**John 15:5-7**

“A Call to Abide in The Vine”

Glenvista Baptist Church

Sunday 13 January 2019

Part 1

**John 15:5-7** “5I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6If 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. 7If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”

**Introduction:**

a) It’s but only the second Sunday of a new year. New often comes with unexpected challenges, concerns, fears, and even untold blessings. New can be very daunting. New means change. New means a shift in direction, or for some simply a continuing in a direction which has been embarked upon already. I want to consider with you this morning a passage of Scripture that I believe would be helpful as we start our journey together in 2019. I want to take two Lord’s Days to focus on this text, and then Lord willing thereafter, we will return to our study of the Ten Commandments.

b) The passage we are to consider this morning is at the heart of our Lord’s Farewell Discourse as found in John 13:31-16:33. It was some of the last things Jesus had to say to His disciples before He returned to be with the Father in Glory. I reckon Jesus knowing that He was soon to depart had some pretty important things to say in this last discourse, and so I thought it well for us to consider something that I believe was very important in our Lord’s mind. Jesus is here having a final meal with His disciples.

c) Now before we look at the text you would have noticed that the context in which Jesus delivers these truths is that of a parable concerning the growing of a Vine. I am a rather keen gardener; and even though there are general principles that apply in this context from gardening; there was much that I did not quite understand about growing a vine, for maintaining a general garden seems to be quite different from maintaining a vine. So, I had to do a bit of research about vine dressing. And in my research, just by way of introduction, I discovered that there are a couple of key things we need to know about a vine, if we were to understand a little better the context into which Jesus was speaking here. Therefore, you will discover that maintaining a vine is hard work which requires continuous effort and manual labor.

d) So if you were to drive past a farm on which grapes are grown, these are just some of what you will see: you will have mist coming up from a tractor spraying up an insecticide; there will be men and women with sheers cutting the vines, cutting out some of the bad branches and giving particular attention to the healthy branches; there will always be some form of work going on; you will see men and women spraying against various insects and pests; there will be expensive equipment watering the vine at certain times of the day; you will witness pruning and general forms of attending to the vine. Now this is meant just to be a general observation of vine growing and not an expert analysis of it; but I think you get the general gist of what it entails to look after a vine.
e) These words that Jesus spoke here in John 15 came though, to a people who were familiar with grapes and with vines. It was a striking parable that Jesus told here as Palestine had plenty vineyards. So, you need to bear in mind that the people who heard these words were familiar with vines and grape growing. They would have understood it much better than you and I who live in a city ever would. And therefore, it is no surprise that Jesus chose to liken Himself unto a Vine.

f) Notice that He said in the wider context that I am the True Vine (v1); I am the Genuine Vine. You Israelites know many vines, and you Israel have been likened in the OT to be the Vine of God; and therefore, vines are familiar to you. But what Jesus wanted to get across to their understanding was that He was THE true Vine. This was the 7th and final expression of the “I AM” sayings found in this gospel, and “I am the true vine” is the last of Christ’s sayings here.

g) This morning our message will focus on verses 5, 6 and 7, with a particular focus on verse 5a. Verses 5-7 reiterate and expand on ideas that Jesus introduced in verses 1-4. There are 5 things going on here in verses 5, 6 and 7. Jesus is saying 5 particular things in this context, yet we will only have time today to look at 2 of the 5 mentioned here. Lord willing next week we will then consider the remaining three.

h) Just before we do that though it is important for me to remind you that the setting before us is in parabolic language and we cannot lose track of that fact. In interpreting it we must not forget the great rule that applies in general to all of Christ’s parables. The general lesson of each parable is the main thing to be noticed. The minor details must not be tortured, and pressed to an excess, in order to extract a meaning from them. We are meant particularly to learn from this parable that the union between Christ and His disciples is very close; He is the Vine and they are the branches.

