

ABIDING IN JESUS

John 15v1-9

Among the many memories of my only visit to Italy is a coach journey where we passed scores and scores of vineyards. The fields were carefully staked out and along the wooden frames were clinging vines and great clusters of grapes. For Jesus and His disciples this would have been a familiar sight.

I am the true vine (v1) What does Jesus mean? The clue is in the Hebrew Scriptures. Israel is described as a vine or a vineyard which God has planted. But this vine fails to produce good fruit. Jeremiah 2v21. *"I planted you a choice vine, wholly of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine?"* In contrast Jesus says "I am the true vine." He is all that Israel was not. Later he goes on:

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (v5) The key word here is "remain". The King James version may be more familiar: **abide in me**. The Greek word is *'meno'* meaning to stay in a given place or state or relationship, to continue or to dwell.

But what does it mean for disciples of Jesus to be branches in the vine? What does it mean to remain or dwell or abide in Christ? This is fundamental and crucial Biblical truth. It says something about who you are in Christ.

Jesus is saying that He *is* your life now. You cannot separate the vine from the branches. The two are one and the same. You have a new identity. Your identity is now in Jesus. That doesn't sound like an hour on a Sunday does it? Paul takes this up in his writings when he keeps using the term "in Christ". This is now who you are. After you have been born again you cannot be defined apart from Jesus. You are a new creation. You are in Christ.

This is what it means to be a branch in the vine. Jesus is not just another ingredient. He is the substance of your life. It becomes impossible to understand who you are - without Jesus in the very centre of the picture. Everything flows out of, and is affected by, your relationship with Jesus. This is what Jesus means by bearing good fruit. Only qualities and characteristics which taste of Jesus are pleasing to God. That is good fruit. (Gal. 5v22,23)

I am the vine; you are the branches. How do you and I get to be in such a wonderful position and have such an identity? Not because of our own merits. *"It is because of God that you are in Christ Jesus"* (1 Corinthians chapter 1v30). God is **the gardener (v1)** He is watching over the Vine. It is His. He places us in Christ; it is by grace through faith; it is the gift of God.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. (v4) Being "in Christ" is not something abstract. There is a mystery to it but it is not mystical. It permeates your whole life; your thinking, your conversation, your lifestyle, your plans, your passions. And it also means you and I can experience Christ on a daily

basis. We can know Him. We can develop a relationship with Jesus. But how is this possible when we cannot see Him or talk face to face with Him? How can we experience Christ day by day? What different avenues are open to us? *Here are some of the ways identified by those present.*

- In worship.
- Through prayer.
- Through fasting
- In the Word of God:
- In stillness
- Through loving others
- By serving others
- Among the people of God, the church.
- Through bread & wine.
- By godly obedience
- By *going on being* filled with the Spirit.
- Through gifts of the Spirit
- Among the poor.
- By giving generously
- Through disability.
- In sickness
- In your work.
- On mission.
- In persecution.
- In terminal illness.

Abide in me. Because you are joined to Him all of Christ's fullness and goodness are yours. So "abiding" is taking hold, by every means available, of who you are in Christ - each day, with your whole heart, with joy and a deep desire for everything that is yours in Him; and *to be* all that you can be in Him.

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now, remain in my love. (v9) God is love. Love is His very being. Love is not so much an attribute, as the very essence of His nature. It is the centre around which every attribute gathers. But love, by definition, seeks a beloved. So the doctrine of One God in Three Persons is perfectly consistent with the essence of who God is. The Father loves the Son. He is the Beloved Son. So Jesus says: **As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.** What an overwhelming thought. Christ loves you as the Father loves Him. You are His beloved, His delight.

And this explains Christ's great longing. **Now, remain in my love.** These are not casual words; not some cool suggestion. There is a strong plea here. Christ yearns for you to enjoy His love. Being in Christ means you now relate to Jesus on the basis of grace not your own good performance. This is what it means to be a branch in the vine and to abide in Christ's love. You were saved by grace, and you continue in your life in union with Him on the basis of grace.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION.

- 1. Read John 15v1- 9 together and spend a few minutes quietly meditating on what you have read. Then share with each anything that particularly stands out for you in the text.**
- 2. What is the main thrust of Jesus' words about us being branches in the vine? How can this great truth bring security and stability to our lives?**
- 3. Look at Galatians 5v22,23 and talk about one fruit of the Spirit you have already seen developing in your life, and one which need to see more development. This could be turned into prayer for one another.**
- 4. Over the past week in what ways have you experienced the presence of Christ? Again this could be turned to prayer – especially for those who feel spiritually dry and those for whom God seems far away.**