

## Children's Moment

May 17, 2015

**Title:** Apart from Jesus you can do nothing

**Object:** Two branches from a tree: 1 withering with leaves and 1 with no leaves

**Scripture:** “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.” (John 15:5)

Recently I was working in the yard and I found this tree branch dying. As you can see, the leaves have all started to wither and die. I also found this branch nearby. As you can see, there are no leaves at all. It is completely dead. In fact, I wouldn't even call it a branch; I would call it a stick.

Do you think that if I took these branches out into the yard and planted them in the ground and watered them they would come back to life? No, that wouldn't work, because the branches get the nutrients that they need to live from the tree.

Branches cannot live or grow without the tree. Without the tree, there will never be leaves on the branches. If the branch comes from a fruit tree, there will never be fruit on the branch if it is separated from the tree. If I take this dead branch and plant it in the ground and water it, it won't come back to life, it will just be an old stick in the mud.

That same thing is true about our life with Jesus. Listen to what Jesus said, “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 we keep our life connected to Jesus, we will grow. Our life will produce beautiful leaves and delicious fruit. But if we are separated from Jesus, our leaves will wither and die and we will never put forth any fruit.

What will your life be? Will you be a beautiful branch on the tree...or will you just be a stick in the mud?

Dear Jesus, help us to remember that apart from you, we can do nothing. Amen.

John 15:5-7

**Abide In Me**

Last week we looked at the beginning of Jesus' parable about the vine and branches. We learned God removes detrimental things from a Christian's life. God strips away bad habits, sins and reorders our priorities, our values and changes the way we see the world. He gives us a heart of service to bear fruit for the kingdom. All followers of Jesus Christ must be fruitful. Just as a branch that does not bear fruit is worthless, so too anyone claiming to be a Christian that does not bear fruit for the kingdom is of little value. Jesus says in John 15:5, "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." Without Christ all is lost – with Christ all is possible.

What is vine wood good for other than to bear fruit or grapes? It cannot be used for lumber – it is gnarled and twisted and has little structural strength. It is not even good to burn for heat for it lasts only a little longer than paper. Rabbis forbade the use of Olive and Grape Vine wood for the altar fires in the Temple. Olive trees were too precious and Grape vine wood was of little value for burning.

This is the same thought the Lord gave to Ezekiel concerning Israel. Turn to Ezekiel chapter 15. Israel was no longer living faithfully to God, so God responds saying, Jerusalem is a useless vine, reading from Ezekiel 15 beginning in verse 1, "And the word of the LORD came to me: **2** 'Son of man, how does the wood of the vine surpass any wood, the vine branch that is among the trees of the forest? **3** Is wood taken from it to make anything? Do people take a peg from it to hang any vessel on it?"

**4** Behold, it is given to the fire for fuel. When the fire has consumed both ends of it (meaning it burns very fast), and the middle of it is charred, is it useful for anything?

**5** Behold, when it was whole, it was used for nothing. How much less, when the fire has consumed it and it is charred, can it ever be used for anything! **6** Therefore thus says the Lord God: Like the wood of the vine among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so have I given up the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

**7** And I will set my face against them. Though they escape from the fire, the fire shall yet consume them, and you will know that I am the LORD, when I set my face against them. **8** And I will make the land desolate, because they have acted

faithlessly, declares the Lord God.'" This is the image Jesus is invoking here in His parable recorded by John. Without Jesus as the Vine providing spiritual

nourishment our souls are like the useless vine branch wood or desolate spiritual

land. The question that you and I must deal with is are we joined to or abiding in

Christ faithfully? Is He our Vine, our source of life? Are we useful to Jesus? Or are

we a sucker branch that takes from the vine but bears no fruit? A sucker branch

must be cut away for the health of the vine and this enables the vine to produce

more fruit. These are the questions that lay before us this morning. Lets look at

what it means to abide in Christ.