**Point 1 – “A Statement Calling for Rightful Dependence.” (V5a)**

John 15:5a “I am the vine; you are the branches.”

a) **V5a** Now I want you to see that in the first place in verse 5 Jesus is making a statement. **It is the statement of a very important fact. “I am the Vine, you are the branches.”** That is a fact. Jesus is saying and we need to take note, that if we want to live productively and happily as disciples and followers of Christ, then we need to take note of this fact. It is possible to live ignorant of this fact. For the believer it is a coming back to solid ground if we take notice of this truth which Jesus gives to us here; the fact that He is the all-important vine and we are merely the branches.

b) The union between the branch of a vine and the main stem is the closest that can be conceived. It is the whole secret of the branch’s life, strength, vigor, beauty and fertility. Separate from the parent stem, it has no life of its own. The sap and the juice that flow from the stem and the origin are maintaining power of all its leaves, buds, blossoms and fruit. Cut off from the stem it must soon wither and die. This becomes for the genuine believer a sobering yet also humbling fact.

c) **You see, you need to recognize upfront the crucial truth that Jesus was conveying by making use of this analogy. He was pointing to the fact that we are the branches and not the main stem and therefore we are utterly and completely dependent upon the vine for our sustenance, for our growth, for our life and for our vitality. Without the vine we are just nothing. We cannot survive. We cannot grow. We will**
become lifeless and without Him quite frankly we will simply die. Now that dear friend is a significant fact Jesus was imprinting on the lives of His followers and it is a fact, we need to take careful notice of here this morning.

d) You see, branches depend on vines. He is the important One. He is the True Vine. You see, there is an emphasis on the pre-emminence of Jesus Christ. By using this analogy, the Lord Jesus was in His incarnation making clear His divinity and pointing His disciples to Him as the Vine as their only source for life, for ministry and for growth. Without Him the branches will not exist and will not be able to do a thing; certainly not anything that could have eternal value.

e) So, by way of application we need to see that what is important and of value to God, must become the disciples’ first priority. My agenda, my wants, my selfish desires and strong notions has to take second place and all that pertains to the Kingdom and the Glory of my God has to take precedence in my planning, in my dreams, in my aspirations and in life in general. The branches serve the vine and not the other way around. I need Christ and not the other way around. I am dependent upon Him and not the other way around. I worship Him and not the other way around. This verse calls all disciples to turn away from self and our own small kingdom and calls us to focus on the Kingdom of our God and how we can best bring Him glory.

f) You see even though we might be Christians, and even though we may have been born again; we still remain human, and as long as we are bound by these bodies, we will always be bound by sin, and because we sin, we naturally think of ourselves first; we naturally gravitate towards our own selfish and sinful desires. And the call of this passage is that such sinful behavior needs to stop and that we need to alter our thought patterns and our desires and that our lives need to demonstrate an all-dependency on the all-sufficient one, Christ our King and Savior; Christ the True Vine.

g) You see the message that comes home here to us and confronts us in our self-centeredness is that I am not the most important one; it is not all about me. You see Christ is the all-important One. You and I have been created for His Glory and it is His Glory that must be seen. We are called here not too think too highly of ourselves but to judge ourselves with sober judgment. These words uttered here by Jesus really put things into perspective: “I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser. I am the vine, you are the branches.” You see what he says? I am the vine. Not you. Not me. No, He is the Vine, and on Him we depend for all.

h) The call therefore which comes to us here is a call in which we deliberately realize that we are not the vine but that we are merely the branches. It is not a call to insignificance. No, it is merely a call in which we recognize the Supreme Worth of Christ our Savior and it then becomes an appropriate response for us to humble ourselves in the presence of such a great God. And so, the first statement of fact that comes then here from the Lord Jesus is this: “I am the vine; you are the branches.”

