

# Christ - Branches

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] I would like to turn back tonight to John, John's Gospel Chapter 15, the picture of the vine and the branches. We have been looking at the life and work of Jesus Christ, the person and character of Jesus and his work. We are going to finish that whole series tonight by just looking at this passage. In many ways, it is linked to the passage of Matthew's Gospel where Jesus gives his church the Great Commission. Having accomplished his work, having finished his work, he ascended to heaven, but before doing so, he gave them the Great Commission and he reminded them that they were to—because all authority had been given in heaven and earth—to him, go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Surely, I am with you always to the very end of the age.

In this chapter here, John's Gospel Chapter 15 and verse 8, Jesus says to the disciples, kind of in anticipation of that, and therefore he says it to you and I as well, he says, This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

So we are to be his disciples and we are to be making disciples. That is his Great Commission for us. We are to do it in his strength and with his help. That is what he has left us to do. That has not changed from the 21st century and things have not changed for us.

It is really revealing the on-going work of Christ in his church and for his church until he returns. It is very simple really for us and as Christians we are to be people who are bearing fruit. We are to be fruit bearing Christians. All of us, all of us, in our workplaces, in our homes, in our hearts, we are to reflect the character and the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is really this very simple, very easy picture. It is about bearing fruit because of Jesus Christ and because we are linked to Jesus Christ. We are branches that grow from the vine. This is a really helpful, easy, significant passage that speaks about our Christian lives and the way our Christian lives are to develop and to grow. As Christians, the fundamental reality for us in our lives is that we are in him. That is what we are.

That is what a Christian is. I am the vine verse 5. You are the branches. It is a really simple picture. Maybe we, you know in Scotland we do not know much about vines and branches but we do know about the concept of fruit bearing trees. It is the same idea. Apple trees, orange trees, pear trees. We do not have many orange trees. We do have apple trees and pear trees and things like that. So you know the concept. If a man remains in me and I and him, he will bear much fruit. Apart from me, you can do nothing. And that is the fundamental reality of the work of the Gospel and the Christian church since Jesus has ascended that we have this spiritually, the spiritual genetic link with Jesus and we are to remain in him. The Christian life is in us. The life of Christ is in us just as totally as our sin and our death was made his on the cross. And so we are connected to him in a way that is life bringing for us. That is life giving. We have spiritual life as we remain in and as we are connected to Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ, we cannot know spiritual life and we cannot even continue in spiritual life. It is a really basic but absolutely fundamental message. Remain in me, he says, because we are part of Christ. So if we had one thing that we were to take from the whole series, knowing about the person and the work of Christ, it would be that our responsibility as Christians in verse seven is to remain in me. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given to you. It is quite interesting, the unintended link with this morning's service and with what we were looking at this morning and this amazing, powerful promise of God that he speaks about here, ask whatever you wish. This open ended promise that we must take in the context of some of the things we were looking at this morning. Remain in me. Branches, which is very significant for us Christians, just as it is for branches, is that branches don't have any life on their own. You know, you don't get branches that just are branches.

[ 5 : 17 ] You don't get branches that live as branches. Branches are branches because they are linked to the bow, they are linked to the tree, they are linked to the vine and it's from the roots of the vine that they receive life. You know how you see that, you know that, don't you?

Use that illustration for here. You're in a windy day in Edinburgh and you walk through the meadows, particularly in the autumn time. There's lots of branches that are in the ground and very soon they become hard and lifeless without sap, without any ability to bear fruit because they are separated from the tree. And that is such a simple but such a helpful illustration. We become hard and we become lifeless spiritually when we remove ourselves from Jesus Christ. And the question is always then for you and for me, what is your ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ? Are you able to remain in Him? You know, whatever else we do as believers following on the responsibility that Christ has given us from His life and work is to remain in Him. Now you think, well, I know that, I've heard that, I've heard that a thousand times. You're always talking about that here, but that is because I find myself often not remaining in Christ and wondering why things are going so terribly difficult in my spiritual life. And there comes a time and a place in our lives where we say, I can't go any further. I must stop what I'm doing and I must get on my knees and resolve to be in communion with Christ again. You know, when we struggle in our Christian lives, that is ironically, isn't it the hardest thing to do? It's the very hardest thing to do when we're spiritually struggling sometimes is to just set aside the time to be in Christ and to be in fellowship with Christ. But I do think that it is the only thing that will enable us to breathe spiritually and to grow spiritually and to fulfill our responsibility in Christ. And it's easy for us to avoid. We can be kind of hanging around Christians.

