

# Jesus the True Vine

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[ 0 : 00 ] One of my favourite bands, a band called Radiohead, have a line in one of their songs. It says, I'm not living, I'm just killing time. I'm not living, I'm just killing time.

It's better to say Radiohead on the downs are having a kind of curious outlook, almost optimistic view on life. But that is a really honest song. I wonder if we're really honest, whether that's perhaps a line or a thought at times we can identify with.

We feel perhaps life is sometimes just passing us by. We're not quite sure what we're doing. We don't always feel like we're achieving a lot.

Perhaps we can feel like we're just killing time. We'll bring that into the context of these passages that we're looking through at the moment in John's Gospel. Jesus speaking to the disciples the night before his crucifixion, telling them that he's going to be going away.

Even with that promise that he's going to return, what are they supposed to do in the meantime? That's one of the big themes of these chapters of John.

[ 1 : 09 ] Is Jesus just going to say, well, just kill some time. Just hang around, don't worry, I'll be back. I'll sort everything out. If we're Christians this morning, is that sometimes how our thought process goes?

We're looking forward to the return of Jesus, and rightly so. We're supposed to look forward today. But in the meantime, perhaps it can just feel like, well, what do we do now as his people?

We're kind of hanging around. We're kicking our heels. Perhaps we're not living. We're just killing time. Well, our passage this morning, and Jesus, as he speaks to us today, through his word, offers us something far, far better than that.

He calls us, and you'll have heard this word repeated throughout the reading, he calls us to be fruitful as we wait for his return. To be fruitful.

It's not the kind of unforgiving, pressurized goals that our society often promotes. Jesus is not saying, hey, you need to be successful. You need to be wealthy. You need to be famous.

[ 2 : 16 ] Nor is it this sort of aimless, or perhaps hopeless situation of those who opt out of that pressure, and instead just drift along, or become entirely self-focused, or focused on their own comfort.

I know Jesus, in this fruitfulness, gives this great picture of purpose, of meaning, of worth, that he enables in his people. And that's what we're going to be looking at this morning.

The way this passage fits together, if you have it open in front of you, verses 1 down to 8, really Jesus gives this kind of metaphor about the vine, and he paints this picture of that.

And then verses 9 down to the end, he explains that metaphor and opens it up a little bit. We're going to follow a similar pattern here, really. There's a fairly clear, big picture that's painted, we'll talk about that.

But then we're going to spend a bulk of our time digging into the detail of what that means, and what that looks like, day to day. But let's start with the big picture. Jesus is the vine, that means kind of the trunk of the vine.

[ 3 : 21 ] His disciples are the branches, which are to abide, that is, to remain attached to the central vine, Jesus himself. And the result of that, as we said, is that they can bear fruit, much fruit, as these verses say.

Just like James, I'm not a gardening expert either. I didn't use that with a cactus, but it dies, that's a branch achievement. But here, the image, even for someone like me, the image is pretty clear, isn't it?

For a branch to bear fruit, it has to be connected to the vine. For a disciple to bear fruit, to have this fruitful life, he or she needs to be connected to Jesus.

So in one way, it's fairly simple. We get that big picture. But I think there's three key questions then to kind of unwrap, three images to really get to grips with, so that we can truly understand what Jesus is teaching us here.

So we can really get specific, I suppose, as we try and bring this out in our lives, as a church. So those three questions that we're going to look at are these. What does it actually mean that Jesus is divine?

[ 4 : 32 ] What does it mean to abide in him? And thirdly, what is this fruit that Jesus is talking about? I think as we get to grips with those three, those are the three main movements in this passage, that will help us get to grips with what Jesus is talking about.

So let's have a look. First, how is Jesus divine? That's the opening of the passage, isn't it? Verse 1, I am the true vine, Jesus says. And in a lot of ways, perhaps we naturally understand that.

Don't we, it's about being the source? It's about being connected to the roots? All these kind of ideas come to mind, and that's all true. And yet actually, Jesus' choice in using this illustration goes much deeper than that.

This is one of Jesus' famous I am sayings that run throughout the Gospel of John. I am the good shepherd. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the true vine, as he says here.

There's actually seven in total. This is the final one. Without going into too much detail, each one of these I am sayings is a claim by Jesus of divinity.

[ 5 : 43 ] And it's Jesus claiming that he is God. I am is actually the name or the root of the name by which God wields himself to his people in the Old Testament.

And so as Jesus uses that title for himself, I am the true vine, his hearers would instantly pick up that he is identifying himself with the God of the Old Testament.

So that's one thing. But there's another thing that the first disciples would pick up here straight away. And that's the background of this particular illustration of the vine.

Because this is also language that goes back into the Old Testament. Back into that part of the Bible written before Jesus was born. Because back there, the language of the vine is used to describe God's people, the nation of Israel.

