

What is the Church Supposed to be Doing?

John 15:1–11

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, August 1, 2021

I want to thank Richard for the lesson with the children just now. I do want to confess I was a little nervous when he picked up those pliers. But then I was reminded that we have church insurance. So we'll be fine. But thank you for that. We have a lot of kids in the in the two services. And so we're trying to find different ways to serve them and minister to them. And this is one of the ways that we're doing that. And so I really appreciate him taking the time to do that. I also want to mention, we are having our membership Sunday, next Sunday. And we're going to do a few things for the 8:30 hour, but a lot of the events for that are going to be at the 10:15 time. So I know a number of you come at the 8:30 hour, and we're going to do some things for that. But we're going to make a really big event at the 10:15 time because that's when a lot of the new visitors come. So maybe you want to watch that at home as well. If you're here at 8:30 tomorrow, you can plan on catching some of that at 10:15. We're going to announce the names of the new members. We have about 13 right now that are wanting to join our church, which is wonderful. And what we found is that a lot of you who come to the 8:30 don't know who they are because they come at 10:15. So we kind of miss each other. A couple of times, someone who's been in our church for a while says, "Who's that person over there?" I say, "Well, they speak English, you know. You can go say hi." But they don't know. They haven't seen them, right? So this is going to be an opportunity just to introduce them to you and let you know who they are. So keep that in mind for next week.

And for now, if you will, just open your Bibles with me to the gospel of John. Please open with me to the gospel of John. And as you're doing that, I've told you before, we are gearing up for a new sermon series here at Grace. We're going to start studying the book of Ecclesiastes here in a few weeks, which I'm calling the saddest book in the Bible, because if you've ever read it before, you'll know that's what it is. Ecclesiastes is a very sad book, because it was written by a man who had it all, but he had nothing. He had all the money and riches and power this world has to offer. But it left him feeling miserable because he left God out of it. He totally put God off to the side. And so it's a book that tells you what it's like to do that—it only creates misery in the human heart. And we're going to start looking at that here in a couple of weeks.

But before we do that, we are doing a few sermons on the on the church in light of membership Sunday. And that's what this is today. So to look at this, if you would turn to John chapter 15. I just want to read the first couple of verses to you. To introduce our passage, it says this, Jesus says,

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also 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 so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."

We'll stop the reading there. Just to say a few words about that, if you've been with us for a while, you'll remember that I preached through the gospel of John several years ago when our church first started. And I told you that John wrote his gospel so that you may believe. He says at the end of the book in chapter 20,

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

So that is why John gave us his gospel, so that you would be saved. And the way he does this is simple because he gives you a story, and then he explains it. That's how John writes this gospel. He gives you a snapshot of the life of Christ, and then he tells you what it means. And the story here in John 15 is about Jesus washing the disciples' feet. That was described back in chapter 13, but he takes four chapters to explain it, from chapter 13 all the way to 17. Because it surprised the disciples so much. It shocked them. So he had to tell them why he did it. You would think at this point in the life of Christ, nothing would surprise the disciples anymore. I mean, they'd seen this guy do everything: walk on water, feed the 5000, stop a storm, but they couldn't believe he would wash their feet, like a slave. And so he says, essentially, in chapter 13, that I did this because I loved you. He says, I washed your feet to show you how to treat each other because you guys are not very good at that. You fight all the time. So I'm doing this to correct that. And then in chapter 14, he says, I did this so you would not be troubled, so you would not be anxious and afraid. And then here in chapter 15, he says that I did this so you could spot a hypocrite, because you have one among you. You have a traitor in your midst, and his name is Judas. He doesn't actually give his name in that passage. But that's the idea here.

