

Abide in Christ

Luke 7:18-35

March 10, 2019

John 15, John 15 is where we'll go. We've been learning so many rich truths from Christ in Luke 9 and from Paul in 1 Corinthians 3, which is what Josh taught last week. And I know, like you, we are so eager and filled with joy to obey the teaching of God's Word. That is a good, godly instinct. That is something, an affection that is known by every true Christian, a desire to obey, and to obey consistently and in greater measure. It's the unbelieving heart, the unbelieving heart that shrinks back from obedience. It's the unbelieving heart that finds distraction from the truth. It's the unbelieving heart that prefers pleasing self to pleasing Christ. The believing heart, though, seeks to obey, seeks to grow, seeks to excel still more. The believing heart tries to discern what pleases the Lord, and that's why Paul prayed for the Colossian believers in Colossians chapter 1, that God would "fill them with the knowledge of his will so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him." The believing heart is not satisfied with yesterday's manna. It seeks fresh food from God. The believing heart seeks daily and often to drink from the fountain of living waters, for strength to pursue God every single day, to

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worship him and offer up the life as a living sacrifice. The believing heart has a, has a hatred for mediocrity. The believing heart despises complacency and stagnation, most of all to find it in oneself, the believing heart hates that. But the believing heart loves to excel in glorifying God through daily service to Christ. It's like that famous book title theme of Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*. The true believer can think of no better way to invest this short life on earth, time, energy, treasure, resources, no better way to invest in service of Christ to the glory of God.

Like so many of you, I'd imagine, I've been examining myself over the past few weeks, months, longing for greater consistency in my life in obedience, greater faithfulness, higher excellence of service for Christ, deeper, more devoted worship of Christ. I, like you, have been longing for less of me and for more of God, for a closer identity with Christ. I'm eager to wean my soul from worldly distractions in order that I, too, may be full of Christ and filled with all the fullness of God. And the question in those desires, with the presences of those desires, the question that so often comes up, we all want those worshipful and obedient attitudes, but sometimes, if we're honest, we feel so powerless and inconsistent in our practical obedience.

We aspire to higher things, don't we? We sometimes can feel so short of practical doing. There are some who feel so defeated in the pursuit of excellence in Christ, that it causes them to shrink back. It causes them to feel some sense of shame even among the saints; where what are if we're not redeemed saints, sinners who are growing, redeemed by God and trying to pursue obedience. But our theology tells us not to expect that in and of ourselves we are anything. But theology tells us that in and of ourselves we are nothing. And yet some people feel ashamed when they come into the company of other believers and saints, as if, as if everybody else has got it right; they're the only ones lagging behind.

Perhaps they can even become discouraged, despondent, despairing. And if that's you, beloved, or if that's you even from time to time, or if that's you more often than you'd like to admit, I'd like to give you some very good news this morning. I can tell you with great joy, with full confidence, that it is not how God would have you live the Christian life, in despair, despondency.

That is not the abundant life that Christ died to give to you. In fact, I can tell you that Christ is now seated at the right hand of God and praying for you. He is serving you as your advocate. He is at work even at this moment by the Holy Spirit, whom he has sent, in the preaching of the Word, to sanctify you completely, through and

through. Ephesians 5:25-27 tells us that Christ died to save you. He lives now to sanctify you, and he has every intention to present you to himself along with all the saints of his blood bought church, and he will present you to himself in splendor. In splendor, without spot, without wrinkle, without any such thing, but a holy people, a pure people, beautiful, without any blemish whatsoever.

That is not a description of mediocrity, folks. That is not so-so salvation. That's not a description of half-hearted, uncommitted, inactive Christianity. The Christ who died for us, he was all in. He gave his life for the flock, and he creates and conforms people to his image, first by dying to save them, and then living to sanctify them and he will make them like himself. This is glory. This is a description, Ephesians 5, is a description of excellence. That is a description of the very image of the holy God in man, in you, and in me, all of us in Christ and that is the secret, right there "in Christ." That's how we are made partakers of the divine nature. The divine life that flowed in and through Christ is to flow in and through you as well, to bring glory to God through a godly and fruitful life. And I want to show you that this morning; how the power of that life, how it comes from him and then flows in and through you.

So if you're in John 15 , let's look at this one simple command from Jesus Christ. John 15 verse 1, he says, "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 the word "because of the word that I have spoken to you." Here it is. "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. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this is my father 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."

That one simple word from Christ, that word commands all our joy, it produces all our fruit, it creates all of our gratitude, and it evokes all of our worship. That's the command, verse 4, "Abide in me." Twice in verse 4 and then repeated throughout. "Whoever abides in me" verse 5. "If anyone does not abide in me" verse 6, again in Verse 7,

"If you abide in me." That is the theme. What's going on in this passage? Well, certainly he is distinguishing true believers from false professors of faith, people who, like Judas Iscariot, only appear to be in Christ.

Remember Judas Iscariot was in the Upper Room with them. Jesus washed his feet. They're eating. Jesus hands him the morsel. "What you do, do quickly." He leaves, goes to betray Christ. Jesus is now left with his people, with his sheep. He appeared to be in Christ, but he was not. Those who truly abide in Christ bear spiritual fruit because they obey Christ in the long run. In fact, they are, here as it says, pruned, cut, sharpened, shaped in order that they may bear more fruit, which as we see in verse 11 leads to much joy. But those who bear no fruit because they do not obey Jesus Christ, God cuts them off, just like Judas Iscariot, who was a false professor.