Point 2 – “A Statement Containing the Promise of Fruitfulness.” (V5b)

John 15:5b “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit…”
a) **V5b** But notice then the second statement of fact in the second part of verse 5 and it is the promise of fruitfulness. “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit...” We are meant to learn from this part of verse 5 that the fruits of the Spirit are the only satisfactory evidence of a man being a true Christian. The disciple that “abides” in Christ, like a branch abiding in the vine, will always bear fruit.

b) Now as we read this text and as we interact with it, we need to be asking ourselves some important questions. There are two concepts being brought across here, which require further investigation. **It is the concept of abiding and then the concept of fruitfulness.** Now both these concepts have significant bearing on our understanding of the text before us this morning.

c) So, let us then first consider the aspect of **abiding.** I did a bit of an exercise and I counted that in the English Standard Version the word “abide" occurs 11 times in verse 1-17. **Eleven times in seventeen verses!** That, dear friends, is significant! That tells me something; it tells me that this concept was extremely important to Jesus as he was likening Himself as the Vine and us as the branches. Because this word is used so frequently in these 17 verses, we are forced to ask from the text what this word “abide" means. “Abide in me" means to continue in a daily, personal relationship with Jesus, characterized by trust, prayer, obedience and joy.

d) **It does not mean that we cling to Jesus for what we can get out of Him.** It does not mean sticking around the Savior so that the road of discipleship becomes a little less bumpy. It does not mean serving Him simply for the benefits that come our way. No! Abiding in Christ means being so intricately connected to Christ as the Spirit indwells us that His life-giving power transforms us daily more and more into the image of Christ so that everyday there is less of me evident and more and more of Christ and His transforming grace seen and experienced in my life. Abiding in Him results in joyful living in spite of difficult circumstances; for you see the branch that is connected to the Vine can survive even the toughest drought as it gets all of its nourishment from its source, the Vine.

e) My abiding in Christ reminds me that He is my source, and it reminds me that He has a particular plan. It reminds me that His plan must be my plan, and it reminds me that none of my plans will succeed unless they are on His Agenda. It reminds me that what Christ has planned becomes the most important thing and that unless I am on His agenda, I will never enjoy the benefits and the blessings that come my way as I abide in Him. You see, dear friends, His glory is most evidently displayed when we are doing that which He has called us to do.

f) That means, beloved that abiding has actually very little to do with me and has absolutely everything to do with God and His ultimate plan. This abiding then in Christ ultimately leads to an ever-increasing growth and this growth is displayed in the kinds of fruit, which comes from a disciples’ life. And the more we abide, the more we depend, the more we realize who and what our source is; the more God becomes glorified as we then display those fruits which He works in, as we look towards Him for all we need.

g) That then leads to the second concept; that of **fruit bearing.** And you see what I want you to see then clearly is that Jesus promises that whoever abides in Him will bear much fruit. This is therefore a conditional clause found here in verse 5b. **Unless**
you remain abiding you cannot bear fruit. A branch that is severed from the vine can no longer bear fruit; and so, a disciple who does not ever increasingly walk with his/her God and does not ever increasingly depend on his/her God for all things pertaining to a godly life, will be a disciple who will bear very little fruit.

h) **Your bearing fruit in the kingdom is directly dependent on your abiding in Christ and your abiding in Christ is directly dependent on how much you realize your need of Christ.** Without Him we can do nothing that will have an everlasting impact.

i) Now I want you to notice dear friends, that abiding in Christ is something, which is only possible for those who have miraculously by grace been brought out of the Kingdom of Darkness and brought into the Kingdom of Light. It is only possible for a born again, washed by the blood of the Lamb, saved, redeemed and ransomed believer to abide in Christ. We must be saved first and then as we are connected to the vine, or better said, grafted into the vine, are we also Divinely Empowered to remain or abide in the Vine.

j) Salvation therefore is a Supernatural work caused by a Gracious Divine God; and abiding is an ongoing process that is granted to the believer, and the believer needs to work towards daily as he looks to God for Supernatural strength and undergirding. This abiding is then made possible for the believer as a result of the finished work of Calvary. It is the outflow of God’s redemption into the lives of His people; and as His people continuously look towards Him for strength and grace; He multiplies that in our lives in such a way that it produces beautiful fruit which bring honor and praise unto the Name of the One who has redeemed us from our sin (John 15:8 – “By this my Father is glorified...”)