Judas is a name we're all familiar with. And he's a very interesting character in the Bible, because he actually had a very common name. When you read the Bible, you see a lot of Judas is in there, because it was a spin off of the name Judah, one of the 12 tribes of Israel. So for example, there were two disciples called Judas in the New Testament, and Jesus had a brother named Judas. Interestingly enough, one of his own kindred had that name. But now no one has that name because it's so despicable. You wouldn't even call your dog Judas, because of what he did, because he sat there and watch while Jesus washed his feet. He sat there and did nothing while the Lord served him in this way, knowing he was going to go out and betray him. It was a horrible, horrible thing to do. In fact, back in chapter 13, verse 10, this is all part of the same sermon. So we are going to bounce back and forth a little bit from chapter 13 on, but in chapter 13, verse 10, Jesus says, "You are clean, but not all of you," which means you are saved. All 12 disciples are saved, except for one of you. And while John doesn't say this, the other gospels tell us that at this point, the other 12 go around saying, "Lord, is it I? Am I the one who's unclean?" So to calm them down and answer that in chapter 15, Jesus says, this is how you can tell. This is how you know if you're clean or not: you bear good fruit. This is how you can spot a hypocrite in your midst. This is how you can tell the real thing from the fake: the real thing is part of the vine. And he shows it with his actions. If you look in chapter 15, verses one and two again, Jesus says,

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

You see the word "fruit" repeated several times here because that's what this text is about. The word fruit is *karpos* in Greek. It means "fruit" or "the produce of a plant", but it can also mean your works or your deeds, depending on the context, because that's what a plant does in order to produce fruit. It has to work for it. It has to sweat. So that's what this word entails. If you're a Christian, you will work hard to please the Lord. The works don't save you. It doesn't turn you into a plant, but that's just what a plant does. Apple trees make apples, orange trees make [oranges], and a Christian makes Christianity, which is something the authors in Scripture said a lot about because Israel was a very agricultural area. There's a land full of farmers. So you see a lot of fruit mentioned in the Bible. The Bible's full of descriptions of olives and grapes and figs. You see almonds and dates and apples in there because they were all used to describe your works as a believer. So for instance, in Galatians, five you read about the fruit of the Spirit.

For the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [gentleness], and self-control.

Because that's what comes out of your life when you're saved. That's what you do as a Christian. It just falls off the branches. Luke six verse 43, Jesus says, "No good tree bears bad fruit. Nor does a bad tree produce good fruit, for each tree is known by its fruit." That's a simple logic there, isn't it? It's not rocket science. You want to know if someone's saved, just look at their life. It'll show you. In Matthew three, verse eight, John the Baptist says, "Bear fruit in keeping with repentance." In Colossians one, verse 10, Paul says, "Bear fruit in every good work, and as you do, you will walk in a manner pleasing to the Lord."

But the point is that this is what Jesus is talking about in chapter 15. How can you tell if someone is a disciple? You will know them by their fruit. Because Judas said all the right words, didn't he? Judas made a profession of faith. In fact, it was so good that when Jesus says, there is a hypocrite in here, they don't know who it is. They say, "Lord, is it I?" because they can't tell. So Jesus says, let me help you tell. You'll know them by their behavior. Can't fake that. Give it enough time, and the truth will come out. And the sad reality is that there's lots of "Christians" today who don't get that anymore, do they? I use the word "Christians" in quotation marks here. There's a lot of professing believers who go to church every Sunday. They sing with us, they pray with us, they read the Bible with us, but they have no fruit to show for it. Their lives haven't changed. They go home and kick the dog. So on Saturday nights, they go out and get drunk. And I looked it up this week, and according to the latest figures, there's about two to three billion professing Christians on the planet, if you can believe that. And it means that one out of every four people are "saved". And to add to that, about half of all Canadians make that profession, at least those probably 40 and above. But if you look at the state of the world today, you'd have to say that's a lie. Because where's the proof? Where's the evidence? This world's not getting any better. But they do that because they don't understand what Jesus is saying here. Jesus says, you can't just say you're a Christian. You have to show it. You can't just talk the talk. You have to walk the walk. Because people need to see a change in you; otherwise, it's not real. It can't just be same old, same old for you. Your life has to show something different. The author John Steinbeck said that "modern man thinks he's so smart because he can shoot rockets into space. But if he was honest about it, he can't cure anger and discontent." We're not that smart. But the fact is, Christians can. You have a way to defeat sin. And that's what you have to be doing.

It's interesting, if you look at the latest church growth strategies of last 20 years or so, you'll see a lot of different ideas out there about how to reach the world. And they include things like finding good causes, and meeting people's needs. Because everyone wants to build a well in Africa right now. It's a very popular thing to do. I get flyers about it all the time. But Jesus says here, I don't want you to focus on that. I want you to bear good fruit. I want you to be my city on a hill. I want you to be my salt and light. That's how you're gonna change the world. You know, I heard one pastor say it this way. He said, "There's so much talk about studying the culture today, but Christians are forgetting their primary calling. And that is to get out of the culture." You need to get out of the world, and then go back into it to show them the love of Jesus Christ. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning.