But listen, Jesus is not in this passage merely trying to help his disciples grow in discernment, even though he is doing that. He's not teaching them discernment just for the sake of being good at discernment. He's teaching them discernment to encourage them, so that they can see that they themselves, even though many of them will go through weak moments, like Peter denying Christ, failing, three times denying that he even knew him; going through weak moments, going through times of failure, going through times of persecution.

Jesus is teaching them to discern between the true and the false in order that they might be encouraged so that they can see that they are not like Judas, that they are not cut off. Even though they fail at times, true believers bear the fruit of repentance. They grow in obedience over time, and therefore they bear fruit that glorifies God and brings joy. And that's really what I want you to see this morning. That's really what I want to see Christ do in all of us, and do in our church. There is such joy that comes from fruitfulness in Christ, that comes from abiding in Christ, in his Word, in his love, all of this through cheerful obedience to his commandments.

So let me ask a first question. You can write this, I think you don't have a outline this week, in your notes. Let's ask a question. You can organize your thoughts under this. What does it mean to abide in Christ? What is the meaning? What does it mean to abide in Christ? "Abide in me and I in you" verse 4. Clear words, again. But what do they mean? What does that mean, abide in me? It sounds, seems like a strange thing for one person to say to another. How many times do you walk up to some friend and say, hey, abide in me, and I in you.

Obviously, it's some kind of metaphor, here, but what does it refer to? It's the word, *menó*, to remain, to stay, to continue in, so

this is a picture, at least, of staying in close proximity, but more to the point, and as the vine-branches metaphor, word-picture illustrates, Jesus is talking, here, not just about close proximity, Judas had that. He's talking about vital connection, living connection, a vital spiritual union with Christ. That's the concept you need to get down in your mind, the union with Christ.

It's a spiritual union and when I say it's a spiritual union, we're talking about a union, a joining that is something unseen. It's invisible because it is by nature spiritual. And yet we know that it's a very real union; it's a vital and powerful union because there's evidence of the union for everyone to see. You just gotta know what to look for. It's like God's invisible attributes, Romans 1:20 "His eternal power and his divine nature." God is by nature invisible, Colossians 1:15, 1 Timothy 1:17, Hebrews 11:27. God is by nature invisible.

The divine essence is not visible to our eyes. God's power as well. Like the electricity that flows in and through the wires of the building here and, and powers the lights. Electricity is invisible. You can't open up a wire and see it flowing. You can't see anything. But we know it has power by the effect because the lights are on. God's power, his nature, they've been clearly perceived by us. How? "By the things that have been made." Romans 1 says, "in all creation."



The power of God, the nature of God, it's the invisible made visible through effect, through what's produced.

It's the same way with us in our union with Christ. Our invisible spiritual union with Christ it's made visible through what? Our fruit. It's made visible through our fruitfulness. The power that flows in and through our union with Christ is manifest in the fact that we bear fruit and the nature of our union is manifested by the kind of fruit that we produce, not evil, wicked works, but rather fruit that looks a lot like Jesus Christ and the fruit he produced.

Every Christian, at the moment of salvation, enters into a profound, intimate union with Jesus Christ. It's a spiritual reality. and by the eternal redemptive decree of God the father, because of the work of God the Son in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are in union with him. We are united to God in Christ by the Holy Spirit. And it's because of that vital, invisible union with Christ that the life of God, the power of the Spirit is active and productive in and through our lives. And that's why when you see a lifeless, when you see an inactive, dead as a doorpost, sour and dour person who calls himself or herself a Christian, I've got to admit I've got serious doubts about whether that person really has a vital connection to Christ. When I see somebody who sits back with their arms folded and is just looking for something to criticize, I'm not talking about any

of you! But when I see that kind of a person, you know, the armchair quarterback, always got something to say or someone who walks through life and they're moping about all the time, I've got to admit I, I have questions.

Why is that? Because there is no life there. There is no power there. There is no spiritual energy there. There is no love. There's no appetite for spiritual things. There's no joyful obedience. There's fruit coming out all right, but it doesn't look anything like the fruit coming out of Christ's life. It doesn't look like what the Holy Spirit produces. I've got real questions. So it could be evidence that someone has not been regenerated, not been renewed, not been reborn. And to claim to know Christ and to belong to him and yet to have no fruit, that is to level a slanderous charge against God. That is to say that his Gospel is powerless and has no real effect. It's to say that his life that is in and working in an individual is really powerless and dead.

Sadly, there's so much of what I've seen in professing churches, professing Christians, it's like that. There are whole churches of people, there are huge stadiums of people who are like that. Paul describes them as "having the appearance of godliness but by their lives they're denying its power." There's no power in it. There's no spiritual life. There's no fruit. There's no Christ-like fruit, no

joy, no love, no happiness. There's no overcoming; there's no enduring with joy and cheerfulness and patience. There's no gratitude.

You'll notice I skipped ahead in my outline, here, to the thesis in verse 4, that's the thesis statement of the text. But let's back up to understand what it means to abide in Christ. Let's back up and look at the illustration that Christ gave. It's very helpful. Here's what spiritual union and vitality look like. It looks like a vineyard. It looks like a vine. It looks like a grape plant, a vine that grows branches and bears fruit. That's a perfect illustration. Two assertions come in verse 1. "Jesus said, 'I am the true vine, and my father is the vinedresser.'"

