

Jesus' Friends

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[0 : 00] I'm going to pray and then we'll have a crack at the passage. Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, thank you for giving us your Word and that you've revealed yourself to us, that we can know you and not be left in the dark.

Please help us this morning as we grapple with your Word to grow more and more into the likeness of the Lord Jesus. We ask it in his name. Amen. Well, if you become a Christian, that's not so hard at one level.

It's pretty simple. The idea of becoming a Christian is to trust Jesus Lord, ask him to forgive you for sins and then you become a Christian. So, becoming a Christian is clear enough.

However, the longer you go on in life and the more you go in growing your understanding of the Scriptures, the more perplexing you become the questions that we seem to face. And this passage throws up a whole lot of questions, doesn't it?

And as we look at it, we come across them like, what does it mean for a branch to be cut off and burnt in the fire? What does that mean? What's it mean to ask anything in Jesus' name and he'll do it?

[1 : 05] And is the Father's love for us conditional upon our part of being obedient to him? They're just some of the questions that just jump out of the page as we read it this morning.

So, if you pick up John chapter 15, Jesus has just gone out of the upper room, right? He's left the upper room and he's now on the way to Gethsemane and to his betrayal where he'll be crucified in a couple of hours' time.

And on the way, he's teaching the disciples more about what it means to be his disciples while they're walking through the streets of Jerusalem, I take it.

And he specifically picks up this metaphor, this image of the branch and the vine. Now, previously, if you cast your mind back over John's Gospel, he said he is a few things already, right?

He says, And here in chapter 15, he says, All echoes of God who said, I am in Exodus chapter 3.

[2 : 27] And now Jesus says he is the vine or more precisely, I am the true vine. Just like he is the true temple.

Just like he is the true bread that came down from heaven. The themes of the Old Testament are all coming together now in the last hours of Jesus' life on earth.

And so we look at the vine. The significance of the vine imagery cannot be understood without knowing the prophets of the Old Testament speaking about the vine and God's people.

So, the grape vine is where grapes grow. That's pretty clear. It consists of a trunk that goes down, I don't know what your pictures look like, the trunk that goes down to the ground and it comes up and then it splits into sort of two heads and goes off along the vine growing area.

The key reference though to vines and God's vineyard in the Old Testament is the nation Israel.

[3 : 43] You've got to get a hold of that. Israel is God's chosen people, God's vineyard, his vine.

That's what he calls it. And the reality is that while the vine or the vineyard is a metaphor for Israel, the vine is more often than not in bad shape when it's spoken about.

So, come to Isaiah chapter 5 with me please. Back to Isaiah chapter 5. And you'll see it. Here we go. Isaiah 5. I'm going to read the first seven verses of Isaiah 5. Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard.

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. 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 vine, a wine vat in it.

And he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. And now inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

What more was there me to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I look for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? And now I tell you what I will do to my vineyard.

[5 : 05] I'll remove its hedge and it shall be devoured. I'll break down its walls and it shall be trampled down. I'll make it a waste. It shall not be pruned or hoed. And briars and thorns shall grow up.

I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. Verse 7. The vineyard is clearly God's people.

But instead of it being holy, the kind of place it should be, it's corrupt to the core.

God looks for produce but only bears wild grapes. But not only is Israel referred to as a vine but also as God's son.

So Psalm 80, come back to Psalm 80 with me. Have a look at Psalm 80. Back a few pages. Back to Psalm 80. And you'll see that the son and the vineyard are one and the same.

[6 : 19] Psalm 80. Pick it up at verse 8. Look at this. Picture the picture, right? You brought out a vine out of Egypt.

You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it. It took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade. The mighty seed is with its branches.

It sent out its branches to the sea and it shoots to the river. Why then have you broken down its walls so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? The boar from the forest ravages it.

And all that move in the field feed on it. Turn again, O God of hosts. Look down from heaven and sea. Have regard for this vine. The stock that your right hand planted.

And for the son whom you made strong for yourself. They have burned it with fire. They have cut it down. May they perish at the rebuke of your face. But let your hand be on the man of your right hand.