So if you're taking notes, I want to talk about several things that the church is supposed to be doing today, in this passage. So if you're taking notes, in John 15, I want to talk about the mission of the church by looking at several things the church is supposed to be doing in this passage on the vine. We're going to do this because this is a confusing issue today. But what is the mission of the church? What are we called to do as Christians on this earth? I have to tell you, there's a lot of different opinions about that right now. I was at visiting a church in California several years ago. And I remember they had these massive white domes all over the campus. These things were 50 feet high. They were spread out all over like little mushrooms. And so I asked someone, what is that? And he said, "Well, each one of those domes has a different type of music in it. So the same sermon is piped in. But you can go to this dome and enjoy Hawaiian music. And you can go to this dome and enjoy Southern gospel music. And you can go to that dome and enjoy classical music." Because it's all about you. It's all about catering to your preferences. I want to tell you this morning, that's wrong. The church is not here to cater to your preference. It's here to cater to God's, and God wants you to do good works as a church. He wants you to do what this passage is talking about, on the vine.

So let's talk about that. Here's several things the church is supposed to be doing in this passage. The first one is to trust in the vine. We're going to make this real simple because we want to just follow the passage here. But the first thing that church is supposed to be doing in this world is to be trusting in the vine, which means you need to believe in it with all your heart so you don't get distracted with other things. So you don't get caught up in domes and musical styles and that type of stuff. If you look back in verse one, this is how Jesus starts off the passage, when he says, "I am the true vine." That's a very short phrase in English. It's only five words. But if you notice, he uses the definite article here because what Jesus is saying is that I am the true vine, and there are no others. I am the one who gives you life, and there is no one else. Richard just came up here and showed you several vines to look at as an illustration. There's not several vines, Jesus said. There's one vine.

And just to explain that, there's seven "I am" statements in the Gospel of John. There's seven times that he starts off with Jesus saying, "I am" something. So for instance, in John six, he says, "I am the bread of life," or the bread that came down from heaven, because I'm what you must eat to have eternal life. In John eight, he says, "I am the light of the world," which means I'm the one you must look to and fix your eyes on if you want to be saved. You can't look all over the place; you look at me. In John ten, he says, "I am the good shepherd." In chapter 11, he says, "I am the resurrection and the life." In chapter 14, he says, "I am the way, the truth and the life," which encompasses a lot of things in here. And then here in chapter 15, he says, "I am the vine," which is another way of saying, "I am the life." He actually says that three times in this gospel. Because it means that just as a branch draws life from a vine, so you draw life from me.

And the context for this is interesting, because if you want to look back in chapter 14, verse 31, Jesus says something that seems kind of random in the sermon, but it's not. There's a reason he says this. Because at the end of chapter 14, right above this, he says, "Get up. Let us go from here." Which implies that they left the upper room as he said, this. This sermon was given in a room in a house in Jerusalem, we don't know exactly which one. You can go to Jerusalem today, and they'll speculate for you. They'll take a guess and point at which one they think it was. But the idea is that as you read from chapter 14 to chapter 17, the momentum doesn't stop. It keeps going. But the idea is that Jesus had finished washing the disciples' feet. They're done with that now. And now it's time for them to get up and leave and walk through the streets of Jerusalem into the garden of Gethsemane. They'll go out the Eastern Gate, up the hill, into the garden, which was at a place called the Mount of Olives, because of all the olive trees that were there. As a matter of fact, some of those olive trees are close to 2000 years old today. And it's been suggested that some might have been there in Jesus' time. So you could go there and maybe see an olive tree that was there at the time.

But as they're walking by them, Jesus, who is a master of illustration, says to His disciples, "I am the true vine." In other words, just like these olives draw life from this olive tree, so you need to do the same thing with me. And it even had another significance as well, because in the first century, many of Israel's coins had images of vines on them, and in Herod's temple, you saw vines made out of gold all along the walls to say you're saved by being Jewish. That's how you get to heaven now, by being a child of Abraham. And so to confront that Jesus says, you're not saved by being Jewish. Because Judas was Jewish, and he's lost. Judas was a child of Abraham. He's going to hell. You are saved by trusting in me.