We can come along at church. We can open the Bible now and again. We can do Christian things, but that individual, independent wrestling with God, however we do, whatever we put aside to do that, must be at the core of our responsibility to Jesus Christ, that we are to remain in Him, remain in that fellowship. And we'll go on to see that that is a spiritual act of friendship that is offered to us through Jesus Christ. We are to remain in Christ.

And He goes on to say there in the same verse, and my words are to remain in you. That's a great thing in recognizing our responsibility to the person and to the work of Christ, that His words, the word of Scripture, the word that He has given, the words of the Gospel are to be the words that remain in us. Our life is to be guided by His word, obedience to His word. So as Christians, what we're learning to do in our ongoing life as we are servants of Christ and reflecting Christ is to reflect Him in His person and in His word, that we're not just to be guided by instinct and by natural ability and by gut feelings and even by popular opinion, or especially maybe not by popular opinion, but by His word.

And can I just go back on that just for a second and say the more we are in His word, the more our instinct and our gut feelings will be what we can go by. So I'm not abandoning these things because they're important, but the more that our conscience and our lives and our thoughts are molded and guided by Jesus Christ, the more we can rely on our gut feelings and the more that we can kind of ask of God because He will tend then to be giving us whatever we want because we will be living in accordance with His word and asking the right kind of questions. It's tremendously important as Christ was getting ready to leave this earth and finish the work that He had done, that He gives this teaching to His disciples, that they may not have known exactly how that was going to be outworked for them at that point, but it soon became clear to them that they would remain in Him and His word in them. And that is so significant for us that again, that we take time to be people who search the scriptures, that who know the mind of God through His word, that it is totally clear, trustworthy, morally clear and unambiguous, increasingly significant in this world in which we live, which is moving completely away from any kind of biblical ethic and any kind of Christian morality that we find ourselves grounded in the word rather than in the kind of popular philosophical thinking of the day as it develops. And we allow that to become the voice of our conscience, that we educate our conscience and our mind to the word of God. The tendencies for us to struggle with that and we find of course that the word of God is not in line with the thinking of the society in which we live and the morality and the ethics of that society and that is difficult and that is challenging. But the encouragement from God is to remain in Him, well can I put it more strongly than that, the encouragement, the command of God is that we remain in Him and that His word remains in us, therefore we will be branches as we do so that are fruit bearing. It's a really significant aspect of discipleship, of the great commission that we were given to be disciples and it's a mark of discipleship. This is to my Father's glory, verse 8, that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciples. So He wants us to be self-revelatory of Christ, that in our lives and as we remain in Him and His word remains in us, we bear the fruit of Christ so that we carry on the work of Christ as He is ascended, He remains the head of the church but we are His body and we are to bear His fruit and we are to be fruit bearing Christians. This is a great mark of discipleship, that the outward, the outward marks of an inner life of faith and each of us will be unique in that but we will bear fruit that is similar, it could be the fruit of repentance, that we are constantly people who are coming into Christ's presence, recognising our shortcomings and our failings and our sins and we are seeking to be refreshed and renewed and revived with prayers of repentance but also the fruit of the Spirit, the love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, meekness, gentleness, self-control, these well-known characteristics of Jesus that are to be ours as people. So you're all going to be different, okay, we're all going to be different, we're

[13:12] all going to be unique, absolutely unique but we're still all called to be Christ-like and that's hugely significant. You know each grape in a cluster of grapes is unique but all grapes are grapes and we have to be Christ's people and be Christ's children. You know we're not called to be melons or oranges, we're called to be grapes, we're called to be like Christ, all of us, all of us unique, all of us in our own separate individual, God-given uniqueness but all to be in Christ and like Christ bearing the common marks of Christ.

