BRANCHES

Good morning and I pray all are doing ok. First off I want to thank everyone for your attendance to Rob and I as we filled in for Terry in his absence. Our goal has been to do our best in keeping all of us faithful in our walk with the Lord.

One of the benefits of filling in for Terry has been the time and effort spent in God’s word preparing for these sermons. I’m thankful that this has caused me to spend more time than usual in God’s word.

Terry will be back in the pulpit next week and we will be back to worshiping together this coming Sunday morning at 10am. Depending on how things go, we will look at Sunday afternoon and Wednesday as we go.

It’s been a long hard year for everyone adjusting to the changes forced on us by this pandemic. Some have have had an especially difficult year with the loss of loved ones. We must keep them in our prayers and look for ways to aid them in their grief.

Which brings me to verse that pops out at me as we go through these times. Hebrews 10:23-25

**“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promises is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day draw near.”**

I pray that none of us has developed a “habit” of not assembling together since we have had to cancel services due to the pandemic.

Let us all make every effort to once again do as the Lord requires and meet for worship service.

The Lord knows full well how we are. He knows our every weakness. He knows that if we fail to assemble we run the risk of falling away from His grace.

Every word of scripture is there for our benefit. Therefore, let us take heed to the word of God as given us in Hebrews to assemble for worship and fellowship!

**With that said, let’s get into this morning’s lesson.**

**This lesson will have its base in the book of John. Specifically John 15:5-8.**

**Let’s read together starting at verse 1 of John 15:1-11**

Jesus has been preparing His disciples for His soon death, burial, and resurrection. He is giving them and us instructions for living the Christian life.

Earlier in John 14:6 At the last supper, Jesus warned His Apostles about His coming arrest and death. The Apostles couldn’t understand what He meant. Finally, Thomas exclaimed: We do not know where You are going Jesus. How can we possibly know the way! Jesus took this opportunity to teach them**: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes unto the Father except through Me.”**

Back to John 15: We find it clear that Jesus used every-day events as a springboard for teaching eternal truths. He used relatable events, things, and life experiences to bring out a deeper meaning. A deeper understanding as we peal back the layers of His words.

Here, in John He was setting an example of what all of us are called to do.

In the Old testament, Moses told the Israelites how they were to pass God’s truths along to each new generation. He said: “Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. {Deuteronomy 11:19}

If the only time you spend on God’s word is one hour on Sunday morning, you will never grow in the faith or discover the fullness of life offered by the grace of God.

We need to be ready for “teachable moments” that come while we’re going about our daily lives. Sitting down for breakfast, walking (or more likely for us, driving) our kids around or in some cases our parents. All these daily events provide opportunities to teach about God and to learn about Him as well. Not only to others but to ourselves. That’s the way Jesus taught. He was always alert to “teachable moments” when He could tie the eternal truth to the events of the moment!

In our verses for this morning we see that Jesus was using a word picture that was very familiar to His disciples.

For one thing, grapes were central to Israel’s economy. The climate in Israel is perfect for the growth of grapes. For another thing, the grapevine had always been a symbol of the nation of Israel. In fact, the symbol of the grapevine was on Israel’s coins up until the time they were conquered by Rome.

Even the entrance to the temple was adorned with gold wire and beads, delicately twisted to look like a huge golden grapevine.

Jesus said, **“I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man abides in Me and I in him, He will bear much fruit, apart from Me you can do** **nothing,”** John 15:5

There is a word that flows through our scripture for this morning that is repeated several times. **“ABIDE”**

This word “abide is used 11 times in 11 verses. We can see that abiding is necessary to produce any fruit. We can also see that not abiding means the branch will be useless. **Therefore, what does it mean to abide in Christ.**

Jesus gave a little more understanding when He said, **“If you abide in Me and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you.” (V 7)**

Please don’t miss this point!

**To abide in Christ means to spend time focusing on Him and His words!**

**In practical terms, it means we spend time reading, studying, and meditating on the Bible!**

**When God’s word abides in us, we abide in Christ!**

We know that some in Christendom demand that God alone is the active one when it comes to salvation. Some believe that we do not have a part in our salvation. Although it is true that salvation comes by God through Jesus the Christ, that it is only through the grace of God that we can be saved, the emphasis here in John 15 pictures a vine and the branch in **“partnership”** with God through connection to Christ.

Allow me to interject here what one evangelist said.

George Whitefield conducted an outdoor Bible campaign in the 1700s during a period of revival called the “Great Awakening.” Thousands responded to his Gospel message. After one of his sermons, someone asked Whitefield how many people were converted. He replied: “We’ll know in five years.”

In other words, the passing of time would show which decisions were superficial and which were genuine.

