

Fruitful Vine

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Date: 30 September 2012

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[0 : 0 0] Can you turn back with me to John's Gospel Chapter 15? We are looking at faith, well we have been looking last four Sunday mornings at the kind of foundations of faith and what it means in the cost of commitment, haven't we?

We have looked at that, that faith is this amazing friendship with Jesus Christ that is a gift, a gift of grace from Him and we have looked then at the partnership that is involved with that, the partnership of Him coming to live in us and the responsibility and the cost that is involved in that and then last week we looked at the possibilities of faith as well and sorry that was two weeks ago then we looked at some of the warnings that were involved in that and what I want to do today is look at, I actually got that completely wrong, no one noticed, that's fine I am not going to correct you, I was mixing up morning and evening sermons here, sorry we will start again, we are not really, we were talking about faith and its foundations and it shows you there is a great link between the two, I knew that, but today we are going to look at moving from faith, it is a kind of link sermon, we are looking at faith and the privilege of faith and the cost and commitment of faith to looking at how that actually works out because between now and just before Christmas we are going to look at fruit, the fruit of our faith from Galatians really and the different aspects of that fruit and I would like to do it by looking at characters in the Bible who are examples of that and then applying it to our lives, so that is what I would like to do and hope to do and some other people will be preaching on that as well.

But what we are doing is we are looking, what I want to do is look at faith in Christ which is what we have been looking at and then see what that means practically in terms of the outworking of your life and of mine, in other words if I planted an apple tree I wouldn't expect to get bananas from it or potatoes, we expect if we plant an apple tree to get apples as fruit from that tree and so when Christ is planted in our heart as Christians when we have come to faith in Him and receive Him as our life we expect Christ like fruit, okay?

So we are all individuals and we are all unique and we all have our own particular characters but nonetheless we all have to bear Christ like fruit in our lives as well, all of us, wherever we are because if we have been planted with Christ that is the genetic code of our lives, it becomes that we, when we go from this place we become Christ like people and that is really what Jesus is speaking about in this passage.

He calls Himself the true vine and He encourages Christians to and uses that picture to remain in Him so that they can bear Christ like fruit in our lives, a very simple picture.

[3 : 0 1] The vine is a picture that is often used in the Bible, it is a big illustrative point in the Bible and it is used in many different ways but it is linked generally with joy and with blessing and with happiness and with health and with celebration and all that goes with that.

But what I want to look at and it is kind of a little bit of repetition and a little bit of new stuff, looking at the fruit of faith through friendship, okay?

We have looked a little bit before at Jesus as our friend at the first study we did but I am going to look at it again from this passage, I am going to look at a little bit at the fruit of our faith that comes through friendship, friendship with Jesus Christ and also friendship with one another, okay?

That is the theme and that is the way I am going to do that today so please try and stick with that and pray and ask that God will apply it to your own heart and conscience as well. Jesus Christ as our friend, now in verses 13 and 14 of John 15 we have these things, nature love has no one in this that he lay down his life for his friends, you are my friends if you do what I command.

So we have here Jesus saying to all Christians in all time he says I am your friend, it is this description that he gives of this relationship, my faith that we have in him as Christians, he is our friend and that is a title or description of a relationship that we sometimes like don't we?

[4 : 36] I really like Jesus, he is my friend and I like to go yeah Jesus is my friend and we like to use that terminology of Jesus as our friend and it is good, it is biblical, it is right but can I say also that we, I think sometimes we must understand that because we simply think that Jesus is the same kind of friend as the friend I am sitting beside or my best friend that I know and we kind of make the parallel between our best friend and Jesus and we kind of treat them the same way and yet it is not the same kind of friendship, it is friendship but he has astonishingly condescended into our lives by offering friendship.

It's scary to be honest, it's scary that Jesus would say to you that I am your friend when you trust in me, when you put your faith in me, when you receive my grace I'm willing to come into your life and be your friend.

To me that is wonderful and beautiful but scary, it's not just that he is a pal next door, he is God and yet he is willing to be our friend and that's amazing.