If you're familiar with John's Gospel, you know John 15 is right in the middle of the Upper Room discourse; runs from chapters 13 to chapter 17. The Lord and his disciples shared a meal together, the last Passover, the first Lord's Supper and after they left the Upper Room, Jesus took the disciples toward Gethsemane, and that's where he'd meet his betrayer along with that entourage to arrest him.

So as they walked along, going from the Upper Room toward Gethsemane, Jesus drew a metaphor from the surrounding landscape. Vineyards are very common in Israel. Vine/vineyard imagery is a common

spiritual metaphor. It was all over in all the ornate buildings, would put vines and clusters of grapes and all the rest, as you might imagine. Vines, vineyards, grape clusters, wine, all of that symbolized productivity, divine prosperity, divine blessing, abundant blessing. God used that imagery to picture Israel.

As we read in Psalm 80 earlier. He used the vineyard to picture Israel in the Old Testament. His own chosen nation he called his vineyard, and he chose that nation and planted that nation to produce fruit, to bring blessing. As it said in Psalm 80, he plucked that vineyard, that vine out of Egypt and transplanted it over in the Promised Land, where it would bear fruit. That was his hope. And yet Israel had failed to produce fruit. Instead, it produced bad fruit, wicked deeds, evil deeds, false worship, idolatry, sin, immorality, injustices, manifold.

Israel's failure to produce good fruit turned the symbol of prosperity, the vineyard, the vine, the grapes, the wine, God actually used those images to remind Israel that judgment is coming. Judgment is coming. In Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, all the same story. God is by nature good and generous. He planted Israel as a vineyard to produce abundant fruit. He left his vineyard to Israel and to its leadership to cultivate it, to keep it, to care for it, to gather its fruit and enjoy, to share the blessing of God's bounty, but Israel

ignored God's grace and kindness; lost interest in the vineyard, spurned God's goodness, failed to care for the vineyard and would thus suffer punishment.

Back in Psalm 80, the plea of Asaph, "Turn again, O God of Hosts and look down from heaven and see. Have regard for this vine." And he's, when he's saying that, he's trying to tug at God's heartstrings. "Have regard for this vine," by the way which you planted. This is your vine. "Have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted and for the son whom you made strong for yourself." Remember the end of the psalm, the prayer for salvation? "Let your hand be on the man of your right hand, the son of man whom you have made strong for yourself!" "Let your hand be on that man" why? "so then we shall not turn back from you; give us life, and we will call upon your name!" Somehow, life is connected with, that man, upon whom God puts his hand. "Restore us, O Lord God of hosts! Let your face shine, that we may be saved!"

Now take a look at John 15 verse 1. Jesus says, "I am the true vine." That's with emphasis in the Greek, I myself am the vine, the true one. The one that God planted. Listen, Jesus is the answer to Asaph's prayer in Psalm 80! And now that Jesus has come, he wants his people to know exactly how they will succeed where generations of Israel had failed. If you wonder for yourself, how will I succeed when

my evangelical forefathers have failed? When I look around and certainly there are no lack of examples as a pastor as I look around and see pastors falling left and right. How can I succeed where better men than me, with gifts and talents and intellects; how can I succeed and stay faithful when they have failed. How can you as a Christian succeed where generations past have really departed from the truth?

It's right there. God's right hand is on the man, the Son of Man, whom he has made strong for himself. And what is the result of that? "We shall not turn back from you." He will give us life, and we will call upon God's name. "I am the true vine," he said, which means, I am the man of God's right hand. Jesus is saying that the strong, the mighty Son of Man, I am the source of energy and power and vitality and life. Instead of acting as an angry judge in this text, Jesus says, no, look at him this way, look at the father this way. He is personally engaged in cultivating his own vineyard. He's in this work. "I am the vine, and my father is the vinedresser."

What's a vinedresser? A vinedresser is an expert in viticulture. *Vitis* is the Latin for vine, so viticulture, it's that branch of horticulture that specializes in grapevine cultivation in order to bring about the abundant, abundance in fruit production. Grapes evidently are temperamental plants: difficult, unresponsive, need constant attending. They require the right climate, the right

temperature, humidity, exposure to sunlight and all that, high maintenance. Very high maintenance. Conditions happen to be perfect in Israel for vine cultivation, for grape production.

It's at the perfect latitude on earth, means good sunlight, moderate temperatures. It's located near a large body of water, which means it has perfect humidity. It's surrounded by hills that provide adequate drainage and, and shelter. But even with those environmental factors, vine are wild by nature, which means they require constant cultivation and care by a vinedresser; otherwise, no fruit. A vine can't have too much hot or too much cold. They can't have too much water; too much or too little sunlight, and it has to be pruned, cut, directed, shaped so it produces abundant fruit.

So that means that this vinedresser, if he's a good vinedresser and skillful, he's monitoring the vine all the time. He's there to eliminate pests, to watch for disease and treat it. He's fertilizing, he's irrigating, he's managing the canopy, he's pruning the branches. In fact, that is how the vinedresser manages the, the canopy, which is the above-ground parts: the trunk, cordon, stems, leaves, flowers, fruit. His skillful management of that canopy that grows out impacts the final product. His skillful care, it affects the yield, it affects the quality, and the vigor of the grapes.

