

John 15.1-11

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Sermon notes by Pastor Paul Goh

Beloved, the scene is in the upper room. When the Lord's Supper was instituted. It was natural for Jesus to speak about the vine for it was a symbol of spiritual fruitfulness. By Jesus' teaching of the vine, and the branches, he was admonishing his disciples not to follow the example of Judas but to remain in the vine, that is, to abide in Christ, in his word and love. In this passage, Jesus addressed the eleven disciples, Judas having left them in order to execute his plan to betray Jesus. Thus, Jesus did not address a mixed multitude but to an audience of believers. In chapters 13 and 14, we are taught what Christ is doing for us while he is away: he is preparing a place for us, manifesting himself to us and sending the Holy Spirit to comfort and to encourage us. John 15 is the other side of the truth, where we learn what we are to be and do for him during the time of his absence from us. We are responsible to bear fruit.

Thus in John 15.1-11 the word of God to us is the Christian is called to abide in Christ in order to be fruitful. And by means of pruning the Christian can be more fruitful to the delight of God. Therefore, in the sermon we will learn the following: what is our relationship with Christ? Why is the vine used to describe the relationship between Christ and the Christian? What is the goal of the union of Christ with the believer? What is the blessing of the vine for the Christian? What happens to those who does not bear any fruits in their life?

An exhortation to abide in Christ. We consider the relationship, the goal and the blessing.

The Relationship. We are united in Christ. Before we can obey Christ's exhortation to abide in Christ, we must first be united with Him. Union with Christ is not simply a step in the application of redemption. It is really a central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation and it a once for all accomplishment in the finished work of Christ. This union with Christ is expressed in Scripture with the phrase "in Christ". We become one in Christ at the fountain of salvation in the eternal election of the Father of us. The apostle says, "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1.3, 4). The Father elected us in Christ from eternity. It is also because, we the people of God were in Christ when he gave his life a ransom and we are redeemed by his blood. We are represented as united to Christ I his death, resurrection and exaltation to heaven. Ephesians 1.7, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace". It is in Christ that the people of God are created anew. Ephesians 2.10, " we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works". And thus, our new life in Christ is also continued because of the same relationship to Him. It is in Christ that the Christian life is lived out and they lived in the fellowship of Christ's resurrection. And it is in Christ that believers die. They have fallen asleep in Christ. And finally, it is in Christ the saints will be resurrected and glorified. It is in Christ that we will be made alive when the last trumpet shall sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible (I Cor. 15.22). It is in Christ that we will be glorified (Rom. 8.17) And thus, we are united in Christ and this union is seen in the picture that Jesus uses.

And Jesus says, " I am the true vine". Why does Jesus say that he is the true vine" Christ did not use the figure of the vine as a teacher would use in order to have an object lesson for his students, instead the vine was a suitable figure to represent the

union of the believer to Christ. In the Old Testament Scriptures, vines represent Israel. In Psalm 80.8, "thou hast a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and placed it. Thou preparest room before it, and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land". Again in Isaiah 5.1, 2 and 7, "now will I sing to my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard in a very fruitful hill. And he fenced it, and gathered out the stones thereof, and planted it with the choicest vine and built a tower in the midst of it, also made a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. For the vineyard of the Lord is hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry. Thus from these passages, Israel as the type proved a failure. In Jer. 2.21, I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?" God expected fruits from Israel. And God was surprised how the vine turned out – an unfruitful plant. IN contrast to this failure of typical people of Israel stand the true vine which fulfills all expectations of the heavenly husband. Christ is the true vine and we are the branches. And Christ exhorts us to abide in Him.

To abide in Christ means, literally, to remain, to continue, to live. And thus, he wants us his branches to remain in the vine, so that the branches can receive all the life, with the nutrients and the sap of the plant. We are not abiding in Christ when we are transgressing in the law of God and we are walking in darkness and not according as Christ has walked. This means two things: First, it is to have a regular fellowship with Christ. To have fellowship with Christ means that we also have the fellowship with the Father in the Holy Spirit (I John 1.3). It is to have a conscious communion with him: We have fellowship with him and he with us. This is shown in the table of the Lord or fellowship. This is where we eat his flesh and drink his blood symbolically. What does it mean to eat his body and drink his blood? Christ says that whosoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood has eternal life. And thus, to eat his flesh and to drink His blood is to believe in him and Christ dwells in us and we in him (John 6.56). Secondly, Jesus says in verse 7, "abide in me and my words abide in you". Abiding in Christ cannot take place where the Word of God is absent. In fact, we abide in Christ when we are abiding in the words of Christ. That is, the word of Christ lives or remains in us. And through God's eternal covenant of grace where he will put his law in our hearts and in our minds, we keep his commandments (v10). Thirdly, we keep his commandments because we love God in Christ and so his commandments are not a burden or grievous but a great delight and joy (v10).