Israel was described as a vine. And now a really brief start here that I think is worth kind of slugging up. When we talk about God's people in Israel in the Old Testament, as the Bible does a lot, it's worth highlighting that it's not equivalent to the nation of Israel that we hear a lot about in the news at the moment.

[ 6 : 56 ] I'm not going to get into that really complicated situation. I'm happy to talk more afterwards if anyone would like. But I think it is important that we remember that, that we're not kind of importing current affairs in 2024 back into our reading or understanding of the Bible in passages like this.

But in the Old Testament, Old Testament Israel, we're talking about here. God's chosen people are repeatedly spoken of using this vine imagery. Psalm 80 is one example that talks about how God brought his vine out of Egypt and planted it.

Speaking there about the Exodus, where God rescued his people from Egypt and gave them a new land. And saying that through them, he was going to bless the whole world.

They would bear fruit. That would be a blessing to the nations around them. And the heart of this blessing was that through them, all the nations of the world would be brought to see and to know God.

And a number of the prophets of the Old Testament pick up this vine imagery as well, describing Israel. But the key point is this, that we need to grasp. That wherever it's used, every single example, I think, it goes on to explain how Israel failed in that mission.

[ 8 : 18 ] That actually Israel didn't bear the fruit it was supposed to. Here's this poor example from a prophet called Jeremiah. He said this, That idea that Israel did not bring the nations to God as they had been supposed to.

And so in our verses this morning, here comes Jesus and he says, I am the true vine. Very deliberately in contrast to the previous vine, the failed vine of Israel.

And the message is clear, isn't it? That God's promised blessing to the world. Ultimately that promise of a way to know God, of being his people, of being brought back into his family.

And all that goodness that flows from that. And that all happens to Jesus. And so again, Jesus is teaching this as a note of encouragement, of peace.

That's the note that's been reeling through these chapters of John to anxious disciples. And this reminder that in him, God has done all he promised to do in bringing his people home.

[ 9 : 34 ] And that as the disciples know Jesus, as they trust in him, that they have access to all the blessings that God has promised. And first, it's so important for us to remember that being a Christian is all about having our hope in Jesus.

He is the true vine that enables us to come to God. The vine that is going to bring that blessing, that fruit of destroying us to God.

Ultimately bringing outsiders, people like us, people who are far from God, back in, back home, back into relationship with God. The way that we get there, the vine as it were.

It's not our hard work or achievements. The vine is not what other people think or say about us. But that true vine that we need here is Jesus Christ himself. That he has done what humanity is unable to do.

And enable that relationship with God. And he's done that. That's possible. As in all of these chapters that we're looking at, the shadow of the cross hangs heavily over the city.

[ 10 : 39 ] And so we remember here that Jesus can bring the true vine that brings blessing. Because on the cross, he's the one who will take the curse. And the curse of sin, that the penalty of sin, that death itself and separation from God.

Because Jesus goes through that for us. Through him we can have that relationship with God. Which is so many ways. The restoration of which is the whole story of the Bible from beginning to end.

And which finds the fulfillment in Jesus as he comes. So that's what it means that Jesus is the vine. The fulfillment of God's promise to bring people, to bring all the nations back to him.

This incredible, full and rich picture of who Jesus is and all that he came to do. So then moving on, the next question we wanted to ask was, well what does it mean then to abide in Jesus?

You know, again we kind of understand what it means for a branch, to be attached to a tree. What does it mean for us to remain connected with Jesus? And we're going to see a few elements here that all fit together.

[ 11 : 45 ] And at the heart of all of this is Jesus' word. Jesus' word. So in verse 3, Jesus says, Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

Remember John chapter 13, where Jesus cleanses his disciples' feet. It's that picture of forgiveness. Again, it's the same idea here. Jesus is saying, You've been forgiven, cleansed through my word.

Jesus' word being his teaching. All that he has told them and taught them about the gospel. But ultimately that is how we're cleansed. That is how we are grafted on or connected, if you like, to Jesus, to the vine.

As we're trusting in the gospel and all that he's done. But we also see the importance of Jesus' words down in verse 7 as well. If you abide in me, are my words abiding you?

And the point here is that holding on to Jesus' gospel message is not just a one-off thing. But it is this ongoing, lifelong process.

[ 12 : 51 ] And I think that's why this image of the vine and the branches is so helpful, isn't it? Because to be a healthy, living branch, it's not enough that it was just once attached to a tree.

It needs that ongoing connection. Or it withers and it dies. Jesus is saying that to abide in him, we need to continue in that gospel.

To continue in that gospel teaching. And we need to remember, we need to remind ourselves day by day that our hope is in Jesus and what he has done for us.

So an example of the kind of thing that we want to be wary of, or the kind of dangers we might see, would be an example from a previous generation, perhaps something like the Billy Graham Morales in the 50s.