Notice in verse 2, Jesus draws their attention to two things that this vinedresser, the father, does. He says, number one: "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away. And number two: "Every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it may bear more fruit." The first is about unproductive branches, and the second is about productive ones. Unproductive branches are actually hostile and threatening to the productive ones. They're hostile to the plant. They sap the vine of its valuable nutrients, it steals the vitality, and for no purpose whatsoever, robs the good branches of life-giving nutrients, and those unproductive branches need to be cut off for the good of the vine, for the productivity of healthy branches, to allow the vine's nutrients to go through the vine and reach out to the productive, fruit-bearing branches.

What's the difference between the unproductive branches and the productive ones? Fruit, right? I mean, as branches, they look identical, they look the same, but looks and appearance can be deceiving, and it's by the skillful eye of the vinedresser that he prunes those branches. He cuts them off for the good, for the sake of the good branches. His expertise is what makes all the difference. His constant care and attention makes all the difference. At the end of the day, the productive vine is the vinedresser's pride and joy.

The disciples are listening to all this, and perhaps they're wondering where they stand. Am I a good branch, or a bad one? So to settle the sensitive conscience, Jesus interrupts the flow, here, he stops to provide a word of assurance, verse 3. Remember, as I said, Judas Iscariot had already left their company, so he's says, to the remaining eleven, verse 3, "Already you are clean because of the word I have spoken to you." What does Jesus mean, here, clean? He sets aside the vine imagery for a moment to make use of another metaphor about cleansing and washing. He's, he's talking, here, this is a metaphor referring to spiritual regeneration. The Greek word clean, *katharos* it's the same word used to translate a very important Hebrew word, *taor*, in a very important passage. Ezekiel 36:25, "I will sprinkle clean water on you." That's the same word, *katharos*, Clean water on you, "and you shall be clean." There it is again, "from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you."

So in the Septuagint, that's the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, that's the translation the disciples were probably very familiar with. Jesus is here in verse 3 he's referring back and alluding back to Ezekiel 36. He says, basically, you're clean because of the word I've spoken to you. You've already been regenerated by means of the word that I've spoken to you. The rest of the promise comes in verses 26-27 in Ezekiel 36, "And I will give you," in addition to cleansing, I'll give you, "a new heart. A new spirit I

will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." What's a heart of flesh? Heart of Stone: unresponsive, cold, dead, lifeless. Heart of flesh: responsive, beating, doing its job, able to respond to impulses from the brain, electrical stimuli; a heart of flesh. "I will put my Spirit within you. I will cause you to walk in my statutes and to be careful to obey my rules."

For anybody who's wondering, how do I get this done? That's the wrong question. The question is, how does God get this done in and through me? How does God do this? Frankly, for some of us, we're, we're stubborn vessels, aren't we? We're clogged. How does he get this in and through me? The disciples may not have understood fully Jesus' allusion to Ezekiel 36, but they would understand later. Jesus is assuring them, verse 3, you have been born again because of the word that I have spoken to you, the gospel that I've preached to you. In other words, I, Jesus says, "I by my own initiative, I have caused you to be born again." He says, you're mine, and your spiritual life is my doing.

To borrow the language from the Apostle Paul, Jesus says to these disciples who belong to him, "Now you need to work out your own salvation. It's a salvation that you possess. You need to work it out, for it is God who as work in you." That's the assurance he gives his

true disciples, here, sovereign initiative, divine power causing them to be born again. And this is God's doing.

So sovereign initiative followed by their responsibility, verse 4, "Abide in me and I in you." Another way to render the command, make sure you continue dwelling, remaining in me just as I am also continually dwelling and remaining in you. This is a beautiful, beautiful promise, is it not? Regenerated by the Holy Spirit, armed with a new nature. Soon, these disciples, anyway, soon to be indwelt by the Spirit of God himself. Jesus then turns to give the disciples a number of reasons, here, to walk in obedience, to help them to be careful to obey his Word. And everything that follows, here, after verse 4, unpacks that command, abide in me, explains how it is that Jesus will abide in you.

Let's ask a second question. If you are writing in your, in your notes for your outline, we asked what does it mean to abide in Christ, now we'll ask the questions. What are the reasons to abide in Christ? What are the reasons to abide in Christ? I think even as we talk about the reasons to abide in Christ, we're going to see how it's done. We're going to see how this works. For every true believer, Christ gives six compelling reasons to obey. The gracious motivation Christ gives us, here, it becomes the impetus of our obedience, the driving force of our obedience. And it's obedience to Christ that leads to

bearing fruit in our lives. And bearing fruit in our lives opens the floodgates of all manner of divine blessing to us.

First, first reason: Abide in Christ, very simply, so that you can bear fruit. Abide in Christ so you can bear fruit, Verses 4-5. "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."

Very simple, very plain, not hard to understand, branches have no life in and of themselves. Try taking a branch, a naked branch, cut it off from the vine and go plant that branch in the ground. It will just sit there, right? A stick, dead, dry, stick in the ground, eventually it'll wither and blow away. Branches are pretty much like, you might just think, I know I'm being overly simplistic, here, but branches are very much like hollow tubes. They simply conduct energy from the vine out to the stems and the blossoms, so that fruit can be produced.