**Some would ABIDE, others would not!**

We are told to ABIDE because it is something we can do….. or not do. We can abide by the Lord’s command. In practical terms, we have a daily choice to make. Will we spend time in prayer? Will we open our Bibles and read? Will we focus on Christ? Will we spend time with other believers? If we fail to see that ABIDING is our job, we miss not only this sermon but we miss the whole chapter that we are spending time in this morning.

There is no exception. If we fail to ABIDE we will be left in a dangerous state!

Jesus gives us reassuring promises for those who stay connected, but chilling warnings for those who turn loose from the vine, Jesus!

The unfruitful branch is taken away (v. 2)

A branch cannot bear fruit and, in fact, can do absolutely nothing apart from the vine. (v.4-5)

In the end, the one who does not ABIDE is thrown away, cast into the fire, and burned. (v. 6)

If we do not ABIDE in Christ, the consequences are terrible. But when we ABIDE in Christ, we will have a wonderful outcome. It’s called fruit bearing. The purpose of the branch is to bear fruit. Fruit bearing doesn’t require much effort on our part. Fruit is the natural result of the branch ABIDING in the vine.

While fruit comes from ABIDING, a good harvest does require effort on the part of the vinedresser. Jesus said**, “I am the vine and my Father is the gardener.”**

John 15:1 we read that the vine provides life, and the vinedresser provides what is needed for a good harvest!

This passage that we have been concentrating on lets us know that we are branches connected to the vine. (Jesus) as long as we ABIDE in Him!

Moving a little further down in (John 15:14-15) Jesus said to His disciples**, “You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for a slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”**

What can we take from the verses that we have so far covered? Two actions that are required from us. One, as branches we are to ABIDE and two as friends we are to OBEY!

We also discover in these two verses, (V 14-15) a new understanding of our connection with Christ. Vines and branches have a biological connection in which the vine does all the giving and the branches all the receiving.

However, friendship adds to this. Friendship is personal, friendship is reciprocal!

Unlike a slave who has no options to obey or not, obeying Christ as his friend is a matter of choice.

Friends care what is important to their friends. Jesus wants to share His plans with His friends. He wants them to not only ABIDE and obey, He wants them to carry forward with His plans. He is not only speaking to those first century disciples He is speaking to us! Jesus is letting them and us know that we are to share in His ministry.

What does it mean to ABIDE and obey?

Someone put it this way; “Each one helps out the other. The one who abides finds it easier to obey, and the obedient one is more comfortable abiding. On the other hand, the one who fails to abide is more likely to disobey, and the one who disobeys doesn’t feel comfortable abiding.”

I know that this statement is not easy to grasp just hearing it the first time. I suggest that you read it after Rob posts it to our web site.

All of us know of some that are not with us anymore because they just drifted away. They never really plugged in to church or to fellowship The real sadness was that during the time we had to advise them they were not abiding with the Lord or us. Because they stopped abiding they no longer wanted to obey. The branch not receiving nourishment from the vine shriveled up and fell of the vine. And so it is with us if we fail to stay connected to the vine, Jesus, we will not receive any nourishment.

On the other hand, the happiest person in the world is the Christian who is abiding and obeying. Jesus explained this when He said**, “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”** (John 15:11)

**What can we learn from that statement from Jesus? The outcome for the obedient abider is joy to the full!**

CONCLUSION:

This was the final “I AM” statement of Jesus to His disciples the night before He was to be arrested and we learn two very important truths.

**He gives in these few verses that we covered this morning both a promise and a command. As the vine, Jesus provides all the nourishment we will ever need for life. As the vinedresser, God does all that is needed to give us fruitful lives. As the branches, our part is to ABIDE and to OBEY. If we abide in His love we can experience His joy to the full. If we obey Him we are His friends and share in His life and ministry.**

How would you describe your connection with Christ today?

Jesus is the vine, the sustainer of life itself.

Is He your vine?

Are you receiving the nourishment to become a fruitful branch?

Do you want to be? In (Matthew 11: 28-30) The Vine, Jesus said,

**“** **Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls for My yoke is easy and My load is light.”**

Wont you take this opportunity this morning to ABIDE and OBEY what the Father through Jesus freely offers. Join all the branches that are connected to the Jesus the vine. All those who have been baptized into Christ are grafted to the vine. Please ask us to assist you in that grafting.

To those of us who have already accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, take some time and meditate on your life as a branch of Jesus the vine. Maybe you need to do some pruning so that you can become a more useful branch, a fruit producing branch in the Lord’s Kingdom.

I want to again thank the Lord and you for this opportunity to cover for Terry during his absence. I pray that the lessons that Rob and I have presented were fruitful to all. May the Lord bless!