[7 : 24] The son of man whom you have made strong for yourself. Then we shall not turn back from you. Give us life and we will call upon your name.

And you see the hope in verse 19. Restore us, O Lord God of hosts. Let your face shine that we may be saved. This vine, this son, has not been faithful to God.

It's not a model vine. It's not a model son that would represent God to the world rightly. However, in Psalm 80 you see this close link between the vine and the son.

And Israel and the son. And there's this cry for restoration. The vine came out of Egypt. It was planted in the promised land. It grew.

God nurtured the vine. It filled the land and became a vitivine. But the vine's broken down and plundered. And we see that this son is the man who will be at the right hand of God.

[8 : 30] There's hope for this vine. This son. A hope for restoration. A hope for glory to come.

There's a cry then, isn't there, for someone to deliver them, to rescue them, to rebuild this vine, this nation.

A people who will be faithful to God. Where Israel's failed to be the light of the world, as the vine failed to be the vine of the world, it should have been, there is hope for a restored vine.

A restored Israel. And so where God's son, Israel, failed, God's new son, Jesus, the true vine, will succeed.

And so come back to John chapter 15. Jesus is the true vine. He is the true Israel, the faithful is right.

True in that he is the obedient son of God who always obeys the Father. True in that he loves God, demonstrated by his obedience to God the Father. True in that he reveals the word, the character of God, accurately and clearly.

[9 : 39] Righteousness, righteousness, justice, truth, faithfulness, all come oozing out of Jesus.

True in that he shows the world what it means to be the true Israelite in one person.

The true nation in one person. Jesus Christ. He is the one that every Israelite was meant to be but failed. Jesus is the model Israelite.

The one who is to demonstrate to the world what the relationship between God and his people should look like. And we see the vine dresser. God the Father.

The Father God is a vine dresser. The metaphor is further extended. Jesus is the vine. And then the disciples are the branches.

You see there in verse 5. I am the vine. You are the branches. And Jesus tells us that the branches are taken away or pruned in order to bear more fruit.

[10:46] That's what they are to do. There in verse 2. Now, there is a difference. Let's get this clear. There is a difference between being taken away, burned or pruned.

There is a difference. There is a difference in that one. We've got to get it clear in our heads that there is a difference. And so, just what does taking away and what does pruning look like is going to be explained later on as we go into verse 6 to 10.

But the key, the key is abiding, remaining, staying in Jesus. See how often that word came up as we read the chapter, the first 17 verses.

The word abide was used there nine times in verses 1 to 11. And so, let's consider the branches and what abiding means.

The word abide simply means to stay. That's what it means. Just a fancy word for stay. That is, you don't leave. You don't go somewhere else.

[12:07] You continue on in something or you continue on with someone. That's what it means to abide. You persist. You stick with something or someone.

Whether you're taken away or burned or bear much fruit depends on whether you remain, whether you stay, whether you stick, continue with Jesus.

Now, verse 6. 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. When the prophet Ezekiel saw the nation of Israel and saw they were faithless, he referred to them as wood of the vine.

And he set his face against them and they were burnt. And Jesus uses the same language here for those branches that produce no fruit.

[13:20] And this is something very troubling. And yet is still the true teaching of scripture. And I know that you're asking the question, does that mean that Christians can be lost from the kingdom?

If you're not asking that question, that's the question to be asking. So let's consider it carefully, right? Let's consider it carefully.

The Christian life is not so much how you start, but how you finish. Let's get that clear. It's important as it is to start properly.

You can't sort of just jump on the track halfway and not start at the beginning. You've got to start at the beginning at the cross. That's where it starts. When I bend the knee, confess that Jesus is Lord and plead with him to forgive my sins.

That's where the Christian life starts. But that's just the start, right? How you finish matters. And so the scriptures teach us that Jesus remained in the love of the Father by obeying the Father's commands.

[14:42] In verse 10. Jesus as fully man was obedient to the Father at every point in his life. And so stayed, remained, abided in the Father's love.

The Father was always pleased with him. The Father was never disappointed in him at all. And so Jesus is the example for all believers.