In order to be fruitful, their sole purpose, they must remain in vital connection with the vine. Now, while they have no vitality in and of themselves, that does not mean that branches are worthless.

They're, they're actually perfectly suited, perfectly designed as vessels of vitality. That is what God designed them to be and to do. So when they are fulfilling their purpose, they are perfect, exactly what God wanted. They're conduits of productivity. They carry the life of the vine through themselves, through the conduit, out to the stems and the flowers and the pods, where grapes are formed and with proper cultivation formed in abundance.

As branches, we can expect nothing in and of ourselves, but when we look to Christ and when we abide in him and remain in him, we can expect that he will bear much fruit through us and we should expect that. We should expect that remaining in him and being obedient to his Word, and following everything it says here, we should expect to see fruit. That's his promise.

We believe his promise. We should expect what he promises. That's the heart of faith. That's the life of a true believer. If you're abiding in Christ, continuous, habitual action, there, in that verb, if you are abiding, you will bear fruit. Be the invisible power of God to flow through our lives, producing the visible fruit of God, we must stay vitally connected to Christ.

Let's look at a second reason that motivates us, look at verse 6. Second, abide in Christ. Two things, here, we could say, two ways to put it, abide in Christ to escape judgment, number one and two, to persevere to the end. Abide in Christ to escape wrath, and condemnation, and judgment, on the one hand; we look into the future. Abiding in Christ also to persevere, to endure to the end, to stand firm to the end. Fruit is not just one benefit of planting and tending grape vines. Fruit is the only benefit. Those plants are so temperamental and labor-intensive that if it doesn't produce fruit, you're not going to spend any time, attention, energy, money, anything, planting a vine. So if the branches aren't doing their job, they have no purpose.

Branches, as I said, are not useful for anything. You can't build anything out the gnarled, twisted trunk of a grapevine and create branches. So if a branch is not bearing fruit, you might as well cut it off and get it out of there quickly, throw it away, burn it up. It is useless if it is not fulfilling its God-designed purpose.

And God has various ways of revealing which are the useless and fruitless branches in the church. Sometimes he exposes those useless and unproductive branches through the process of church discipline, Matthew 18. He uses his people in a case of church discipline to reveal that. Sometimes he just takes those things away with swift

judgment. Sometimes I think of Korah's rebellion, I just read that in my daily reading the other day. Korah's rebellion, very swift judgment, there.

Other times, these unproductive, fruitless branches they simply walk away on their own. They just leave the fellowship. They find something else that doesn't bother their conscience so much. Whatever the route they take to become severed from the vine, these are the ones that the Apostle John wrote about in 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us, but they were not of us. For if they had been of us, they would have continued with us." So again, the same verb, there, *menó*. "They would have remained with us," "they would have abided with us." abiding in Christ, but they didn't. They departed. Jesus said so clearly, as a warning to us, Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my father."

We wouldn't say that those words, that warning from Christ, incites dread or terror in a true believer. We know that "perfect love casts out fear." God has forgiven all of our sins in the cross-work of the Savior on the Cross, past, present, future sins. Remember when Jesus died for us Gentiles living two thousand years on this side of the Cross, all of our sins were future, weren't they? So in present time, when he died and he had our names on his mind, all of our sins.

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For us past, present, and future, for him, all future, he died for those sins. He died to forgive us of sins of thought, word, and deed. Sins of omission and commission. He died to forgive us of all the times that we should have but we didn't, or the times we should not have, but we did.

He died to forgive us and cleanse us of all the sins, namely, if we could summarize it, sins against love. We didn't love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We didn't love our neighbor as ourself. In fact, we hated God. We didn't believe him. We distrusted him. We slandered him. We gave ourselves to a different idol, really our self as an idol, we were self-centered. Christ died to forgive all of that. And God has looked upon his sacrifice, for all those who believe and declared those people forgiven.

Not only that, but we are now robed in the spotless righteousness of Jesus Christ, his fulfillment of all the Law, never omitting one command, never, never committing one sin, obeying in thought, word, and deed, the love of God and the love of neighbor; he perfectly fulfilled. He fulfilled it to the uttermost. He endured, stood against any testing and trial to solicit him to sin. He, he wore out the temptation and drove away the tempter. He fulfilled all righteousness, and that perfect, spotless righteousness is now the gift of every true believer. So then not only are all our sins taken away, but now we

stand having fulfilled the law of God. And so when we stand before the, the bar of God's justice as truly guilty, he can look upon Christ and see that we believe, we trust, and declare us righteous, not just not guilty, but positively righteous. Both things are true.

So we wouldn't say that these words, these warnings from Christ, incite dread or terror in any true believer. "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." But God uses the warnings of Scripture, doesn't he? He uses them for our sake, in order to preserve true believers to the end. The Spirit put these warnings in Scripture because of grace. Warnings like this tear us away from the world. That's why John says, "Do not love the world, even the things of the world. If anybody loves the world, the love of the father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life, is not from the father but from the world. The world is passing away, and the lusts thereof, but only those who remain in him abide forever."

Those warnings are there to turn us away from the world, to tear us away from the world. And they spur us on to daily self-examination, to fruit inspection. Christ wants us to follow him. As Sinclair Ferguson preached this last week out of Hebrews 12, "laying aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us in order that we might run with endurance the race that is set before us."