And Billy Graham, an incredible godly man whom God used in amazing ways to bring so many people to space. But then there are also many people for whom those individual events, at those single evenings, that were really the full extent of their Christianity.

[ 14 : 00 ] And who lived the rest of their life with this kind of uncertain hope, where they say, well, you know, I once went forward at a meeting, and yet that was it. As if it's like getting a kind of a vaccination, or just a one-off shot.

Perhaps for us, the kind of equivalent might be the thought or the thing that we hear, well, I've been baptized. I've got that stamp, because that's it, it's done.

I don't need to worry about that part of my life anymore. But Jesus is saying to him, that life with him is this ongoing relationship, and this ongoing dependence, and this ongoing abiding in his word, and continuing in what he teaches.

That is what it means, to abide in Jesus. And then Jesus puts it another way down in verse 9, where he says, that the Father has loved me, so I have loved you.

Abide in my love. Jesus' word and Jesus' love come hand in hand, because as you said, Jesus' word is first and foremost his teaching of the gospel about his incredible love for us.

[ 15 : 08 ] And so we abide as we continue to remember that it's God's love for us, shown in Christ, not our efforts, not our one-off experience we've had, not even, as we'll speak about in a moment, not even the fruit that we bear for God.

But it is only the love of Christ, shown in the gospel, that is what sustains us. We abide in his love, and to remember our ongoing dependence on his love.

And then the final element in this abiding that Jesus lays out here, the last thing, what it means to abide in Jesus, we see just below that, just under verse 9 down to verse 10, I'm following on from that, where Jesus says this, if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

And so it's not there that there's this element of obedience involved in abiding in Jesus. That abiding in Jesus is seeking in his strength to live according to his word and his commandments.

And again, I think it's really important to see here, this isn't a separate thing, it's certainly not an opposing thing, where we think, oh, I thought abiding was about God's love for us, but it turns out it's all about our obedience to put these in opposites is to get things back to front because we've seen in these chapters time and time again that our love to Jesus and our obedience go hand in hand.

[ 16 : 39 ] It was there in black and white last week in chapter 14, if you love me, you will keep my commandments, Jesus said. And especially, that is the commandment that Jesus repeats here throughout these chapters, but in verse 12, this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.

So what it means to abide is to constantly hold on to Jesus' word and his teaching given to us in the Bible. The teaching of the gospel about the God who loves us and view through the cross has made forgiveness possible.

And we can never forget that, that we never move beyond that, that we constantly abide in and depend on that love. But it also has this obedience element.

We live that out by showing this radical, self-sacrificial love for one another. And in all of this, we follow Jesus' passage. Jesus, the one who was perfectly obedient to his father and demonstrated that perfect love by laying down his life for his friends.

And so really, this is a huge part of what church is all about. Both in our corporate gatherings like this on our Sunday, but also in our life together as a community.

[ 18 : 03 ] And the church is to be a place or more accurately, more specifically, a people where we encourage each other to abide in Jesus. Where we encourage each other to continue.

A place where we're reminded of Jesus' word and Jesus' love for us. And we are spurred on to live in obedience to that. Church is to be a place where we can model that love for one another as Jesus says.

And if abiding, as Jesus said, it does involve loving one another, then that means that it cannot be something that is done purely in isolation, but must be done as a collective.

Jesus calls us together to abide in him. And it's good to take note of what Jesus said in verse 11. These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be so.

Remember, this whole section is Jesus' encouragement to his disciples. To live abiding in him is what brings real joy. This is what we're designed for. Remember, that this is the path Jesus says to a fruitful life.

[ 19 : 14 ] And so really, our challenge this morning is to think, well, how can we make sure we are taking hold of that joy? We are claiming what Jesus is offering us. How can we make sure we're keeping ourselves connected with God's word?

Are we treasuring that throughout the week by reading our Bibles as it shows God's love to us? Are we making the most of our opportunities as a church to gather together around God's word together as it tells us how we should live and it tells us all that he has died in the gospel?

Are we showing this love to others in merely practical ways? By giving them time? By showing our concern? By dying to self and our own agenda and putting others through us.

Because this is what Jesus commands of those seeking to abide in him. This invitation, it's an essential invitation that we cannot do without this, Jesus says.

But he's also keen and it's so important that we remember that this is a joyful invitation that we would grasp this and that we would live this out, this life, abiding in Jesus.

[ 20 : 27 ] And that then leads us to our final question here which fills out this picture that Jesus is painting in his vine imagery which is the fruit.

Now we see this whole passage in the invitation that we live a fruitful life which is not just killing time but real purpose and that that is the result of abiding in Jesus through trusting in the gospel, through living that hour in obedience to his word.