## ***PRAY***

### **Abiding In Christ**

John 15, verse six reads, "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." Here we find the phrase "he is thrown away" or some translations say, "he is cut off." This is the negative, but I want to begin with the positive. The positive is

abiding in Christ and this is the main point of chapter 15 of John. The word “abide” occurs ten times between verses 4 to 10 and shows Jesus is hammering home His point of the importance of abiding in Him. Verse 6 speaks about what happens if we fail to abide in Christ, but how can we understand this failure if we first do not understand what it means to abide in Christ?

First, abiding in Christ is for Christians or for those who are already in Christ. So, Christ’s challenge in these verses is for Christians. The dictionary defines “Christian” very simply, “a person who believes in Jesus Christ and follows his teachings.” Does this define you? If so, then the teaching this morning applies to you. If not, nothing will make sense until you come to know Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

The second point Jesus is driving home is the act of abiding. Jesus is saying it is a conscious decision and a choice for a Christian to live a Christian life and abide in Christ. To abide in Christ a Christian makes a conscious decision to expose themselves to Christ and this is done through the study of the Bible, the preaching of God’s Word and being part of a community that has the same goal of abiding in Christ. To abide in Christ one must also work at staying in contact with Him and this is done through communication in prayer. To abide also means one makes a decision to submit to the Holy Spirit and let God direct their life. When we are in charge we make a mess of things. Have you ever noticed the more you try to control the events and the environment and the people in your life the more things get out of kilter? We must choose to abide in Christ and this decision will affect our ability to know the peace of Christ as well.

In America we like to think of ourselves as “self-made” and “independent”, but this is unbiblical. We not only belong to Christ but also to His church and the church is

the people abiding in Christ. So your conscious decision to abide in Christ not only affects you, but those around you. Look around you – your life affects the ability of these brothers and sisters to live holy and abide in Christ. You are either - supporting and helping others to abide in Christ or you are a hindrance – there is no neutral ground. The Church of Christ or the Body of Christ or Community of Christ is called by Jesus to share our life experiences, to bear each other’s burdens, confess our sins, help each other overcome our weaknesses, sharing in fellowship, praying together, laughing and crying together. Does this describe Canyon Bible? Does this sound like your life?

The Apostle Paul, the great missionary and church planter knew well what Jesus hoped for His Church. Please turn to Philippians chapter 2. Many of Paul’s letters were instructions to these new creations – the New Testament Church of Jesus Christ. Paul established the Philippian church on his second missionary journey around 50 AD. He wrote this letter to them from his imprisonment in Rome about 10 years later giving important instruction of how we as Christians we should be humble in whom we are in Christ. Beginning in verse 1 of chapter 2, “If then there is any encouragement in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, 2 fulfill my joy by thinking the same way, having the same love, sharing the same feelings, focusing on one goal. 3 Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. 4 Everyone should look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” (Philippians 2:1-4) We have no hope of doing these things without Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls us to abide in Him. How are we doing in placing Jesus above all in this world? Do we have our priorities right – Jesus first, then spouse, then children, then those in our community of Christ

and finally ourselves?

There is a third point concerning abiding found in verse 7, **“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”** This point is peppered throughout John’s gospel and the idea of abiding has been building as we approached chapter 15. Jesus says, **“my words abide in you.”** For a Christian to experience the words of Jesus abiding in them, experience the love of Jesus and be able to express His love to others one must first abide in Christ. The evidence of having the words of Christ abide in you is your being obedient to His commandments. Look back at chapter 14 of John. Jesus makes this point in verse 23 saying, **“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”** We saw in Ezekiel that God turned away from Israel because they quit loving Him because they quit living His Word. Jesus brought this very thought forward in His parable, look at verse 3, **“Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.”** Why is a person clean? Because of the Word of God cleans them and they have made the decision to embrace it and live it.