Listen, warnings are our friends. As believers, they are our friends. They're like sharp sticks that poke us along when we feel lazy. They are useful for turning us away from lesser things, useful to make us more fruitful, useful to make us faithful.

So abide in Christ to bear fruit, number one. Abide in Christ to escape judgment and to endure to the end, point number two. Third reason, third: Abide in Christ so you can work the will of God. So you can work the will of God, this is verse 7. Wish we had more time to linger here, but this is so, so good. Jesus said, "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." He didn't qualify that, did he? Did he?

Look, early in verse 3 Jesus said, "You're clean because of the word I have spoken to you." That's *logos*, the word, word is *logos*, it refers to the Gospel. Here, when Jesus says, "If my words abide in you," he's using the word, *rhema*, and that refers to the sayings of Christ, individual teachings of Christ; things like the Sermon on the Mount, the parables, and on it goes.

It's not enough, listen, it's not enough to know the facts of the Gospel. It's not enough to have a grasp of Christian doctrine, to be able to recite points of theology. You need to know Jesus Christ

personally and through a deep familiarity with his teachings. What drives that pursuit of knowledge? What motivates this interest in Jesus' sayings, his teachings, to know Christ through all that he has said and taught. That's the mark of an intimate relationship. Jesus' sayings are going to be at home in you when he becomes an intimate friend to you. You will love his teachings because they are what help you to understand your dearest friend.

This is the key to the whole thing. This right here is how abiding in Christ works. This is how it generates so much effectual power. This is how it produces so much fruit. Those words in verse 7, when they are received by a regenerate, converted, worshipful heart, when they are received by a humble, teachable, obedient heart, those words convey the very power of God to save and sanctify the believer. As Jesus said, verse 3, his word is so powerful, it is powerful to effect the salvation of the believer. Here in verse 6, his teachings are powerful to effect the sanctification of the believer. There's power in what he says. There's power in what he teaches to save and to sanctify.

God has so designed us that we do what we think. We live out what we actually believe. So obviously, mind renewal is the key thing. Change the mind, change the man. Change the mind, change the woman. That is what repentance is, *metanoia*. It's referring to an internal

change of thinking. *Noia*, referring to the mind, internal change of thinking, and it results in an external change of behaving. So here's the initial repentance that leads to salvation in verse 3 and ongoing repentance that results in sanctification in verse 7. There cannot be the one without the other. They are connected. And that's why Jesus' teaching here is so vital to renew the mind, to transform the life, to produce ongoing, life-long repentance.

Listen, when his teachings, when you really get them, when you really grasp them, when they wash over your mind, your will, your desires, they come into conformity with the perfect will of God. And when that happens, beloved, watch this, verse 7, "Ask whatever you wish," whatever you wish, "and it will be done for you." You say, is that an unqualified statement of health, wealth, and prosperity? No, it is not. It's qualified. It's qualified with this, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you." If that qualification is met, then your mind changes. Your will aligns with God's will. You pray according to his will because those are your desires. That's how you become a healthy and effective branch. That's how you become a true conduit of vitality, carrying out the father's will.

It's kind of like Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." It's a beautiful thing, isn't it? He'll give you the desires of your heart. Because why?

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Because they are his desires, they are his will. His will, his desires become our will and our desires. When we learn from him, when we delight ourselves in him, our desires align with his desires, and he is please to give us whatever we ask.

What unmerited favor is ours that the true and the living God, the King of the ages, 1 Timothy 1:7, "immortal, invisible, the only God." That, that God should involve us like this in accomplishing his will here on earth! What in the world? Who are we? That he should work in and through our prayers to fulfill his eternal purposes? "Things," Ephesians 2:10, "that he has prepared beforehand," good works he prepared beforehand, "that we should walk in them"? This is the most precious gift, here, the gift of co-laboring with God. What a beautiful thing to see, the power of God flowing through an intimate relationship between the believer and his Savior.

All right, I wish I could linger, but I can't. Number 4, another reason, verse 8, fourth: Abide in Christ so you can glorify God. That follows, right? Abide in Christ so you can glorify God. If you're bearing fruit, if you're accomplishing God's will on earth, that means you are bringing glory to God, verse 8, "By this is my father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." We bring glory to God when we bear spiritual fruit. So thoughts and actions, words, behaviors, intentions, motivations, ambitions, plans,

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all that is fruit that only God can explain. Fruit that can only be attributed to the mighty working of the Spirit of God and to him alone. It's not false fruit. It's not platitudes. It's not faux humility. It's not flesh-motivated service. It's not carnality masquerading as religiosity. It's God-borne fruit. It's God-produced fruit. It's fruit that only God can bring, things like Galatians 5:22. We bring glory to God when we're conduits of doing his will, revealing his character, speaking his truth.

Now I am no wine aficionado. I, I hope you're happy to hear that I'm not, but I have enjoyed other products made from the fruit of the vine, things like grape jelly, Smuckers®, grape juice, grapes. I can honestly say that I have never, after sampling these fruits of the vine with my refined palate, I have never stopped after tasting their sweetness and exclaimed, wow! That is good! It must have been an amazing branch! Have you? And I've got to believe it's the same for wine aficionados, wine tasters, those who know their wines, who have a seasoned, tested, trained, educated palate. They sample wines, all these different labels, different parts of the world, properly aged, properly prepared. No, none of those critics enjoys a good wine and marvel at the branch. What do they praise? The label. What does the label represent? The maker. They honor the maker of the wine. Just as I honor Smuckers®.