I think this is important for us today to consider, these brief words, "I am the true vine," because I've been in BC for some time now, and I mentioned this last week. But I would say it's one of the most diverse places on earth. You have people from all over the place here in this province. And a lot of them have an identity crisis over that. And what I mean is that they come to church, and they tell us that they don't know where they're from anymore. They say, I don't know if I'm African or Canadian. I don't know if I come from this place, or that place, or where I fit in. But what Jesus is saying here is that if you're a Christian, it doesn't matter anymore. Because you're in the vine. If you're a believer in Christ, your identity's found in him, and that's all you need to know. All the other things are secondary to that: your accent, how you dress, your parents, that type of stuff is kind of all incidental now.

And it's the same way with a church. You see a lot of churches having identity crises today. They don't know what to do, which is why they're getting into all this domes and music. That's why you see them getting into all the dog and pony show in order to bring people into the building. But the problem is that that's not what this is about either. We're here to promote Christ. And that's it. It doesn't matter if you like Hawaiian music or southern gospel or whatever. That's just all a secondary thing. You know, I've often kind of joked in my head that, you know, we could get a lot more people into our church today, if we just started calling it the Farm Church. Come have church on the farm. We could even put up fliers, free cow rides for the kids after the service. I mean, we joke, but people do that nowadays, right? They put it all over the website, they make t-shirts, we get hats. But we're not in it for that, amen? We're here to preach Christ. You come out here in the rain on the farm to learn about Christ. You're not coming out here to learn about cows. That's all a secondary thing. That's not the main focus.

And it brings us quickly to another point to look at this morning. I just want to move along in this passage here. But another thing the church is supposed to be doing in this text on the vine, and that is to bear fruit. And I've already said a little bit about that. But let me say some more, because the first thing the church is supposed to do is to trust in the vine, find its identity in the vine. But secondly, it needs to bear fruit, which means it needs to show signs of life. It needs to have evidence of its profession. And if you look back in verse one, Jesus goes on and he says this, he says,

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit.”

To help you see what he says here, a vinedresser is another word for a gardener, or one who takes care of the vine. We would call them landscapers today. And the idea here is that Jesus is the vine and the Father is the one who landscapes him or landscapes his people. We just saw clippers there a moment ago. The Father is the one who holds the clippers. Because verse two says, “Those who do not bear fruit he takes away and those who bear fruit he prunes so that they will be even more fruitful.” And we'll talk about the pruning here in a moment. But if you notice, Jesus says there's two types of branches here. Two types of people who connect themselves to the vine or the church, the live ones and the dead ones. That's a little terrifying to read that. But the ones who are really part of it and the ones who aren't. And the idea here is that the dead ones were never really part of it to begin with. They're just hanging on. So the Father comes in and he takes them away. There'll be a day when he'll stop playing games. A lot of people play games when they come to church. They fake it, they pretend. The day is gonna come when it's all gonna stop. Because like it is now, gardeners in the first century, they'd go through a plant and cut off all the branches that would take away the life from the plant. They would pull out the clippers and snip, snip, snip and cut, cut, cut and throw all the debris into a pile and burn it. In a similar way, Jesus says that my Father will do that with his vine. He will take away all the dead branches. In the words of verse six, “he will gather them up and burn them,” which is a reference to hell. A place of eternal burning.

And if you're wondering what he's going to look at to do that, Jesus says, “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, he takes away.” He will look at their fruit. He won't look at their words only. He won't look at their profession only. He'll look at their fruit. It's been said the proof is in the pudding. And the rubber has to meet the road somewhere. It's the same way with this because God's not asking you to do something amazing here, he just wants you to look like you're part of the vine. Because that's what he's going to look at on Judgment Day. And just so there's no misunderstanding on this, this is a passage that's caused a lot of fear in a lot of hearts. It's made a lot of people tremble. Because we all fall short of this, amen? I mean, nobody does everything they're supposed to do in the Christian life.

