

Jesus Is the Real Life-Giver

Pastor Dave set us up very well last week. It's like the perfect pass in basketball that leads to an easy slam dunk. Some of the truths of John 15 Jesus stated in John 14 but in different terms. Thank you, Dave, for the perfect pass.

Before we dive in chapter 15 of John's gospel, I want to tell you about a pastor I know. This pastor preached faithfully about 47 or 48 Sundays a year, for many years. He counseled, led Bible studies, visited people in their homes and in the local nursing homes. He conducted funerals and weddings. He served on a committee to address homelessness in his area. He helped to teach and lead AWANA on Wednesday nights. He served on the church board and did several other things.

Something you would not know about this pastor is that he was running on empty, like the daring driver who drives into the gas station with just enough gasoline to make it to the pump.

After a few years of this exhausting and empty lifestyle, this pastor hit bottom. Depression kicked in hard, consuming the little joy he had left in life. He came to a place where, unknown to his wife, his church people, or his friends, he was contemplating suicide. He had a plan and was often thinking about that plan, dreaming about it at times. Then this pastor saw a light at the end of the tunnel, and it was not an oncoming train. It was hope. It was the beginning of restoration of joy, peace, and spiritual life, and the fruit that accompanies that renewal.

I want to talk with you this morning about life, real life, abundant life, the life that only Jesus can give, the kind and quality of life only Jesus can give. John begins this chapter by quoting a very important statement that Jesus made about himself. It is another "I am" statement, another indicator of his true nature and mission. Jesus said:

"I am the true vine... (v. 1)"

Jesus is the true life-giving vine.

In the Old Testament, Israel was the vine, planted by God, but Israel proved to be a faulty vine. Listen to the words of the prophet Isaiah who describes the kind of vine that the nation of Israel proved to be.

Isaiah 5:1-7

"Let me sing for my beloved
my love song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.

² He dug it and cleared it of stones,

and planted it with choice vines;
 he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
 and hewed out a wine vat in it;
 and he looked for it to yield grapes,
 but it yielded wild grapes.
³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem
 and men of Judah,
 judge between me and my vineyard.
⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard,
 that I have not done in it?
 When I looked for it to yield grapes,
 why did it yield wild grapes?
⁵ And now I will tell you
 what I will do to my vineyard.
 I will remove its hedge,
 and it shall be devoured;
 I will break down its wall,
 and it shall be trampled down.
⁶ I will make it a waste;
 it shall not be pruned or hoed,
 and briers and thorns shall grow up;
 I will also command the clouds
 that they rain no rain upon it.
⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
 is the house of Israel,
 and the men of Judah
 are his pleasant planting;
 and he looked for justice,
 but behold, bloodshed;
 for righteousness,
 but behold, an outcry!"

By declaring that He is the true vine, Jesus was saying that He is the true Son of God who has been faithful and obedient to the Father, and is the One who gives life, unlike the nation of Israel who were supposed to be the vine planted by God to offer life to all nations but instead proved to be the disobedient vine. Jesus was saying that He is the One sent by the Father to give real life to all His followers.

When we come into this faith relationship with Jesus, He gives us life eternal and abundant.

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly (or to the full) (John 10:10)."

Jesus can do that for us because He is the true vine, the true life-giving vine planted by the Vinedresser/Farmer, God himself. And when Jesus has given us this kind of life, He expects evidence of it to come from us. Jesus expects fruit or evidence of His life in us, the branches.

“Every branch in me (i.e. followers of Jesus) that does not bear fruit he takes away (to lift up or lift up and take away) and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes (to prune in order to remove unclean material), that it may bear more fruit.” **REFERENCE?**

Coming into true life in Jesus is a life transformation. If we think of Moses as the law giver, then we can think of Jesus as the life giver. When you and I come into this life in Jesus through faith, there will be evidence of this transformative new life. In fact, Jesus expects this evidence of life transformation. The theologian Boltzmann writes that the fruit mentioned here by Jesus is “. . . every demonstration of vitality of faith . . . Reciprocal love above all belongs.”