All glory to the vinedresser! All glory to God, who planted the vine and cultivated it and kept it and produced the fruit. All glory to the divine owner of the vineyard, who funded it, resourced it, empowered it, grew it, strengthened it, produced all the fruit, all glory to God! That's our joy in producing fruit.

Reason number 5, fifth : Abide in Christ so you can participate in divine love. Abide in Christ so you can participate in divine love. This is incredible! Verses 9 and 10, "As the father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love." And Jesus says, here, shifted the command, you'll notice, from "Abide in me" and now he says, "Abide in my love." Why the change? If we broaden it out a bit, we can see how Christ has developed a thought. He starts with "Abide in me" verse 4, that emphasizes our spiritual union with the person of Christ. Then he moves to "let my words abide in you" verse 7, that emphasizes the power of Christ in his word to save and to sanctify. Now it's "abide in my love." So to emphasize love, it takes the person of Christ and combines it with the power of Christ, making them effectual to accomplish the work of Christ, namely, to demonstrate the love of God for us. God loved the world by giving his only Son, right?

I love the comparison. "As the father has loved me, so have I loved you." Or "in the same way, also, I also have loved you." How has the father loved Christ? Fully, infinitely, perfectly, deeply,

eternally, passionately, tenderly, zealously, jealously. We could add more and more adverbs to that, how he has loved God, or how he has love Christ. So how does Christ love his disciples? How does Christ love us? Same way. Same way. Jesus followed the pattern of divine love, the father's love for him as the son. He turns and then applies that same pattern of love to you and to me, those for whom he died, if we're to remain in that love, we're to abide in it, we're to hold fast to it.

There's no mystery about this. He tells us how it happens. How to remain in the love of Christ. Same way Christ remained in his father's love, by doing what he said. He just did what he said. "If you keep my commandments" verse 10, "you will abide in my love. Just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love." Some people might say, oh, so you mean you have to obey to earn the love of Christ through obedience. You're teaching legalism? No. I'm not really teaching anything, here. I'm just pointing to what Jesus is teaching. He says very plainly, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love." Not my words, his words. But no, to put your mind at ease, this is not about gaining or maintaining a right standing with God. A right standing with God comes by God's grace through faith. God did that, verse 3, causing every true believer to be born again by the word of Christ and by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit. Nothing about earning, here. Nothing about legalism.

But what is here is the evidence of a true relationship; the proof of a relationship. You say you love God? Don't just talk about it. Prove it. Your obedience ought to flow from love, your will directed by affection by God, your, your love for Christ, for his people, for the church. The course of your life ought to be set by the loving ambitions, motivated by loving motivations, loving decisions, free choices of a regenerated nature, a heart that is inclined toward God.

So don't tell me that you're all about love when you do not obey Christ's commandments. Don't tell me that. Don't tell me that you're all about love when you stand aloof from the people Christ loved, the people for whom Christ died. If you love God, if you love God's Son, then you're going to busy yourself loving those whom he loved. You're gonna love his people, too. You're going to do it with great sacrifice just like he did. Why not? Why not? If we truly love and trust Jesus Christ, then keeping commandments is our greatest joy. It's true freedom for us. It's our settled peace. It's our perfect happiness and contentment. Keeping his commandments means walking with Christ. It means keeping in step with the Holy Spirit. It means becoming conduits of the love of God.

So if we summarize where we've been so far: Abide in Christ to bear fruit, to escape judgment and endure to the end, to do God's will, to glorify God, and to remain in God's love. So six: Abide in Christ that you can be full of divine joy. So you can be full of divine joy. Verse 11, "These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, that your joy may be full." It's a purpose clause that governs that verse. This whole section, this whole teaching, this saying, this *rhema* of Christ, this is for the express purpose of filling our lives with divine joy. It's the word, *chara*. It's translated, joy, delight, gladness, rejoicing; this is profound, exuberant happiness, and a happiness that has no regrets.

Think about your life as a pagan, I mean just momentarily; before Christ. Think about the times when you indulged in sin. Why did you indulge in sin? Because you thought that that was the key to your happiness at the moment, right? And you saw by indulging in sin, that when you gave yourself to that sin, when you unleashed that verbal tirade against that coworker or against that, you know, some family relation because you thought, I'm going to give it to them. They deserve it! And, boy, you relished in the anger of that or you gave yourself to that lust, or you gave yourself to that ambition that you stepped over others to get ahead and get the money and win, the, all that stuff.

You did that because you thought, that is going to lead to my fulfillment. That is what is going to earn my greatest happiness. I'll do whatever it takes to get it. What happened when you got there? Momentary enjoyment, but it was fleeting, wasn't it? It dissipates. It falls away; it comes apart. It's like seeing in the desert, hungry, tired, and you see in the distance a pool of water and you run and you run and you work and you work and you get there and you find it's a mirage. There's nothing there but more sand. That's what it's like, is it not? The joys of sin are fleeting and unrewarding and condemning and damning and degrading.