So maybe to clarify a few things here, this is not about perfection. This is about direction. God doesn't expect you to be perfect in order to go to heaven. Because if that were the case, nobody would. We'd all be lost. This is about where you're going. This is about the trajectory of your life. Are you becoming more and more of a godly person as the days go on? We could also add, this is not about failing, either. It's not about whether you mess up or not,



because we all mess up. This is about what you do afterwards. Because the idea is not that you don't fail. The idea here is not that you never fail. But when you do fail, you keep going. It's not that you never sinned, but when you do sin, you turn back to Christ. You keep trusting in the vine. In fact, the sins in your life need to take you closer to the vine. They need to draw you nearer to Jesus. This is important because I've talked to people who've said that they don't know if they're saved, and it bothers them. To which I've said, that's good. It needs to bother you. If it doesn't bother you, you're lost. But the fact that it bothers you, it could be a work of grace in your heart. I've talked to other people that say, they're not sure if they're Christian because they don't have a dramatic conversion. They didn't have some Damascus Road experience where the light came down and everything turned around in a flash of light. Well, that's okay. Because Jesus says, Are you producing fruit? That's what he wants to know. That's all he cares about here. Is your life showing evidence now?

That's what the church needs to be telling people. We need to be reminding them of this. God wants you to persevere in that. It's been said that the one fruit you can't fake is the fruit of perseverance. You can't pretend for the long haul. Now, I've heard it said like this, you know, I may still struggle with the same sins I did when I first got saved. But I don't struggle with them in the same way. Because by the grace of God, he's changing me. I'm still proud, I'm still arrogant, I'm still angry, all those things, but not like I used to be. That's what this is saying here. The disciples were a great example of this, right? I mean, they sinned all the time. They failed miserably. But they changed. The same 12 guys you read about in the gospels, they're different in the book of Acts. Because they were part of the vine.

Which brings us to another point to look at in this passage. And this is the most uncomfortable one, if it hasn't been uncomfortable for you yet. This is a difficult one. But what is the mission of the church? It needs to trust in the vine. It needs to bear fruit. But thirdly, it needs to help people get pruned. And it gives me chills saying that. I get a little shudder. But the third thing that church is supposed to be doing in this text is it's supposed to help people get pruned, which means it needs to help them suffer. The church isn't here just to entertain people; it's here to help them bleed. And if you look in verse two, this is what it says. It says,

Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

You know, it might help at this point for you to see some of the context for this. So if you would hold your finger in chapter 15, and turn back to chapter 13, verse one, it tells you what was going on in the life of the disciples when he said this. But in chapter 13, verse one, it says, this is when this occurred,

Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come that he would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper...

So that's when this occurs. During the Last Supper, or John calls it the Feast of the Passover. The northern Jews ate the Passover feast on Thursday night, and the southern Jews ate it on Friday morning, because of the large number of lambs they had to kill. They had to kill like 100,000 lambs, every Passover. It was just a bloodbath. It was terrible carnage, and they couldn't even fit them all into the temple at the same time. And so that's how they divided it up. So on Thursday night, Jesus has this meal with his disciples. And on the next day, Friday morning, as the lambs are being slain for the southern Jews, he dies for the sin of the world. I mean, talk about perfect timing. Everything was perfect. But that means this is a very sober setting here that you're reading. Because the disciples are about to suffer. They're about to experience the worst time in their lives because the Messiah is going to be hung on a cross, and they're going to watch it or run away. And so Jesus, to help them with that, says here, that "every branch that bears fruit, my father prunes, so that it may bear even more fruit." They're about to be pruned. He talks about pruning. Very fitting.

And the word prune is an interesting word. It's the word *kathairō* in Greek, which means to clean something, to go through a plant and clean off all the dead wood. In fact, it's actually the same word that's used for clean in verse three. So this could be translated, "Every branch that bears fruit, he cleans or prunes, so that it may bear more fruit. You were already clean or pruned, because of the word which I spoke to you." Same word in both instances. So for the previous branches in verse two, the Father takes them away and prunes them. He destroys the whole thing. But for these branches, he only takes away the useless part and cleans it. And so you can see what he's talking about here.