I do like the C.S. Lewis, I've used it before, as you know I am a man of few illustrations and the ones I use often because I am not very imaginative and I don't read very much but the ones that I do are great and this is a great one from C.S. Lewis which the guys are going to put up hopefully in the screen and I'm going to read you know it because I've used it before, it's when Lucy is speaking to Mr Beaver and she's asking about Aslan the king and it's just a great way to describe I think in picture what I mean by what I'm saying about him being a friend.

Is he a man, asked Lucy? Aslan a man, said Mr Beaver sternly. Certainly not, I tell you he's the king, he's the king of the wood and the son of the great emperor beyond the sea.

[6 : 26] Don't you know who is the king of beasts? Aslan is a lion, THE lion, the great lion. Oh, said Susan, I thought he was a man, is he quite safe?

I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion. That you will Deary and make no mistake said Mrs Beaver. If there is anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking they are either braver than most or else just silly.

Then isn't he safe, said Lucy? Safe said Mr Beaver. Don't you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you, who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe but he's good.

He's the king I tell you. Now that's what I'm trying to get across in terms of his friendship with him. He's good and he's a great friend but he's not safe because he's God and we mustn't just have him in our back pockets as that kind of image of a friend that we can take or leave or pick up or drop because of who he is.

He is this great God and we are his friend. And he tells us to remain in him in verse 4. He says remain in me and I will remain in you.

[7 : 39] No branch can bear fruit by itself. So we have this great challenge from our great friend and remember we mentioned Jesus, great friend that we have as Christians in the first study and he says remain in me.

And that again, I have to say I'm not going to say new things. I'm sorry I am not. And I think the more that I go on the more I realise that I'm just, I'm repeating a lot of things and I don't know about for you but I know I need to hear these things and they're fresh for me when I'm preparing them so I hope they're fresh for you.

I'm challenged by them but he says in his word remain in me. We, you know you can't be a Christian. You can't be a Christian if Christ remains a stranger to you.

If you're in no relationship with Him, it's simply impossible to be a Christian. It's like a branch that looks like an apple tree branch just lying on its own in the ground and bearing fruit.

It simply won't happen. An apple tree branch on its own will not bear any fruit if it's just lying on the ground. And so we can't bear fruit and be like Christ and be Christians if we're disconnected in our day to day living in an ongoing way from Jesus Christ.

[8 : 59] It's hugely significant what Jesus is saying here. And I can't do it for anyone else and you can't do it for anyone else. It's about our eyeball to eyeball contact with the living God ourselves and for we are in relationship with Him about remaining.

What does it look like when He says remain in me? What does it mean? What does it mean when Jesus says remain in me? I'm sure we have lots of different ideas but He gives us some ideas of what it means. Here in verse 7 He says to us, if you remain in me, He uses the same words, if you remain in me, He says and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you.

So there's two things there. If you remain in me, we are to recognise His words are to be in us. If you remain in me, my words remain in you. Now again in our second sermon we looked at Jesus through Him being declared the word.

The Bible be very important so I'm not going to go over that ground but it is vital isn't it? That our relationship with Jesus and our fruit bearing as Christians is related to our understanding of and our love for and our assimilation of the word into our lives because it is His living word.

You know I think a lot of the times we have a kind of mysterious idea of the spiritual relationship with Jesus. Oh yeah man, Jesus, He's speaking to me here, yeah. I know what He wants in my life.

[10 : 21] It doesn't agree with what the Bible says but yeah I think, yeah I can feel the contact. That's rubbish. I'm not interested in that kind of vague spirituality that has no grounding in God's revelation of Himself because God reveals Himself through His word and His word remains in us.

It moulds our conscience, it moulds our will, it directs our life and that's how we bear fruit. He's given us His word and as some famous person, I don't know who it is, has said and he was referring to John's Gospel in its mystery, you know toddlers can paddle in it and elephants can swim and that's really the reality of God's word.

It's for all ages and stages. Sometimes we need just a simple understanding. Other times we can go as deep as we want and yet we find it feeds us and teaches us.

We know His law, we know His word, it governs our conscience, all that we are. So I say if we are Christian and we want to bear fruit, we can't be living with a closed Bible as a way of life as Christians.