You know it's very well, it's all very well being a maverick and being individualistic in the kingdom but he asks us sometimes to just look, suck it up and be a Christian and be like Christ because that's what he wants and that's what ironically will make us as unique as we can be, that will make us as we were created to be uniquely individual but yet uniquely like Christ. It's not about being clones, it's not about all thinking and acting the same, we will have different characteristics, different abilities, different mindsets, different thinking, different strengths and weaknesses but none of us are exempt from being like Jesus and bearing his fruit and as we are in Christ we will bear his fruit. We have a tendency, I think a dangerous tendency to all want to want all other Christians to just be like ourselves or to be like what we think Christians should be. I think that is equally dangerous because we kind of try and press people into a mould that isn't necessarily

Christly, I think you can be very different from one another and still be absolutely Christ-like in our lives. So we are to bear the mark of disciples as bearing his fruit, being like him in the characteristics that we bear. Now for some of us, some of these characteristics might be easier to bear because they are more natural to us than others, some of us more naturally might be more patient than others. We will need to examine our own lives and know ourselves very well to work on the areas where we need to repent and we need to change and we need to become more gracious and more like Jesus Christ but that is his work for us, his work is to bear his fruit, to reflect him, to look like him. And in so doing we will as Christians, I believe as we follow through this illustration, we will be attractive.

We will be attractive. Man, don't mean necessarily that we will look attractive but we will be attractive as people. I don't know if there are some ugly fruits, I am sure there is.

A camquat is not a very nice looking fruit. Some fruits are very aesthetically pleasing but we look for all fruits to taste good, don't we? And fruit should taste good, it is meant to be sweet and meant to be enjoyable and attractive and very often attractive to look at also. Nourishing, useful, beautiful, pleasing to the eye. Like Jesus Christ. Jesus I think was tangy but he was also appealing. There was a sharpness about Jesus, not in an attractive way, in a challenging way. He wasn't soft and malleable, he was strong and courageous but he was considerate and humble and strong and he lived a servant life and he devoted himself to obedience. I think we need to dwell more on the person and the work of Christ, particularly the person of Christ when it comes to bearing fruit in the power of the

[ 17 : 57 ] Spirit so that we can reflect him. We need to work very hard at reflecting Jesus Christ because he was hugely unique and we will find his interaction with people and his responses to people and his attitude to people was very different from what we would expect it to be and we are asked to reflect that attractiveness. I appreciate it and I know that it came to a certain point with Jesus Christ when people turned back from him and turned away from him because they found his teaching hard because he wouldn't give up on the truth and he spoke a great deal about separation and hell and about division and about judgment and about our hearts and about sinfulness and he exposed hypocrisy and there was many times that Jesus Christ, people turned away from Jesus Christ but nonetheless crowds were drawn to him also and children, probably most significantly children were very comfortable in his company.

He wasn't an ogre, he wasn't hard, he wasn't judgmental at that level, he was truth and sometimes we need to recognise that truth is an important part of being attractive but also will bring us to a point where it might cause a reaction against us. So as we bear fruit it's a mark of our discipleship, it's attractive and it's also in that and through that we find the seeds of reproduction. Now as a tree bears fruit the expansion of the tree orchard comes through the fruit bearing seed itself and it grows because of that and we recognise that it was 12 ordinary people under Christ who bore the fruit of the gospel and brought the gospel into the rest of the world and future generations of Christians are born from the fruit bearing testimony of believers today and I think that's a significant aspect of our Christian lives and the fruit bearing lives we are living or otherwise.

In this morning's version Ephesians it talks about the glory of God in the church for future generations to come and there's this future element that is spoken of all the time in the covenant and the life of the people in the covenant and the fruit bearing lives of the covenant and how that is reflected in the blessedness of the church. I believe that's Christ's way that Christ uses our lives to bear the foundation for the next generation of Christians for the seed of the new converts and we have that responsibility to be sowing seed as it were to kind of mix the metaphors a little bit to be telling others about Christ to be reflecting Christ in our lives to be fruit bearing in our lives for Christ so that we will be the seed of the future church so that the future church will grow because of us ultimately of course because of God but through our life and work and witness we are to pray to the Lord of the harvest don't we and the answer to that prayer is often in the people of the Lord of the harvest it's in our lives and it's in our obedience and it's in our faithfulness and it's in our ability to share the gospel that we will see the harvest coming to bear in our lives. So church growth we talk about church growth and church planting and things like that here a lot church growth and we often think about strategy and we think about other people and we think about leadership and we think about lots of things but actually probably the most significant thing in church growth is you and me in our individual lives in our obedience to the word of God as we follow him as we remain in him and his words remain in us that that is the key to the future of the church as we move forward in him that's the great isn't that the great freedom of living as Christian lives that we don't need to be the ones who ultimately have the strategy and who have the responsibility and do you have the burden we simply are asked to remain in him his word remain in us and we will bear much fruit for him and that is very much part of being his disciple showing yourself to be his disciple and in so doing Christ will in his grace and in his ongoing work and his ascended ongoing work he will be someone who will prune us in our Christian lives maybe looked a little bit of that this morning because every branch in me that bears no fruit every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful and God the