But what really is this fruit that Jesus is talking about? Now it can be really tempting here I think to think of the fruit as just general Christian living and maybe we think of the fruit of the spirit that's a metaphor used elsewhere in the New Testament and that's absolutely true and that we cannot live that way without this ongoing vital connection with Jesus and yet I think Jesus actually has something more specific in mind here because I think the fruit that Jesus is speaking about here is the fruit of other people coming to know and put their trust in Jesus the true Father and the one through whom God has blessed the world and made a relationship with him possible.

I think the fruit here is more people coming to enjoy in that joyous way of life living with Jesus. Let me try and show you that verse 16 I think here is the key Jesus said this 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 so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give to you.

Jesus sends out his disciples including us today all those who abide in him and he sent them to go and that word appointed there as well is one that usually means for a particular task or ministry it's quite a specific word it's not just a general go and be nice there's a real task here that we're sent out abiding in Jesus and that we might produce this fruit and this fruit that also as verse 16 says abides that as we abide that we produce fruit that abides this fruit that lasts because it too comes to recognize and be connected to Jesus and the true vine and abides in his word and loving obedience to him and this fruit here is the fruit of other people that are going to put their trust in Jesus and let us resolve and let us just think what an incredible privilege it is there what greater privilege in life could that be and what way to purpose and let that fruit pass that Jesus will bring people to know him for all eternity and that people will be brought into his family abiding in Jesus at the fruit of our lives and we spend so much of our time and our energy chasing after all sorts of different things and Jesus has his something that is eternal here is the fruit that you can bear if you remain abiding in me and again we want to be really kind of open and up front and face up to that you know as a church we need to be and we should be bearing fruit in this way

[ 23 : 54 ] God's purpose for us is not only to be a community for those who already know and believe in him or that's great but on top of that the mission of the church is that people who didn't previously know Jesus would come in to know him just as it was the mission for the people of Israel back in the Old Testament that mission fulfilled in Jesus who then uses us to carry on our mission and again if you're here you're not a Christian yet but we're so glad that you are here we want you to know that you are incredibly welcome and really loved and we're so pleased to have you but the thing we would want most of all is that you would come to know the love of Jesus being and trust in him to love him to abide him that is not a secret plan that we're trying to hide that is not us pushing an agenda on anyone that is simply us being as loving as we could possibly be because we think that is the best thing in the world that is the most important thing in the world that is what brings purpose that is what brings joy as Jesus says that is what connects us for all eternity to God our creator through Jesus and the true

God and so this passage is a great encouragement and as we're told incredibly that happens that that fruit arrives through ordinary Christians like us as we abide in Jesus' word in his love as we seek the keeping commandments specifically that commandment highlighted here to love one another that means that the way that we relate to one another within the church as we love one another should be a witness to those outside of the church of God's great love for them. Christ's writer called Francis Schaeffer puts it like this we must never forget that the final apologetic that word just means evidence or argument for the final apologetic for the gospel which Jesus gives is the observable love of true Christians the true Christians that there are love for God that moves us to love one another that we need to be living that out not hidden away but in the midst of the world that others might come to know and believe in God's blood in some ways this passage leads us to reclaim the power of so many words that have become a bit kind of cliché or weak sounding community fellowship hospitality you can also get a little bit vanilla or plain or anything but the Bible says that these things are absolute dynamite that as people see gospel community that as people share in gospel fellowship that as people experience gospel hospitality where people love others as Christ has loved them even laying down his life for them and that is something about fruit as it encourages it opens the door for people to turn to

Jesus love so let me finish it with two specific applications of this the first is this we asked earlier how are we showing this love to one another so the following question is to say is that something that is visible to the world around us. Don Carson writes that is why the union of love that joins believers with Jesus can never become a comfortable exclusive huddle that only they can share but by its very nature it is a union an intimacy which seeks to bring others in great question how can we live out a loving church community in the midst of a wider community and that people can see that love rather than having church friends and other friends we can merge those together at social times at meals at birthday parties at days hours whatever it is that we do and that those who don't yet know the gospel might see it in action in our relationships with one another and that is not just a kind of a church strategy we see that right here in the Bible that is part of God's plan for bringing people to know him for Jesus and then the second application we have nearly long enough to give this the time it deserves but the second application here in these verses is prayer and we return to this in the coming weeks but twice in this passage you'll see in verse 7 and verse 16 we're told that God will answer our prayers it's not that God will do us anything that we want whenever we ask we promise that because there's fruits of people turning to

Jesus it's for his glory that God will answer prayers in line with them and so that final kind of application here this is a call to pray for people pray for people who don't get no Jesus pray that God will open their eyes to his incredible love for them pray in a kind of organized and deliberate way that we don't just kind of forget about pray that God would graciously introduce us to bear this fruit for his glory and as we continue to abide in Christ together remembering his word and remembering his love and being obedient to his commands that we might bear fruit for his glory let's pray together