Our Bible needs to be open, doesn't it? Because the living word of God needs to be. It has to be open when we're living with Jesus Christ. As does prayer, need to be part of our lives.

[11 : 42] He says you know in verse 7 there in the same bit, He says if you remain in me, my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you. Jesus is referring to prayer and it's linked to the word.

It's linked to remaining in the word of God and so our prayer life, sometimes you think the prayer life is the kind of real spiritual thing. That's when we're friends with Jesus and the Bible, well that's the kind of gritty, theological doctrinal bit that's miserable.

I don't think it should be like that. A reading of that living word when God speaks to us through it is what stimulates and motivates our prayer life and enables us to ask and know what to pray for.

So we have this recognition that we will begin to pray in God's will when we are opening God's word and that is where we remain in Him and bear fruit. He is King and we ask and we ask for friends and we plead for people we love and we ask for impossibilities and we're longing for miracles and all of that comes out in our prayer life with Him or ought to as we seek to remain in Him.

So there's the word and you could have given this sermon because it's absolutely not new. You know all these things. I've repeated them ad nauseum, prayer, the word and then obedience.

[12 : 59] Abedience is the other description of how we can remain in Jesus. Are you struggling today to remain in Christ? Are you thinking of giving up? Is that a real slog?

Then can I ask you to consider these things in your life? Prayer, the word and obedience. See in verse 10 he says, if you obey my commands again, he uses the same language, you will remain in my love.

You will remain. How do you abide in me? How do you remain in me? He uses, he's wanting to link what he's saying by using the same words. So he uses remaining in me again and what he says is you remain in me.

If you obey what I command, then you will remain in my love just as I have obeyed the Father's commands and remain in His love. So Jesus says obedience. Why?

Because he obeyed and he was perfect and he wants us not only to follow his example but recognize his Lordship. He wasn't just obeying to be an example. He was obeying to be our substitute.

[14 : 02] He was obeying to do what we can't do. But I wonder if obedience today in the society we live in and the way that our mindset is going and the way we're taught in schools and everything else and the kind of general anti-authoritarianism that there is in the world, whether obedience is really the ugly sister that we don't talk about in church.

We don't mention, if someone wants to become a Christian, we better not mention obedience because they might not stick around. They might not keep going. We just want to tell them that Jesus is our friend.

But don't make this demand of obedience because it seems so legalistic. There's obedience to troublesome cousin that we don't like bringing out in the Christian family, but only if we don't understand grace.

Because grace recognizes that Jesus is obeyed and lived this perfect life where he fulfilled all the commands of God because it was the best and it was a good life. And he did that in order to be a perfect Savior for us so that we can come with his grace and live in obedience to Jesus Christ because that is to the Father's glory and it's for our good.

You know, his commands are good. That's why he asks us to follow. That's why he's not just an ordinary friend. I don't know if you are in any kind of friendship with someone that you would unconditionally obey.

[15 : 30] I hope not. I hope you're not in any friendship or indeed in any marriage because that's not the kind of friendship that we want and look for in life. But here is the living God and he's Jesus Christ.

He's the picture of Aslan. Yeah, he is not safe. And he demands, because of his lordship and his perfection and his work of grace, he commands that we follow him, that we are his disciples and that we obey him.

I find myself making apologies for obedience all the time as if it's, you know, it's just for the one or two. It's for the really special kind of holy Christians.

It's for all of us because it's good and it's perfect and it's how we bear fruit. It's how we will be assured that we are in Christ.

It's how we will know blessing and I'll go on to speak about that briefly. By asking the second question, why does it matter? Why does all this matter? Why does the word and prayer and obedience and remaining in Christ, why does it matter today?

[16 : 37] You know, you've had a busy week last week. It's a new week today. You probably haven't been that busy this week. You've had a busy week. You've got lots of burdens and you come and you're why do you need to know this stuff?

I'll just kind of, I'll just let Derek rat along for a while. He spends a lot of time preparing his sermon and I'll give him that.