I came across a good description of this in one of the commentaries I read, so I want to read this to you. This is one scholar's explanation of what you're seeing here. He says, "Gardening consists primarily of pruning. In pruning a vine, two principles are generally observed. First, all dead wood must be removed, and then second, the live wood must be drastically cut back. Dead wood harbours insects and disease and may cause the vine to rot. And so it must be trimmed back in order to prevent such heavy growth that the health of the vine is in jeopardy. Vineyards in places like Israel looked like a collection of barren, bleeding stumps in the spring, but in the fall, they were filled with luxuriant fruit. So as a farmer wields his pruning knife, so God prunes His saints. He cuts dead wood out from among them, and he often cuts back the live wood so far that his methods seem cruel and bloody, but from those who have suffered the most, there often comes the greatest amount of fruitfulness."

That was well said, wasn't it? You guys can testify to this. If I asked you what has brought you close to the Lord, you would say the pain did it, right? The suffering. If I said, what helps you pray harder or worship harder, you would say, it was the time in the hospital. I met with a lady this week who was dying. She's on bed rest, she only has so much time to live. And she said, I've never felt so close to God. Well, this is why. The pruning draws you nearer to the Father. It makes the fruit better in your life. Verse three actually sheds a lot of light on this too when it says,

You are already cleaned because of the word which I spoke to you.

So it's the Word that does the cleaning. I heard it said that the trials are the handle, the Word is the knife, and the Father is the one taking it where it needs to go. And he takes it here and there. He cuts you in this place and in that place. But the process never ends. These disciples had heard Jesus preach a lot at this point in their ministry. They'd been around him for years. And so they'd heard a lot of his word. And it cleaned them off. But Jesus says here, the process isn't over yet. It's the same way with you. The pruning continues.

This is not about whether you suffer or not because lost people suffer. It's not about whether you go through hard times because unbelievers go through hard times, but they don't get pruned. You do. It doesn't bring them closer to God. But that happens when you're saved. And it's the church's job to help people with that. In fact, this is one of the reasons I think our church has grown a lot in the past year or so. We've had so many visitors because we've gone through a hard time as a society. Amen? I mean, it's been said that if 2020 were a hula hoop, it would be made out of barbed wire because it just cuts you everywhere. I mean, everywhere the year turned, it just sliced you. And in times like that people have questions, and it drives them back to the Bible. They came here to hear the Word of God. In fact, I haven't told you this before because I didn't want you to stone me. But I was actually excited when the Coronavirus started because I knew it would do this in your life. It would drive you back to the Bible. Catastrophes do that. They make Bible readers out of all of us. And that's why this passage is saying. Trials are given to us to draw us closer to God. This shoots a hole in the prosperity gospel, doesn't it? It obliterates all the stuff you see in the health and wealth movement because it says there are times when the Lord takes your health and wealth away. Not just the devil, but the Lord does that. But he does it so you'll focus on him. He wants to take away all the driftwood. He wants to take away all the trash.

Which brings us to one more point to consider this morning that kind of brings all this together. Just to review these other ones, the first thing the church is supposed to be doing in this passage is to trust in the vine. It needs to believe in it with all its heart so it doesn't get distracted. It also needs to bear fruit as well. It needs to show signs

of life. That's such a sad thing to talk about because the church is full of people that don't do that. They're like the walking dead among us spiritually. But this says that we need to have life in us. We need to bear fruit. Third, the church needs to help people get pruned. And then fourth, this one kind of brings it all, ties it all off. And that is, it needs to help you abide in Christ. A fourth thing that church is supposed to be doing in this passage on the vine is it needs to help you abide in Christ, which means that it needs to help you stay close to him. That's the point in this whole passage. This passage starts with Christ, and it ends with Christ. It begins with him and it ends with him. And if you look down in verse four, Jesus says this, he says,

“Abide in Me and I and you, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me.”

And skipping ahead a little bit, if you look down in verse six, it says the same thing again. He says,

“If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away.”

And then in verse seven,

“If you abide in Me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

And then down in verse 10,

“If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.”

I didn't read all of that for the sake of time. But if you want to go back through this passage, you'll see the word “abide” mentioned nine times in here. Over and over again, Jesus says, “Abide in me.” “Abide in me.” “Abide in me.” Why? Because you can't produce fruit if you don't. Because apart from me, you can do nothing. You'll dry up and die. Because you'll be thrown away and that type of thing. But the point is, you have to stay with Christ. And this is important, because if you remember the context here, the disciples are about to leave him, right? They're about to go away. At the cross, they all left him, but John. And so Jesus is reminding there here, that if you want to be saved, you have to come back. If you want to go to heaven, you can't stay away forever. Because if you put it this way, Judas left Jesus and the disciples left Jesus. Judas abandoned him and they abandoned him, but the disciples came back. And that's how you know they were saved. They failed, and he failed. But they repented.

