

John: The Word Became Flesh
Abide in Jesus
Application
John 15:1-17

Hello Grace Community Church Family. Over a few days this week, I will be giving application for the sermon that was preached this past Sunday from John 15:1-17. I would rather have done this over two weeks together at church than to share this material over two days in this manner, but we are in the exact place the Lord has determined that we would be in April of 2020. One benefit of being in this text during this time is we have over a week to revisit and process a passage that is vital to the believer's walk in a world that is uncomfortable, at best, with Jesus and his followers. The metaphor of the vine and branches that Jesus shared with his disciples is important for us in understanding our relationship with Jesus, but also in understanding the mission he has given us. So much more I would like to say about this now, but it will find its proper place in the application. If you do not have your Bible open to John 15, I would encourage you to pause the video until you are ready. It might be good if you would read John 15:1-17 before you go further, and please do the same in preparation for Thursday's session for the last five points of application of our text. I would go so far as to say that it would be much better for you to hear the sermon, if you have not already heard or read it, before you consider the application. Without understanding this text in the greater context of John's Gospel and the entire Bible, you may wonder where some of the application is rooted.

The first point of application from our text is:

- 1. Preaching the gospel to yourself every day is the only way to abide in Jesus**

Our default position for living, whether we be Christian or not, is the law, or, legalism. You have heard the expression, I imagine, “there is honor among thieves.” It is true – we all have certain standards that we have established in our minds that allow us to live comfortably in this world. Comparisons are a must for the law-driven mindset, because nobody’s perfect, right? “No, I am not perfect,” you might say, “but I am a sight better person than my neighbor.” This is how we make the law work for us. There is always someone worse than us, so maybe we are okay.

The gospel causes me to focus in one place – my relationship with Jesus. If I believe that salvation is exclusively in Jesus, then I did nothing for my salvation except to believe. “Ah,” you might say, “Yes, but justification is Jesus’ doing, sanctification is a partnership – I do my part and God does his part.” That is in the direction we are heading, but it can quickly veer off into the wrong direction and you can go a long way down the wrong road, if you are not careful.

The gospel reminds us that we are sinners and, as Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful, above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” Before Jesus, we were controlled only by the old man, or, Adam, who lives in all people. When we were adopted into God’s family, from that time and forever more, Christ lives in us, and we are now able to please him because the Spirit of Christ enables us to not sin. Believers who embrace the gospel understand that they will sin until they die, but the One who lives in them gives them the strength to die to themselves and to live for God. How does this happen when we do not feel like that even the Holy Spirit cannot give us victory over sin? Not that it is his fault, but how can I ever hope to live righteously? By faith, which is the second point of application:

2. Faith is required at every stage of the believer’s life

We know this, right? 2 Corinthians 5:7 tells us that believers walk by faith, not by sight. Why, then, does it feel that so much is up to us? It could be that the freedom and affluence we have experienced for many years in our nation have conditioned us to think that whatever happens, good or bad, is based on our hard work and perseverance. Deep down we know better, and there are times when life does not reward our efforts, but these days are next level!

Freedom is restricted and you can watch affluence slipping away – and in some cases, running down the drain. You know it is a bad day when the statement for your retirement account and your water bill arrive in the mail on the same day.

No, wait – that could be a good day. It *is* a good day if it increases your dependence on the Lord. Colossians 2:6-7 says, “As you have received Christ Jesus, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

How did we receive Jesus? By faith. How are we to walk in him? By faith. This begins to get at what it means to abide in Christ. Let your roots go deep into the soil of the Word so that you will be established in the faith, or, in the Christian teaching and doctrine. This extended time at home may be the perfect time for you to go deeper into your understanding of Jesus’ death on the cross by reading John Stott’s excellent work on that subject titled, *The Cross of Christ*. Perhaps you would like to know more about the Holy Spirit, in which case you could read Michael Horton’s fine work titled *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit*. If you want to go deeper and get a broader picture of doctrine, go with John Frame’s *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief*. Frame’s book is a big one! All these books will challenge you, but they will drive your roots deeper into the Christian Faith, which will draw you into a deeper understanding of who God is, and that will almost certainly draw you closer to him and lead you to walk in faith. That’s

important, because faith is required at every stage of the believer's life. That is important because of the third point of application:

- 3. Fruit is expected and produced at every stage of the believer's life – believe it!**

That is what believers are called to do, right? Believe! It is natural for branches attached to the vine to bear fruit. God is so serious about this that when a branch doesn't produce fruit, it is taken away and burned. No poser branches allowed! That is why the Christian life is an all or nothing proposition. You cannot come to Jesus and say, "Lord, it's cool that you died for me, and I want to live with you forever, but I do have to live in the world, you understand, so please don't expect me to be extreme or anything like that. You wouldn't expect that of me, would you?" Uh – yes, he would.