I'll just listen to him and we'll go. Is it just that? Is it the rantings of a fanatic? Or is it that we recognize the very core realities for why does it matter?

Well, Jesus says here there's no alternative in verse five. He says in the great words, very simple words, apart from me, you can do nothing.

There's no alternative. You know, apart from me, and he's speaking spiritually, speaking about bearing fruit here, we can't do anything. It's not enough just to be that branch. Remember I was talking about that branch that looked like an apple tree branch, but isn't connected to the apple tree.

[17 : 35] And even if someone came along with celotep, and if they celotaped or super glued, these really nice wax apples. You can get these, what I do if you get them, just now maybe an aged thing here.

Used to be all get wax apples that you'd put in a bowl and you'd put them on your table and look like real apples until you took a bite and you would spit it out because I was just like eating a candle.

You would just wouldn't do that because they were just, they were for decoration. If you could celotaped or super glue these wax apples onto the branches and it would look pretty good. But my goodness, it wouldn't be bearing fruit the way Christ intends it would it.

And you couldn't really do anything with that. So being not connected is impossible. And if I take that illustration, what does that look like?

Well maybe it looks like being a Christian on the outside polished and read and ready to be eaten. But actually you're not the real thing. It's just outward.

[18 : 35] There's no relationship with Christ. It's kind of just a life of good works. Even maybe sometimes even a vague connection with Jesus.

But not a living connection. Not a connection that bears fruit because of who He is because of our dependence on Him. But there's no alternative.

You can't go on being, a lot of you guys will have walked through the meadows this week. The meadows are strewn this week with fallen branches from the winds earlier on Monday and Tuesday.

And it's incredible how quickly, big boughs, you know, big branches. And it's incredible how quickly they wither. And so that I walk in through this morning, you know, they're very visibly evidently withered.

They're no longer connected to the tree. And God says, John, look, when you walk through the meadows, just look at these branches and think of it spiritually and remind yourself that when we're disconnected from Jesus, when we're not in prayer in His Word and obeying Him, then we're not remaining in Him.

[19 : 42] Then we will wither spiritually. And often we look at our lives and say, why am I struggling so much spiritually? Why am I withering? Why is it so difficult? And we fail to hear what He says.

It's because we are not persevering in being connected to Jesus, who is our source of life and hope. So it's simple, but it's not easy, if you know what I mean.

And I know for us sometimes it's a battle, but that is the reality. There is no alternative. And as we remain in Him, we will bear much fruit. I'm the vine.

If you remain in me, verse 5, He will bear much fruit. And it's great because it's two ways, isn't it? He says, if you remain in me, I'm in you.

And that is how we bear fruit. We looked at that before with the Holy Spirit, it doesn't just that we've met someone great like Jesus, but He actually comes and lives in us. And He says, I remain in you, we'll bear fruit.

[20 : 38] That is, He will transform our lives. And in the weeks following this, we're going to look more practically at that actual fruit that's mentioned in Galatians, and we're going to look at that.

It is productive. But you know that one of the challenges of the productiveness is that the Father takes an interest in our lives and He prunes us.

Okay? Katrina always is worried about my pruning of things because it's usually hugely drastic and sometimes things die because I'm not really a gardener.

I need Colin Morrison or someone else to show me how to do it. Every year the front of the man sees two trees get skinned, absolutely skinned. As far as they haven't died, but maybe one day they will because I'm not a great pruner.

But the Father prunes our lives so that we will bear more fruit. By that He means the things in our lives that cut out the sun and the air.

[21 : 37] You know, that's how fruit grows. It grows by having enough room to grow on the tree so that things around it, the clutter around it is taken away so the sun can get in and the air can breathe.

And so in our Christian lives this not ordinary friendship is revealed in the Father's interest in that He will sometimes use difficult things in our lives to prune us, to cut back the things that maybe are keeping us from Him in order to be more fruitful.

It matters because there's no alternative because it produces a blessing and a fruitful Christian life and because it's to the Father's glory. He says in verse 8 that it's to the Father's glory that we do these things.

This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit. That's why we live. We live to bear fruit for the Father's glory. This is what God wants and He wants other people to see that in our lives that we're living in a way that's fruitful as we live in sacrificial service and beauty and worship.

