or three, extracts, from the scriptures,

Paul writing, to the Corinthians, said, do not be deceived, neither the sexually, immoral, the adulterers, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers, will inherit, the kingdom of God, and then he adds, those amazing words, and such were, some of you, transformed, his letter, to the Ephesians, listen to the, transformational power, of the gospel, let the thief, no longer steal, well that's good, that's great, but not more, but he goes further, than that, but rather, let him labor, doing honest work, absolutely wonderful, going from being a thief, and stealing, and taking which is not yours, to doing a day's, a decent day's work, so, why, goes even further, so that he may have, something to share, with anyone in need, the gospel takes us, from being those, that steal from others, to those that, are changed, and transformed, the fruit of the work, of the spirit in us, is not just, to satisfy ourselves, but to be a blessing, to others, and that's, the nature, of fruitfulness, you see, fruitfulness, carries within itself, the seed, of its own continuity, of its own, as the new buzzword, in business, the new, of its own sustainability, because the seed, is the life, for the next generation, and as we, as a community, exhibit, and reflect, the fruit, of what Jesus, wants to bear, through us, in this world, we are, in a sense, carrying that seed, to our neighbors, to our communities, to the children, to the grandchildren, and to succeeding, generations, it's a work, completely dependent, utterly, relying upon, engagement, and relationship, with Jesus, and allowing the Holy Spirit, to direct, and to lead us, so the question is, what issue, what challenge, what anxiety, what uncertainty, are we, battling with, this morning, what is the prevailing, video, in the mind, what's the heart, what's the emotion, that grips the heart, and what, what, the scriptures, are encouraging us, to do, is to, make a faith-based, decision, to set those aside, those anxieties, and to say,

Lord Jesus, I don't know how, this is going to be solved, I don't know how, this is going to be, worked out, I don't know, how this is going to be, satisfactorily, fixed, but I am choosing, to abide in you, to trust in you, and when my mind, starts to run away, and take me down the wrong, I'm going to come back, to saying, Lord Jesus, I'm trusting you, when my heart, becomes anxious, I'm going to say, Lord Jesus, my heart is anxious, but I give it to you, and ask you to, speak your peace, into me, the truth of the matter, is Jesus said to us, that we cannot live, nor be fruitful, apart from him, outside of me, nothing you do, has lasting value, but as we commit, and as we abide in him, suddenly we're no longer, living as it were, for peanuts, but we're living, for a kingdom, that is everlasting, we're living for, something much bigger, than we ever imagined, and we are achieving, not in terms of, our own capacity, and our own CVs, but we are achieving, according to the grace, and the goodness, and the empowering person, of the Holy Spirit, each of us, must make that choice, for ourselves, let's pray, can I just ask you to pray,

Father, it is with an amazing, and a wonderful, and profound sense, of thanks, that we, come before you, to thank you, for your son, the Lord Jesus, and all that, and all that, he bought, on our behalf, what he took from us, our shame, our guilt, our complete inadequacy, our complete, hopelessness, and what you have, introduced us to, through, been grafting us, into the vine, that, as we draw on you, for sustenance, for strength, for insight, for wisdom, through the ministry, of the Holy Spirit, Lord, life suddenly, finds its right hue, finds its right perspective, finds its, right direction, and Lord, we come, and we cry to you, we do want to live, lives that are fruitful, we do want to live lives, that are effective, for the kingdom of God, we do want to be consumed, with being used by you, for your purposes, and for you to achieve, what you want, rather than to pursue, the peanut agendas, of our own lives, open our eyes, to the wonder, of who you are, and draw us, daily, weekly, monthly, until our closing days, into intimacy, and closeness, with you, for Jesus sake, and all his people said, amen, and amen, thank you,

God bless you, and amen, to Jesus, amen, to the peace, and correct, to the joy, hand Prim Room, and to pray, and bring was nada, of what you want, in God, and the something, and this, another thing,