Father is always about his work and he sees those who are Christ's will bear his fruit it is inconceivable that you belong to Jesus and don't bear fruit inconceivable it will not happen you cannot be a Christian and not reflect Jesus Christ to a greater or lesser degree you are not Christ's if you do not bear any fruit for Christ you are out of Christ that is a hugely solemn thought but those that do bear fruit in this kingdom that is all of us to a greater lesser degree as we are in Christ and his word isn't as he will prune our lives he will remain doing his work his ascended position because he wants us to be more fruit bearing in our Christian lives and he wants to deal with the sin that separates us from him and that is his work and that I think is probably looking back to sorry if you weren't here this morning but it is kind of looking back again to that whole mystery of the way God works in our lives when he is answering prayers not the way we expected but the best way because very often what he will be doing he will be pruning our lives to make us more fruitful dealing with the sin that sometimes we love but it separates us from him and that chokes the fruit and that chokes the growth so as we conclude and as we draw to a finish we remember that Jesus Christ in his work and in his life and in his work has ascended the work is finished but he has passed on the work of the kingdom to his people through whom he works and by the gift of the Holy Spirit in us and he has done that to bring all his people in and to draw us to himself and the reason he has done that is because he wants us to be completely full of joy in verse 11 he says that I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete you know that is what he wants us to be he wants us to have joy he wants us to be his friend I have called you I have called you your friends for everything I have learned from my father I have made known from you so God in his work here was learning from the father in his in the humiliation that he faced in his true humanity and all that he learned from the father he is it has been revealed to us and given to us and that is the mark of true friendship and he's done that for the glory of God and we rejoice in these things because we know that we are part of him and part of his finished work and it's great to think about joy you know if you think of that vine that branch that fruit bearing branch on the vine somewhere in the south of Spain and the sun shining and it's weeded weed free because someone's taking good care of it and it's been pruned and it's loaded with fruit and the fruit will come off and it'll be nice and ripe and it'll be made into wine and grapes and everyone that'll be one happy branch that's one happy branch doing exactly what was created to do and couldn't be happier happiest branch that there is and that's a picture of where we find our joy in life we look for it in many different places but we're to find our joy in being united to Christ bearing his fruit being pruned by him allowing him to deal with the weeds of sin and us dealing with the weeds of sin in our lives and being reliant on Jesus Christ in fellowship with him I can't as I close I can I just stress that again in fellowship

with him nobody else coming to church isn't the same thing it's important but it's not the same thing it's about you eyeball to eyeball with Jesus Christ on your own dealing with him taking time speaking meditating thinking working through your life reading the scripture and being immersed and soaked in his God maybe it was just before 20 minutes but that time dedicated in silence away from everyone else just in him a branch in him whatever else you're doing do that on a daily basis being in relationship with Christ remain in him because that's the only place where we will bear fruit and that's what we are commanded to do is disciples that is the fulfillment of the great commission to which we've been called in which Jesus has appointed us and commanded us to do until he returns I mean let's power heads in prayer Lord God help us teachers guide us leaders we thank you that the Bible is really simple and so and Jesus particularly in his teaching gives everyday simple examples particularly would have been for the people of his day as they looked around them and as they knew all about vines and vine groves and fruitfulness and a gradient lifestyle and yet very easy and simple for us to understand also and give us that ability to have the picture of the branches in the vine and the connection and the fruit bearing which are also poignant and powerful as pictures of the great commission that you've given us to be disciples and to make disciples and may our lives bear fruit and be seed bearing and be reproductive in the way that we live to attract others and to point them to Christ and for Christ to draw them to himself through our work and witness we do pray for that we pray for energy and strength and above all he asked that you would help us really strongly to be able to be disciplined enough and courageous enough and strong enough just to take time to be with God in a daily basis to be in him and for his word to be in us that we would inculcate his word to our lives and to our hearts and that simple old fashioned and dramatic unglamorous picture and discipline would be a spiritual discipline that rocks our lives and that transforms us and helps us when we are struggling and battling with faith and with doubt and with belief and with unbelief. Lord we pray these things in Jesus' name.

[ 30 : 58 ] dangerous cause.