I think what it will do in your life where you are tomorrow and in my life hopefully as well, it will break down people's misconceptions and preconceptions and stereotypes about what a Christian is.

[22 : 53] Because people have all kinds of stereotypes about what a Christian is and that they're bigots and that they're homophobic or that they're self-righteous or that they're just moralistic churchgoers.

But as we bear the fruit of Christ, some of these stereotypes and preconceptions of people, misconceptions will be broken down.

It's to the Father's glory and we will be showing ourselves to the world to be His disciples. It matters for these reasons. It also matters because it brings joy into our life.

He says an amazing thing in verse 11 there when he's describing, he says, I've told you this. Why is Jesus telling us these things? Another haranguing message from the pulpit. No, he says, because I told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Has anyone ever else made that statement for you in your life, that your joy can be complete in Jesus Christ? It's extravagant language.

[23 : 59] And if your image of a Christian is misery, pious, solemnity, then that's not the mark of the spirit of God.

Of course, there's times when we're serious, times when we're solemn. But as a mark of our ongoing Christian life, it's a life of joy. I had an interesting email from a friend this week who I admire and whose advice I take and he was asking about, I was asking about the paper that I'd done for my sabbatical various things I'd said in it.

And he was talking about the mark of churches, different churches. One of the sure marks of a spirit filled church is if it's joyful. If there's joy, when you go in that place, there's a sense of joy and a sense of spiritual life within it.

That's an evidence of the Holy Spirit. Maybe I emphasise too much in my dear Presbyterian Calvinistic background. The struggles and the battles of the Christian life.

I hope I'm just being realistic with that. But yes, there is struggles and there is battles, but there's also victory for us. And there's a reason behind them and God is pruning us for a particular reason.

[25 : 09] And there's joy so that we can even have joy in our trials and not kind of give a kind of pouting lip and say that God's been unhelpful or unfriendly to me.

That we recognise a deep-seated joy through what He's done. So we have friends with God. Now very briefly, and in conclusion, very briefly can I just say.

We remain in Him, okay? And we've gone through that. We also remain in one another. That's a really important part of bearing fruit because verses 12 to 19 speaks about that.

He says, my command is this. After all He said, my command is this. Love each other as I have loved you. So there's this great responsibility for you and for me as we are part of a local church that we love one another.

And can I just spend just a moment speaking about friendship again? Very often in our minds we think of friendship as being something that we look for and receive.

[26 : 10] As you know, I want everyone to be nice. I've got lots of reasons for liking this person or maybe disliking this person. And I don't feel I can be friends with them, but I want to be friends with them.

And there's this kind of way of thinking so much of the time in our lives. But this is really a command. My command, He says, is that. Not just what you might want to do and find a really nice bunch of friends, which is significant.

Don't get me wrong, but I'm wanting to think slightly differently. It's a command that we're to love one another. And greater love is no man than this that you lay down in his life as friends.

So Christ is the example. And that is how we're to live in community. Open, honest, trusting relationships with one another. Where we go on with one another or from the same kind of cultural background or whatever it might be or not that we are in community as friends committed to one another.

And can I just say what Jesus is speaking about here is not so much friendship. We're saying, oh, they are great friends. You know, I really go on with them. They're just my type of people. It's rather it's not about what we get from these friendships, but what we can give to the friendship, give to the relationship.

[27 : 26] This is the the the background to this chapter is Jesus washing the disciples feet in chapter 13. That's how he expressed his love, you know, and now I'll show you the extent of my love.

He washed their feet. That was what he was expressing when he talked about friendship and about love. And that is what the friendship that we are to develop in St. Columbus here.

It's not just a friendship, I'm going in my my way group or I'm not going to involve that don't get on with that person. It's not my that's not primarily what we're looking for. What we're looking for is this willingness to wash not literally, but feel free, wash one another's feet and the act of service.

OK, because it's just as well that Jesus doesn't think in these kind of friendship terms with us the way that we often make our friends with one another, because he would have ditched us long, long ago.