“By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples (v. 8).”

Did you catch that? You and I prove that we have experienced this transformation from death into life, and we give evidence to the fact that we are Jesus’s disciples, when our lives are full of the fruit or evidence of Jesus’s life in us. Jesus later in this passage says to His followers:

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide (v. 16).”

May God rescue us from the idea that Jesus saved us only for a life in heaven without any expectation that there will be evidence of that eternal and abundant life here and now! What is the nature of the fruit that Jesus expects to see in our lives here and now? Peter picked up on this in his second letter where he wrote:

2 Peter 1: 5-8

“Make every effort to supplement (or add to) your faith with **virtue**, and virtue with **knowledge**,⁶ and knowledge with **self-control**, and self-control with **steadfastness**, and steadfastness with **godliness**,⁷ and godliness with **brotherly affection (the brother or sister type of love)**, and brotherly affection with **love (self-sacrificing love)**.⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, **they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.**”

This is what true faith in Jesus brings about. It brings about the evidence of that transformation. Are these things evident in your life? Is there the evidence of Christ-like virtue (moral excellence), knowledge of God, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love, in you?

Jesus is not playing games with stuff that inhibits fruit in our lives.

Jesus said, "... every branch that does bear fruit he (the Father) prunes. This word "prune" is the word from which we get our English word "catharsis" which means to make something clean. Jesus comforted His disciples with these words, "You are already clean (same word as in v. 2) because of the word I have spoken to you (v. 3)."

The disciples didn't need to be pruned or made clean at that point because Jesus had given them God's word and they had received it for what it is and obeyed it. Pruning in our life means to have God cut away stuff that stops our growth toward spiritual maturity. Pruning is like the discipline God uses to deal with stuff in our lives that is not helpful to us or pleasing to Him.

Shortly after I came to trust in Jesus, I realized that I had to make things right with people whom I had hurt. I knew this was not going to be easy, but I also knew that I was under conviction by the Word of God and the Spirit of God. The Lord was doing some pruning in my life. I made a list of those I knew I had wronged, and one by one I went to them and confessed the wrong I had done to them and asked for their forgiveness. As I look back on that time in my life, I see that the Father was pruning some stuff from my life to make me a cleaner branch.

Our Father in heaven is a good vinedresser or farmer. He sees the stuff in our lives that needs to be pruned so that we can be more fruitful. It might not feel good at the time, but it is oh so very necessary. Is there anything in your life that you know is not helpful or healthy in terms of your life in Jesus?

How do we go about seeing our life full of fruit?

Jesus reveals the key to being fruitful.

"Abide (remain or stay) in me and I (will abide) in you (v. 4)."

"As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me (v.4)."

This is the practical illustration of what Jesus meant in the first part of verse 4. This gives some clarity to the idea of abiding or remaining in Jesus. We are invited into this abiding relationship with Him, and Jesus promises that He will abide in us.

"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 (v. 5)."

Is this not clear enough for you? Do you feel like Jesus needs to make this clearer? Okay. Here it comes!

"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 (v. 10)."

"These things I command you, so that you will love one another (v. 17)."

Jesus moves from illustration to spiritual application, referring again to Himself as the vine and His disciples as the branches. Jesus was in effect saying, “I am the One who connects you to the Father who is the life-giving source for the vine”.

As we stay connected to Jesus by trusting in Him, obeying Him, and loving Him, we are bearing spiritual fruit. The one who is separated from Jesus cannot produce fruit or evidence of this close connection to Jesus because—like the branch that has been picked up and thrown away from the vine—the person who is separated from Jesus is dead spiritually. When we are abiding in Jesus, our life will be full of the evidence of real faith, working itself out in obedience. Apart from that faith, however, we can do nothing. That is right. Nothing. Jesus said, “the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.”

What if we aren’t connected to Jesus and His life is not really in us? What happens to us if we are just playing a religious game and faking it?

Jesus gives a stiff warning.