k) This all then results in **fruitfulness**, and we need to then secondly be asking ourselves this morning what this fruitfulness is. Does fruitfulness have to do with how well I serve in the church? Does it have to do with how many people I have effectively led to the Lord in the past year? Or does it have something to do with Christian leadership; does it mean that only Elders and Deacons and Worship Leaders and Sunday School Teachers and so on are fruitful?

l) **Well if we base fruitfulness on how busy we are in God’s Church or how much we do or how much we are seen serving then we really have missed the boat. You see, being a busy Christian does not necessarily mean that you are godly.** You see fruitfulness in the Kingdom has nothing to do, dear friends with what we do in the Kingdom or how busy we are; no, fruitfulness is all about Christian Character.

m) **The New Testament is very clear on what this fruit is, and I believe it can be summarized in the following terms: fruitfulness comes as a result of repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and holiness in life and conduct.** Fruitful Christians are the ones who most gloriously display Christ and His character in all that they do. You see fruitful Christians are the ones who are low and meek; they are the ones who show kindness and love; the ones who demonstrate grace when no one else is prepared to do so; the ones who reach out to the downcast whilst others pull their noses in the air and turn a blind eye.

n) **Fruitful Christians are the ones who most adequately reflect the glory and likeness of Jesus Christ in all that they do.** Fruitful Christians are the ones who have the Gospel at heart. They are the ones who like John the Baptist will say that I must decrease so
that He can be greater. Fruitful Christians do not draw people to themselves but rather bring people to the Savior.

o) Hear then the following quote from JC Ryle from his commentary on John’s Gospel: “Fruit is the only satisfactory evidence of saving union between Christ and our souls. Where there is no fruit of the Spirit to be seen, there is no vital religion of the heart. The Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus will always make Himself known in the daily conduct of those in whom he dwells. The Master Himself declares, “Every tree is known by his own fruit”. (Luke 6:44)”

p) So, then the promise here in verse 5b is that those who abide in Christ will indeed bear much fruit. Let me ask you then dear believer, this morning, to evaluate yourself in light of this admonition. Are you fruitful? Are you drawing others to the Savior because of what they see in you? Or are you a repulsive Christian? Do you possibly by the lack of fruit in your life rather turn people away from the Gospel and from Christ? May we abide in Him so that we will bear much fruit for His glory!

q) Let me end this section with a most appropriate quote from the prince of preachers Charles Spurgeon. Only Spurgeon could say it this way when he talks of some of the negative fruit that comes when a man does not abide in Christ: “Religion never ought to become the subject of selfishness, yet I fear some treat it as if its chief end were personal spiritual gratification. When a man’s religion totally lies in him saving only himself, there is a disease upon him. When his judgment of a sermon is based upon the one question: “Did it feed me?” it is a swinish judgment. There is such a thing as getting a swinish religion in which you are yourself first, yourself second, yourself third, yourself to the utmost end.”

r) What does your fruit look like my friends? Does it gloriously shine forth the greatness of Christ or are you possibly involved in a “swinish religion?”

Conclusion:

a) We have looked therefore this morning simply at the first two aspects of what it means to abide in Christ. For now dear friends we need to ask God to be gracious to us as we evaluate ourselves. How much do you really depend on Christ as your sustenance? How many times do you not simply do things in your own strength thinking you are a little god and you really do not need God? Do you realize this morning that you are merely the branches but that He is the Vine?

b) Are you bearing fruit? If you are not it means you are not in the Vine! No one can produce these Christian fruits unless he abides in Christ. Are you sure therefore this morning as to whether you are in Christ or not, for this passage in its wider context clearly teaches that every branch that is not in Christ will be destined for the raging fires of hell; and we will see more of that Lord willing next Lord’s Day.

c) Go then; live in recognition that you are merely a branch and that without Christ we are nothing. May this passage cause us to see our need of Christ, both for the believer as well as the unbeliever possibly present here this morning. And may we flee to Christ for rescue and grace; and may our fleeing to Him result in abundant fruit to the praise of His glorious grace.

Amen!
Soli Deo Gloria (For God’s Glory Alone)
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