And now Jesus is teaching and has taught two key things about obedience. Firstly, last week we saw that the obedience to the disciples was the evidence, right?

That they had love for Jesus. That's important. Secondly, here this morning we're seeing that the obedience to the disciples is the way of staying in Jesus' love.

You see there in chapter 15, verse 10 as well. The way that you stay in Jesus' love is by obeying him. Doing what he says. Now our obedience, right, to Jesus does not earn Jesus' love for us.

[15:59] Right? You can't earn it. You can never earn Jesus' love for us. Rather, our obedience is the way that we stay, we stick, we remain with Jesus in his love.

It's the way we keep ourselves running straight and not veering off to the left or the right. We stick with Jesus by obeying what he says in his word.

And so we stay in his favour. So now there is belief. Let me push this a bit further. There is belief and there is belief. See, people can start off all enthusiastic in their belief, but the proof is in the persistence.

The proof is in the persistence. The fruit is in the persistence. The parable of the sower is telling Mark chapter 4. You'll know the parable of the sower.

They all receive the same word. They all received it with great eagerness and joy and gladness. But in the end, only one soil produces fruit.

[17:10] Or maybe the book of Acts. Consider Ananias and Sapphira. Seemingly devoted followers of Jesus in the beginning. But in the end, they lied to the Holy Spirit and so didn't remain

the Father's love.

Or the Corinthians, for example. They so corrupted the Lord's Supper. Some of them have died. And they were not living as Jesus commanded.

The genuine disciples' belief will blossom through their life. That's what it will do. As we conform our life to the way of God's word, which will be evident by the pruning that God the Father does.

Which has got to be painful, hasn't it, when it happens? By its very nature. As he cuts off the rough edges. Now just a bit of light comic relief here.

I've got a bag of things here. And in my bag is not a snake. Alright? In my bag is not a snake. You'll be thankful to know. But in my bag is a vine.

[18:19] There you go. And I have some secateurs here. Alright? Vine, secateurs. Now this is a vine.

I just pulled it off this morning and chopped a bit of it off for you to see. It's got no fruit because it's useless anyway. There you go. But it's got some tendrils going out here.

And I'm going to cut them because you're going the wrong direction. Now that's got to hurt. And if I cut this leaf off here, that's going to hurt.

That's what pruning is. But pruning is not done to hurt, right? Pruning is done to guide and to shape and to make the tomato bush. You know, you prune the tomato bush so that you get the leaves to grow so that the tomatoes grow.

Now that's the kind of thing... No, I'll just leave that there for the kids to play with later on. But I'll be safe so they won't cut their fingers off. Won't do that, will you? I'm not a gardener, but there you go.

[19:27] So, there's a bit of idea of pruning. It's going to be painful. It's not going to be nice at times. But God will chop off, right? The offshoots that are growing in the wrong direction in unproductive ways.

And it will only happen by remaining, by staying in Jesus. So, now you're asking the question, well, what if I sin? What if I don't obey Jesus' command?

What happens? Well, firstly, it's not a matter of if I will sin. It's a matter of when I will sin. That's the reality of it all. And so, does that mean that I have not remained in the Father's love and will be cut off as a dead branch and gathered and thrown into the fire?

Is that what Jesus is teaching us here? Well, our attitude to our sin is what matters.

It's what we do about our sin is telling. If I'm convicted by my sin and then confess it to the Father and ask Jesus to forgive me and cling to Jesus in obedience to his command, well, all is good, all is well.

[20:52] Submitting myself to his lordship is the way that I demonstrate my love for him, that I remain in his love. That's exactly appropriate. But if I'm not convicted of my sin, right, and continue to live in disobedience to Jesus, refuse to recognise my rebellion against him, in whatever air it is, refuse to submit to his lordship, that is the way that I demonstrate my rejection of Jesus, my hard-heartedness toward Jesus, and rejecting of his love towards me.

Then I'm in real danger of having my love for Jesus proved as fake, as fraudulent, and being in real danger of being a dead branch gathered and thrown into the fire.