“If anyone does not abide (remain) in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned (v. 6).”

Jesus goes back into illustration mode, illustrating His spiritual point with a vine dressing reality. The branch that does not stay connected to the vine is going to die, and when it dies it will be thrown into the fire because it is dead. Is Jesus talking about dead wood and a bonfire, or is He talking about spiritual separation from Him and eternal punishment? Jesus is using the metaphor of a dead branch and the vinedresser’s bonfire to illustrate a spiritual point.

Jesus warns that if there is no evidence of life transformation, the fruitless branch will be taken away. Is it possible for you or me to be taken away? If there is no fruit or evidence of the life-transforming presence of Jesus, no evidence of real faith or trust in Jesus in our lives and flowing out of us, then the answer is yes. If there is no evidence of Jesus’s life in you, then you are dead like a dead branch of a vine that produces no fruit. The farmer takes it away and gets rid of it because it is dead.

When your day of reckoning comes and you are found to be a counterfeit and not truly one who has the transformative life of Jesus in you, there is going to be a reckoning with God and there will be no more time to fake it.

Jesus himself said this:

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

We can fake it and play a phony religious game and fool people, but you can’t fool the all-seeing, all-knowing God.

You might be thinking, “Hey Jim, I thought that the gospel is good news, but this sounds like bad news.” Don’t shut down yet. The good news is coming!

Jesus makes a wonderful promise.

“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you (v. 7).”

Do these words, this promise seem familiar to you? They should. Jesus made a very similar promise in the previous chapter.

“Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it (John 14: 13, 14).”

Living a fruitful life of intimacy with Jesus means open and honest communication with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. When we align our will with the will of God and align our prayers with God’s will, He hears us and grants us what He knows is the best for us and in line with His will. Does this mean that we get everything we ask for, like a spoiled little child? No! This means that we receive what we ask for when we ask according to God’s will.

There is more good news!

“⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.” **REFERENCE?**

“¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers (1 John 3:16).”

Let’s pause right there for a minute. Did you hear the statement Jesus just made? As the heavenly Father loved Jesus, in the same way Jesus loved you. Jesus, the eternal Son of God who lived with the Father in eternity past came into this world, took on flesh, hung out with us, and became fully human and yet fully divine. He became a servant for us; He suffered for us; He died for us; He rose from the grave for us; He was exalted to the right hand of the Father for us; He is preparing a place for us in the Father’s house; and one day He is coming back to take us to be with Him. If that isn’t good news, then I don’t know what is. Jesus loves us. This we know for the Bible tells us so.

What do we need to do now?

“¹⁰ 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.”

“¹² This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

“¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”

And when we are obeying the commands of Jesus, what does He promise?

“¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

“¹⁵No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.”

As we are abiding in Jesus, abiding in His love, and abiding in His word, Crosspoint is and will continue to be a community filled and flowing with that life-giving presence and blessing which is the love of God, the grace of God, the mercy of God, the kindness of God, and the goodness of God. We will be more and more like Jesus toward each other and toward our community and in this God will be glorified. Amen!

Conclusion: Are you a healthy branch of the true vine who is Jesus? Are his life and love evidenced in your life? Are you bearing the fruit of faith, joyful obedience, and love for God and the people around you?

Crosspoint is not a religious club where as long as you have your membership card you are an insider. This is the Church, the body of Christ. He is our life. Without Him we are dead men walking. True Jesus followers abide in the vine, that is they stay close to Jesus, follow Him, obey Him and love Him.

Do you remember that pastor I mentioned to you at the beginning of the message? That was me. I was that pastor. I stopped abiding in Jesus, in His word, in His perfect love for me, and instead I just kept working for Him, more like a servant than a friend and the lover of my soul.

My friends, don't go there! Don't follow that path of religious performance without abiding in Jesus, the true vine. And if that is the path you are on, please stop the religious game that is so deadly and come to or come back to abiding in Jesus. Obey Jesus! Love Jesus and the people around you. It really is just that simple.