This joy, fullness, happiness, delight, gladness, *chara*, that's what he wants to give to you and with no regret! This is the key to it all. This is how all our questions at the beginning are answered, fully and completely. This is how our weaknesses and frailties and inconsistencies in obeying are increasingly overcome. Let me ask you this question. The men, we've been talking about this in our men's theology: Is there any happier being in the universe than God? I'll answer. No. There is no happier being in the universe than God. God is the blessed and only sovereign, according to 1 Timothy 6:15. He is the happiest, the most delighted, joyful being in eternal existence and God is the source of all being and as such, that means that he is also the source of all joy. He is the source of all blessedness. He is the source of all happiness, of all contentment, of all fulfillment. So

since Jesus is the Son of God, possessing the divine nature, he too, is filled with the same joy, the same delight, the same blessedness in being God and in everything that God rejoices in.

As a man with a truly human nature, Jesus Christ, the Son of man, he is perfectly and wholly possessed with divine joy. He is driven and motivated by fulness of joy. No obedience that Jesus offered before God was performed reluctantly. Never did he complain, Ahh...gotta die on the Cross. Ahh...gotta pray for these people. He never did that. He wasn't hesitant. He was all in. He was jealous and zealous for obedience. You think about what we've learned from Jesus in Luke 9 and other texts as well. Think about some of the harder sayings of Jesus, things like "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Or something maybe even harder for some of us, "Love your enemies. Do good to those who persecute you and hate you, those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you." Is there anything that Jesus commands us that he has not first accomplished himself, and in the accomplishing, did he accomplish that with grumbling and complaining or did he do it with joy? Hebrews 12 again, "For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame." So is there anything he commands, not only that he has not done himself, but is there anything that he commands that he has not intended for our joy?

It's an evil and unbelieving impulse of the sin nature that doubts the goodness and the kind intentions of God, that refuses obedience to his clearly revealed commands. When we resist his will, when we shrink back from obedience, we reveal, frankly, our lack of trust in him. We reveal that we somehow doubt his goodness, doubt his character, think he's less than he is and that's going to compromise our ability to obey this one command: "Abide in me." It's devastating to our life. Devastating. It makes shipwreck of the faith. But if we obey that one command, just that one command, "Abide in me," knowing the joys at the end, knowing that his good intentions, his love, his, all his desires for our fulfillment are at the end.

If we'll obey that one command, it becomes a cascade of obedience. It becomes a fountain of living waters to us, overflowing in our souls. What a tender Christ! What a good and kind Savior, that he would endure such suffering for the likes of us poor, wretched sinners! That he would involve us in the outworking of God's eternal decree through prayer and obedience. That he would lavish us with divine love in order that he might fill our hearts with the delight of divine joy. And what, but an unbelieving heart would ever resist that?

Let me close with the words of Charles Spurgeon. It's a blessed reminder to us believers, but it's also a gracious call to anyone here who's not yet a Christian. Spurgeon said, "How I wish that everybody

here knew my dear Lord and Master. I tell you who do not know Christ and do not experimentally know what true religion is that five minutes' realization of the love of Christ would be better for you than a million years of your present choicest delights. There is more brightness in the dark side of Christ than in the brightest side of this poor world.

"I would sooner lie on a bed and ache in every limb with the death sweat standing on my brow by the month and year together, persecuted, despised, and forsaken, poor and naked, with the dogs to lick my sores and the devils to tempt my soul and have Christ for my friend. Then I would sit in the palaces of wicked kings, with all their wealth and luxury and pampering and sin. Even at our worst estate, it's better to be God's dog than the devil's darling. It's better to have the crumbs and the moldy crust that fall from Christ's table for the dogs than to sit at the head of princely banquets with the ungodly. I'd rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. God bless you," he said, "and save you."

So said Spurgeon, pleading with the non-Christian, and I'll only add, God bless you and sanctify you that you may enter into the fulness of the joy of your Master. Let's pray.

Our Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we thank you for your eternal plan of redemption, to glorify yourself by saving poor, wretched sinners like us in the most glorious, beautiful, perfect Son. We thank you that you were pleased, even though it is hard to utter these words. We thank you that you were pleased to crush him for our iniquity. We thank you that you were pleased to make him suffer your eternal wrath for sins that we committed. And he endured the condemnation and the sentence of death for those of us who are the ones who committed the crimes, he stood in our place to take our sentence. And we love you, father, because you planned this from before the foundation of the world and written our names in the Book of Life. We love Jesus Christ, our Savior. He's so tender, he's so, such a good friend. We thank you that he fulfilled all of your perfect righteousness, that standard of righteousness which over us in our sin was a harsh and unrelenting judge even though it portrayed your absolute perfection and goodness. Father, every time we looked at it, we saw ourselves in the mirror of your law and saw sin. We saw wretchedness. We saw everything that displeased you. But our Lord Jesus Christ looked to that law and paid it to the full. He fulfilled all righteousness, and you've been pleased to give that righteousness to us as a gift, and we, we are eternally grateful. Thank you, father, for saving us. What can we say but thank you. And we who are yours, here, we give ourselves wholly to you, to obey you, to abide in Christ that you might bear in our lives much, much fruit. Sometimes we look

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around and we just see a few shriveled grapes, and father, we don't, we don't want that. We, we want abundant fruit. We long to see abundant fruit produced in our lives and our church and our region and in all the faithful churches, that we know. Father, please produce this good fruit. Glorify yourself in and through us. Help us to abide in your love by obeying your commandments, to know that love of intimate relationship. Let us be filled with divine joy. Spur us on to even greater obedience as we go it all over again. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.