And so we need to bear fruit. If we remain in Jesus' love, a branch connected to the vine and pruned by the Father, let me say the pruning will be painful, necessarily so as tendrils are cut off, growing in the wrong place in the wrong direction.

But notice the purpose, the purpose of the painful pruning is that we will bear much fruit. That's the purpose.

And so, the question is, what is the fruit? What is the fruit that we are to be bearing?

[22:42] Well, is it obedience? Or Christian character? Or new believers? Or the fruit of the Spirit?

Or love? Is it one of those things? Well, it seems to be that fruit is related to prayerful dependence on the Father.

Have a look at verse 7. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you. By this, my Father is glorified that you bear much fruit.

fruit. So, at one level, the fruit being borne out by prayer to the Father in Jesus' name brings glory to the Father.

Which means then that the fruit is the whole sphere, I take it, of the Christian life and witness. So, it's obedience, it's perseverance, it's love for others, especially love for other believers, humble service, not least, continuing in the faith.

[24 : 00] So, here is the comforting promise, right? The comforting promise. If we remain in Jesus, we will, you see there, it is guaranteed, produce much fruit.

For, I take it, as we remain, even the remaining is fruit. As we remain, we persevere, that is fruit. As we remain, we serve one another, that is fruit. As we remain, we are pruned, and so we grow more and more like Jesus, which is fruit.

And as we reign, we ask the things that bring glory to the Father, and we will see people coming to faith, that is fruit, which is all entirely, we see the work of God.

And notice that as the disciples of Jesus bear fruit, proving to be Jesus' disciples, the fruit bearing brings glory to the Father, not to the disciples.

[24 : 58] It's not about us, it's about the Father, not our own glory. For it wouldn't happen unless God was the one connected and bringing the fruit.

fruit. So as we are connected to the true vine, the Lord Jesus, we will produce true, good fruit, living as the true Israel was meant to live.

Well then Jesus goes on then to talk about friends. And there's a couple of things there about that, friends particularly love. The disciples are now given the standard by which love is measured, verse 13, you see, in a world which says that love is love, which is utterly meaningless, Jesus says that love is death.

Do you see it there? Verse 12, this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

Jesus says that love is death. Love is self-sacrificial. It's not just an emotion. It's not just being the buzz of the moment.

[26 : 14] It's not just limerence. Love is dying for your friends. And Jesus takes it even one step further, dying for his enemies.

We know in Romans chapter 5. But here he now calls them his friends, he's dying for them. And so Jesus tells us why the disciples are now called his friends.

Not servants, not slaves, but friends. The reason is because friends know. Friends know what's going on. They know what their Lord is doing.

Slaves don't. The disciples have heard from the Master. They know where the world's going. They know what their Master's on about now. And they're not called to serve without knowing why.

See, knowledge is a privilege, not a right. And the disciples of Jesus are now the friends because they know what God is doing. The servant, the slave, is left in the dark, follows directions blindly, but the friend knows the Master's business.

[27 : 25] And brothers and sisters, we are friends of Jesus because we know the Master's business. But note something carefully here.

Jesus calls them his friends, but Jesus is not their friend. I've got to get it right.

Jesus is always their Lord and Master. Jesus is God. He is their friend though if they do what he says.

it's not a mutual living playing playing field here. We need to preserve the truth, right, that Jesus is the one who redeems us and is our Lord and Saviour and we are those that he calls his friends.

In the sense that Jesus treats us as friends by revealing to us the plans and purposes of the Master. And the disciples need to know this.

[28 : 31] Jesus chose them, they didn't choose him. Alright? Read it again. Come on down to where is it?

Chapter 15 verse 16. 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 or remain so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you.

God is the one who takes the initiative in choosing people to be his friends. God is the one who takes the initiative in calling people to follow him.

as clear as black and white on the page and Ephesians chapter 1 verse 4 and 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 13 speak about it absolutely clearly.

And he directs his disciples to bear fruit and fruit that remains that abides that stays that sticks that fruit.

[29 : 49] And so the disciples bear fruit whatever they ask the Father's name he will give them. It's as he said in verse 7 earlier. It's not a formula though you crank the handle of success for prayer.