It's not so much about what we can get from friendship. It's how we can serve people and love them. He goes on to talk about laying down his life and that's what we're to do.

[28 : 42] Lay down our life for others. We live in a self obsessed society and he says, lay down your life. Consider other people better than yourself.

There's a little children's chorus that most of you will probably have known. I'm not going to sing it. You'll be very thankful. I'm not going to do a Jonathan Keenan, but you'll know Jesus first, others next, yourself last.

I think it was a chorus anyway. It was certainly a kind of ditty that people knew about. And in all its simplicity, that brought joy, wasn't it? J-O-Y, Jesus first, others next, yourself last.

It is profoundly correct in what it says and it's a deep, deep statement of the reality of Christian friendship and service that as we put Christ first and remain in him, we will have friends that we serve and that we will love because of what Christ has done and that in putting ourselves, considering others better than ourselves, we will find the fullness of joy.

We will find complete joy and we will find blessing and hope and fruitfulness and usefulness in our Christian life. And that's what I want to finish with.

[30 : 00] What is the lasting influence going to be of your life and of mine? In verse 16 it says, You did not choose me, but I choose you and I pointed you.

Can you just pretend today there's nobody else in the room if you're a Christian? If you're not a Christian then I want you to think about these words for yourself and your need of Christ. But if you are a Christian, can I just ask you to imagine as we close that there's no one else here but you in this big building, just you and Jesus Christ speaking from His word and He says, You did not choose me, but I chose you and I pointed you.

The King of Kings appointed you today to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. Because He's talking about your legacy, the legacy of your life.

What's it going to be? What is, as you look at your life today, what's the legacy of your life going to be? What do you want it to be? What influence do you want to change the world?

Are you going to change your country? Are you going to change your fact? What is the influence, the legacy you will live when you're six foot under and they put a headstone there?

[31 : 06] What is it going to say on the headstone? What will we have changed in the world? Well Jesus says here, every one of us, ordinary Joe blogs like me and you can have a lasting, lasting influence, fruit that will last because we're remaining in Christ.

It's ordinary people, kind of a lasting influence. In God's eyes, He says, when you're on your knees praying for some person that you love that nobody else prays for, that's a lasting fruit that God listens to and hears.

When you're just walking that dirty, dusty road of obedience that nobody else wants to walk on, then no one understand. That is what is lasting in God's eyes, when you give a cup of cold water, when you listen, when nobody else will listen to someone, when you provide a meal for a family with a new baby, when you hold the hand of someone who's dying, when you shop for an old person, when you do it in Christ's name, when you do it because you're remaining in Him, because you're loving Him and you're loving one another.

These are just the words laughs and mocks at the insignificance of our lives, but Jesus says that that is fruit that will last and it will last on into eternity. We don't need the bright lights, we don't need the headlines, we don't need to be in the front pages, we don't need to have created something amazing, we don't need to have invented anything to have a lasting influence in God's eyes.

And I imagine with all my heart, the people that will be nearest to the throne in heaven will be the people who nobody knew about on this earth, and even in the church, it will be the quiet, invisible people, allegedly, not the people up the front or ministers or anyone else, it will be the people that have done the unseen work, they will be the closest to the throne, their fruit will have lasted because their eyes have been kept absolutely on Jesus Christ and they've remained in Him, and may that be what we do in our lives.

[33 : 14] And in the following subsequent weeks, I hope to look more practically at what that means for us. Let's bow our heads and pray. Lord God, please help us to live for your glory and help us to see that as something significant, how often we just are living for our own glory, we're living for our own lives and for our own ambitions and for our own heart's desires and we leave you out and you ask that we don't be left out.

You ask because you know and you love and you care and you have shown that greatest act of love in laying down your life for us so that we might live.

May our legacy be as people, one that Jesus stamps with His seal of approval through His word and may you help everyone here today, be with those particularly who are struggling in their Christian faith or maybe those who stand here today uncommitted to Jesus or unsure about Jesus as Savior and Lord, may they be spoken to you from your word and be challenged and excited by its relevance to their life this week.

And bless us as we sing together a parting song today for Jesus' sake. Amen.