Does this mean we will be perfect? No, and we need to be careful not to be derailed by comparisons in the opposite direction from what we discussed earlier. Instead of feeling superior to others, like a legalistic approach to the Christian life, we can just as easily compare ourselves with believers who are more mature than we in certain areas and question the validity of the meager basket of fruit we have to offer.

First, it is not your basket! Well, it is your basket, but the Holy Spirit is producing the fruit. What spiritual gift has the Holy Spirit given you? Two things are certain. One, God has designed you for a perfect role in the body of Christ, and two, your gift is intended to bless others, not to build up yourself. If you are praying, you are blessing Grace Community Church! If you are serving when no one sees or knows, God sees and knows. If you are giving generously or helping Keisha with children's ministry or helping Jeff with youth ministry, you are bearing fruit. Goodness, if you are patient with

your family when you have every right not to be, you are bearing fruit.

What kind of spiritual fruit is expected in the believer's life? You will need to go back to the sermon to see all the ways God produces fruit in our lives. Instead of asking "What is expected of me so that I can be who I ought to be?" when we preach the gospel to ourselves every day our focus will slowly turn toward, "In what ways has God designed me to bless him and others with the fruit he is producing through me?" Fourth:

4. Faith is increased by time in the Word and in prayer

You need faith, right? Almost everyone believes that, even those who consistently elevate science above every other way of way of knowing anything about everything. Science is meant to be used as a tool, but not necessarily as a sledgehammer.

As often as not, when people speak of faith they attach no object to their faith – only a mystical sense that all will work out for the good. It is more faith in a general idea of who God is, or it is faith in faith – "I just know everything will be okay?" But what happens when everything is not okay? When everything does *not* work for the good of the individual or the community? If you are attached to the vine, your dependence is on the source of your life, not a general sense that you will be able to weather the storm that is forecast for tomorrow afternoon, or, the squalls that appear out of nowhere.

Our faith is an objective faith. A scientist who doesn't believe in God would laugh, but we can say, "My relationship is with the Creator of the world – he is my Redeemer and King, and I live to do his good pleasure." Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." That verse needs a lot of explanation, and its primary application is in the context of

evangelism, but it is true that the more time we sit at Jesus' feet, as Mary of Bethany did, the more our faith is increased. Since we have already established that the "Word of Christ" is the "Word about Christ," we begin to see the benefits of preaching the gospel to ourselves every day!

As we spend time in the Word and our prayer is informed by Scripture, then we will begin to see the benefits of our next point of application, which will be our last point for today:

5. The more time we spend in the Word, the more we will look like Jesus

When I say, "I want to be like Jesus," my temptation is to think that I must do everything Jesus did so I will be the person I should be. God's Word, though, leads us in the other direction. Only when I abide in Jesus and his Word abides in me will I function according to design. I become who he has made me to be and I will then bear the fruit he has granted me to yield.

We will close this session with a word of explanation about how the design works. Since we do not have slides for these application points, turn over to 2 Corinthians 3, where the Apostle Paul makes a compelling argument for the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old Covenant. Jesus is better than Moses because grace is better than law. We learned that in the Prologue to John's Gospel, didn't we, in John 1:17? There is nothing wrong with the law, but we are incapable of keeping it and it condemns. There must be a remedy, or we will perish. Not only does Jesus heal, but he produces amazing fruit in and through us.

2 Corinthians 3:18, at the end of Paul's comments about the New Covenant, says, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one

degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

I like the New American Standard translation of this verse the best – with unveiled faces, we behold as in a mirror the glory of the Lord and we are being transformed into the same image. James 1:22-25 speaks of the perfect law of liberty – or God’s Word – being like a mirror. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul is saying that as we gaze into the Word, and, as we marinate in the Word, we are gradually changed into the image that becomes clearer in our hearts and minds, from one degree of glory to another. What do we behold? It is more like, who do we behold? Jesus! Our identity is already in Christ, but as we spend time in the Word, our lives are subsumed into Jesus and we will begin to look like the one we behold. This sounds to me a lot like the vine and branches metaphor in John 15.

You have noticed, I am sure, how that the longer couples are together the more they look like one another. I will tell you right now, if Alison starts to grow a beard, I am going to shave! You know what I mean, though, right? I hope that by the time the quarantine ends the couples of Grace will have more of a smile than a scowl on their faces! You are certainly getting more time together, these days.

You get this point as well, don’t you, about 2 Corinthians 3:18? The more time you spend in the word, the more you will look like Jesus. Warren Wiersbe had this commentary on 2 Corinthians 3:18: “When the child of God gazes into the Word of God, the Spirit of God transforms him into the image of the Son of God for the glory of God.” Yes! One more time: “When the child of God gazes into the Word of God, the Spirit of God transforms him into the image of the Son of God for the glory of God.”

This is a good place to take a break. I will see you again on Thursday with the other five points of application for the truth we have contemplated in John 15:1-17. God bless you and keep you and make his face shine upon you.