In fact, if you want to just take the case of Peter for a second, Peter failed Jesus miserably here, because he didn't just do it once. He did it three times, in the worst way imaginable. I mean, he denied Jesus when Jesus was on trial. But the next time you see him in the Bible, he's running to the empty tomb. He's, like, going as fast as he can. Why? Because he came back. He was abiding. That's what you have to do if you want to be a Christian. I meet people who wrestle with this, because they tell me they don't feel like a Christian because they struggle with sin so much. But what this is saying is, it's not about whether you struggle or not. You just need to abide. It's not about whether you fail. We all do that. It's about whether you stay with the vine. And the way this applies to the church is that because of this principle, you have to have a long-term perspective on the church. You don't get quick results. Maybe sometimes you do, but most of the time you don't. Because it takes people a long time, to abide with Christ, to wrestle with sin, to battle with it, and to come back.

And some of you remember, in the spring of 2020, we took several men to the Shepherd's Conference in California. And at the end of the conference, I asked the men what they had learned, and I wrote it on a whiteboard for them. I've learned at those conferences, if you don't do something like that, it all kind of becomes wasted. People don't remember things. And so they told me, they learned that the church needs to focus on faithful preaching and theological training. It needs to focus on producing godly Christians and being ambassadors of Christ. It needs to have a passion for the Lord and a commitment to Scripture. And I wrote all that



down on the board. And afterwards, I drew a line to the bottom and I said, You know what all those things have in common? Longevity. They can't be accomplished in a short amount of time. You can't do all that for three days at a conference. It takes much longer than that. And that's what Jesus is referring to here. It takes a long time to abide. It takes a long time to remain with someone. So the church needs to have that perspective. It's been said ministry isn't measured in years. It's measured in decades. You see the results in a lifetime. It's the same way in the Christian life. We've had people leave our church because they were offended at something, only to come back later on, because they saw it in Scripture. They discovered it for themselves. And we've had other people walk away during a crisis, during a hard time, to come back as well. But you have to give them time to do that. You have to be patient in the ministry, to give them time to abide.

Several months ago, someone showed me a biography of John Patton. He was a missionary to the Hebrides Islands off the coast of New Guinea. And his story was a good example of this, because they found out that before he got there, 100 missionaries had died trying to bring the gospel to those people. They counted it up years later. But 100 of them had been killed by cannibals. The islands were inhabited by man-eating people. So these missionaries would come in and get killed. And then another wave would come in, then another wave, until finally John Patton came and he established a church. But they did that because they understood what Jesus is saying here. Our goal is not to do something temporary. We're here to do something eternal. And so if we fail in the first wave, that's okay, because we come back again. If we don't get it the first time, we keep going, because we understand we're involved in something bigger than that.

You know, I often think about what we're doing in this tent, and it seems so small sometimes, doesn't it? It all seems so tiny. I mean, how are we going to make an impact on the world? But when I think about that, I'm reminded of what Jesus says here. You can do it if you're faithful, and you abide. So will you do that today? Let me pray that you would, and that Christ would be glorified in the work of his church. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the passage that we've read this morning, and the things that we've had a chance to meditate on concerning your vine. These are deep things and they're things that are too wonderful for us to know. And anytime we talk about a passage like this one, we're scratching surfaces. But Lord, it's such a refreshing reminder of what we're supposed to be focusing on today. And I do pray for our church, Lord, that we would be people that want to produce good fruit. That our goals would not be to chase after the latest trends or the frivolous stuff, but that we would keep our mind focused on Christ, and what he's called us to do. Lord, thank you for such a savior. Thank you for one who would be patient with us when we fail and would take us back over and over and over again, just like you did with the disciples. And Lord, I pray if there's any here today who are struggling with this, with their works, with their life, with the evidence in it, that you would remind them that you are a kind and compassionate God, and if they have failed, you will take them back if they repent. And would you encourage them in that this morning? If there's any who are lost and they're not part of the vine, would this be an encouragement for them to open their eyes and take that seriously today. Would you be glorified in the remainder of our morning? We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.