The goal of abiding in Christ is to bear fruit (verse 2). The branches are divided into two groups: one that bore fruit and another that did not bear any fruit. Those who did not bear fruit did not abide in the vine and so it was a matter of time that it dried up and was cast away into the fire and burned. Fruit is not something that is outward that can be attached to the branch like the bells on a Christmas tree but are an organic part of the plant. Who was Jesus referring to the dead branch? Judas Iscariot. He was never part of the organic vine of Christ. He seemed to be part of the true disciples but he was not as he betrayed our Lord with a kiss. He was that branch that bore no fruit and was cast into the fire of hell to burn. And those who continue to abide in the vine bore fruit. The eleven disciples were those who bore fruit for they abided in the vine of Christ.

The figure of vine is one of fruitfulness. The vine is a very fruitful plant. 1 cluster of grapes yields 400 grapes. 5 clusters can yield 2000 grapes. And 1 branch with several clusters can yield thousands of grapes. Through this figure of the vine, God expects us to be more fruitful. And the way to more fruitfulness is by pruning. And the vinedresser prunes or removes all the parasites, fungus, insects that hinder the

growth of the vine by stealing the nutrients from the vines. Pruning is surely a very painful process for the Christian but this is an indispensable for growth. Those parasites are trials that come our way: chronic sicknesses, terminal diseases and disappointments and failure in life. Trials by itself do not cause us to grow but this trial pave the way for our spiritual growth. By the ministry of the Word, God ministers to us in our trials, by causing us to trust in Him and thus our faith is strengthened. And we bear fruits unto God. And to continue in the vine is very necessary for if the branch is separated from the vine, it cannot bear fruit. We will not be fruitful to God if we neglect the means of fellowship with God in his word and prayer. And our fruitfulness brings glory to God. Nothing but fruits from the harvest makes a happy gardener. It is a reward for all his labours. It makes his labour worthwhile and he eats the fruit of his labour. God is pleased when there is fruit. It shows that God is an effective gardener who has fruit according to his sowing. It shows that God is all-powerful when there is good fruit and that we are his disciples.

The second goal is that your joy may remain in you and your joy may be full. "These things" in verse 10 refers to the maintaining of the communion with Christ, and thee means I which it can be realised. When fellowship with Christ is broken, joy disappears. This is illustrated in the life of David when he sinned grievously against the Lord. And as a result, he no longer enjoyed a comforting sense of God's presence. He was wretched in his soul. And when he confessed his sins to God, he cried, "restore unto me the joy of salvation". The ground of our joy is not in our self but in Christ alone. Joy is ours according to the measure in which we enter into communion with Christ. The world finds its happiness in circumstances but for the Christian, our joy is independent of these things. Paul and Silas were in the Philippian dungeon but they were singing their hearts out. What a triumph over their circumstances. The prison walls could not cut them off from Christ! May we continue to have fellowship with Christ that nothing robs us of our joy.

The blessing for abiding in Christ is answered prayers (v7). When we are abiding in Christ and his words abides I us, then his words abide within our hearts richly and supplication is simply the beating of a heart that belongs to God. While the believer is in fellowship with the Lord and is ruled from within by his word, he will ask amiss. Instead of praying in the flesh, he will pray in the Spirit. Why is there so little power of prayer today? Because there is so little close communion with Christ and so little obedience to his words. Men who do not abide in Christ pray in vain and their prayers will not be answered. But for the believer, since God's Word abide in his heart, his prayers are guided by the Word of God and he will not ask anything which is not according to his will but only according to His will. And the promise of God is that his prayers will be answered.

Beloved, are you abiding in Christ. Are the Word of Christ and the love of Christ live in your hearts? If not, you are none of his, and you will be cast off as a branch into the fire and burnt. Repent and turn unto the Lord for neglecting to abide in Christ. Perhaps, you saw other things as more important and you lack the desire to commune with Christ. But know this, that there is full pardon in Christ. Therefore, Christ calls you, "abide in me and I in you for the same brings forth much fruit". Amen