I hear Americans say they can have Christ and they can be Christian without the doctrines of Christ. No! A thousand times No! They cannot be obedient to Christ without being part of His Church. Again the answer is a resounding “No!” The Church, at times, is difficult because there are so many sinners in it. But, you cannot be Christian as defined by Christ without His Church! Some people like the idea of Jesus, but they shy away from His teachings. They want to pick and choose what they want from the scriptures. This is impossible for a Christian. Jesus has clearly said He will not come and abide in anyone who does not keep His commandments. We cannot separate Christ from His Word – for Christ is His Word! How dare people

call Jesus Christ their Lord and Master and not do as He says and reject the truth He teaches! As the theologian John Morris said, “If thou will not have Christ and his words, neither will he have thee nor thy words.”

### **Abiding Not In Christ**

We are encouraged by Christ’s promise to abide in us and this brings us purpose and peace. But in the midst of this great encouragement Jesus speaks of the opposite possibility that we can choose to not heed His calling and His abiding and not abide in Him. Verse 6 is clear, look in your Bible and read with me and tremble, “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.” The whole of the scriptures teaches that one who is truly saved cannot lose his salvation, thus the language of this verse is difficult. Please look at the verse again. Jesus says that failing to abide in Him is more than simply failing to produce fruit. Jesus says we will suffer and lose relationship with Him. This verse is not about losing salvation but losing the “abiding” and the “bearing of fruit”. The works that are done when not abiding in Christ are burned up and useless.

Although the imagery of the text may seem to teach the possibility of losing salvation and suffering eternal hell, it is actually teaching about the value of works apart from Christ. The value of the fruit produced is directly related to the nourishment received from abiding in Christ. Jesus is focused in this parable on fruitfulness, not salvation – this is a consistent theme found throughout this section of John.

I believe Lot is an example of what Jesus is addressing. Lot separates from Abraham and not only moves to Sodom, but in moving he begins the process of moving out of

fellowship with God. Lot ceases to bear fruit for the glory of God and his dead works are burned up with Sodom. However, Lot survives.

Works not of Christ are burned, but the Christian survives – should we rejoice at this? Should a Christian relax because if they choose to be fruitless for Christ they escape hell? What a horrible thought! Christ gives His all for our salvation and then gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit, God Himself, to dwell within us. This is not to be taken for granted. Saved but fruitless? Far be it for any Christian to entertain such a low view of Christ and their salvation!

### **Abiding Blessing**

Jesus ends verse 7 with the promise of a great blessing for those who abide in Him. Reading verse seven, “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” Jesus only speaks the truth and He says, “ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” The Creator of the universe will fulfill our requests – amazing!

However Jesus does give three conditions. First, the prayer Jesus promises to answer must be offered in His name. Asking in prayer “in the name of Jesus” means to be consistent with His person and will and that His glory will be displayed. Second, Jesus’ promise to answer prayer is only for those who abide in Him – meaning true believers. God does not obligate Himself to answer the prayers of unbelievers – even though He may choose to do so if it furthers His sovereign purpose and plan. The final condition is that Christ’s “words abide in” the person making the request. The Greek noun  $\rho\tilde{\eta}\mu\alpha$  “*rhēma*” translated as “words” means a complete discourse or the complete conversation or the complete Word of God found in the Bible.

Again, Jesus' promises to answer prayer to give whatever a person asks when the person asks in His name, abides in Him and lives in obedience to God's Word.

Branches of the True Vine have the privilege of abiding in Jesus and drawing spiritual life from Him. As we live holy lives by abiding in Christ, we will bear fruit for His kingdom and bring Him glory. If anyone is not connected to the True Vine, that is Jesus, they may work hard and do good things from the world's perspective, but these works will have no kingdom value and sadly, in the end, will be burned. On the other hand, believers, living holy under the power of the Spirit, will produce the fruit of peace and joy not known by the world. Their focus will be on producing glory for Jesus and because of this, their prayers will be answered.

This is the life I desire, the life I want to achieve by the power of the Holy Spirit. How about you? As a community sharing this desire, we can bring God more glory, produce more fruit, love each other more and serve one another more.

What a great adventure made possible by abiding in Christ! It's the greatest experience a believer can have! I look forward to experiencing this with you, my beloved, my brothers and sisters in Christ.

Amen!