Right? Got to be careful about that one. It's not dear God give me a million dollars in Jesus name. Not saying that. Amen.

It's not saying dear God give me a Tesla Model 3 in Jesus name. Amen. Dear God give me a palace in whatever suburb in Jesus name.

Amen. Jesus prayer praying in Jesus name is more than a lucky it's not a lucky child. It's not crank the hand or formula for getting what I want.

Prayer in Jesus name will seek what is the glory of the Father. We saw back in verse 8 by bearing much fruit. Fruit that will last and remain and it will be proven to be true believers.

[31 : 01] So in Jesus name means according to God's will. Jesus will. And we have been graciously told what the Master is up to. He's working at having people grow to be just like him.

Pruning, shaping, and that should shape the kind of stuff that we pray for. It will mean that we'll search the scriptures to inform us for our prayers on various things.

We'll search the scriptures for prayers for our government and officials. We'll search the scriptures for praying when it comes to money and finances. We'll search the scriptures when it comes to ministry and family matters and schooling and health and all kinds of things.

We'll search the scriptures to know what the father's will is so that we might pray accordingly and that will be the father producing fruit in us that will remain.

But we can't help but think can we that one key important aspect of fruit bearing has to be seeing others come to to a living faith in the Lord Jesus will.

[32 : 15] For those to become disciples of Jesus, to become precious in God's eyes and become faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ as well and so they will remain beyond the judgment and live forever in the presence remaining in the glory and presence of God forever.

Well, as Jesus teaches his disciples, he's helping us to have right expectations of what it means to be disciples, really, isn't he?

Remember, these are the last sort of words that Jesus is going to speak on earth. Believers, you and I who serve the risen Lord Jesus, are friends of the Lord.

We're not his enemies. fruit. And we are to be bearing fruit is the right expectation. Fruit, which is the life of those things which brings glory to God as the rough edges are pruned off, as painful as that might be.

It's important if we call ourselves followers of Jesus to be bearing fruit. fruit. If we're not, well, then there's something fundamentally wrong.

[33 : 44] If we're not connected to the vine, we can't bear fruit. And we can expect nothing other than the wrath of God and being burnt up.

Faith without fruit fruit is not genuine faith. And the future is the fire.

If we are bearing fruit, then we should expect to be pruned, groomed, cut back, shaped by God. God, it will definitely not be comfortable at the time.

As God trains me in the right way to go. Left to myself, I'd normally go this way or that way or this way.

But God, if I'm connected to Jesus, is going to say, no, that's not right, Roy. I'm going to train you and prune you to come back this way. He will prune things in me, cut it off, not despite me, but for our good and his glory, so he might continue to bear much fruit, for God disciplines those he loves.

[35 : 13] So it's right to expect some pruning, pruning. We might not recognise it at the time, but it will be good for everyone in season.

Better to have some pruning now than find ourselves burnt on the last day. That's the kind of thing we should be praying for our church. We should also be asking the Father to be bearing fruit in people, becoming believers.

There are people checking out Jesus Monday nights at the moment on the Good News course. Our plans are that after Easter we will have a Good News dinner, another Good News course start. But it might be that you are wanting to actually check out Jesus now. Hang on a second, I really need to know about this. There will be nothing that we'd love to do more with you than to read through some of John's gospel with you.

Just turn the page, you can do it yourself with someone. We've got this word one-to-one, a guided read through John's gospel. If you'd like to read that through with someone because you're not sure where you are with Jesus yet, that's a good thing to do.

[36 : 21] The people in this room would love to read it through with you, I'd love to do that as well. If that's for you, let me know and we'll work that out. And if you want to check out Jesus, that's a good way to do it.

Let us know. We're working out with John's gospel, not a bad thing to do. just let us know. Well friends, let's pray and we'll call it quits there and we'll have a question in a time in a minute because I'm sure we need to answer some questions. Let's pray. Our Father in Heaven, we thank you that you speak to us in your word and we pray that having heard your word, we would be shaped to grow convicted by your spirit and pruned by your heavenly care. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.