

Scripture Text

John 15:1-11

Context

The Passover was at hand and the disciples were having their last meal with Jesus. It was on this occasion that Jesus washed the disciples' feet, predicted Judas's betrayal and Peter's denial, and gave the Farewell Discourse to them. That night, Jesus took advantage of the disciples' heightened senses to discourse one last time on many themes. It was Jesus who was going to the agony of the cross; it was Jesus who was troubled in spirit. Yet, it was Jesus who encouraged them to keep trusting and believing in him. This is the last of the "I AM" statements in the Gospel of John. Jesus reveals that he is the true vine. His disciples are the fruitful branches that abide in him and they are marked by obedience, love and joy. Conversely, the branches that do not abide in him are indicated by their lack of fruit and they are cut off and thrown into the fire.

Observation & Meaning

1. Are there any repetitions or the same idea being mentioned in multiple ways? Do any of these repetitions make a single point or help us understand the structure of the passage?
2. What does the passage tell us about God's character? What analogy is being used regarding the relationship between God and His people, and what does this tell us about Him?
3. What kind of human behaviour is condemned or rewarded?
4. What response is called for? Are there any instructions / commands given to the people that the passage is addressing?

Big Idea

Our identity as true Christians is marked by lives that bear tangible fruit of obedience, love and joy. Only abiding in Christ and his finished work will enable us to do so.

Connecting to the whole Bible's storyline

The Old Testament frequently uses the vineyard or vine as a symbol for Israel, God's covenant people, especially in two "vineyard songs" in Isaiah 5:1-7 and 27:2-6. Israel's failure to bear fruit resulted in God's divine judgment. Jesus, in contrast, is the true vine and true Israel of God who would birth God's people.

Sermon outline

1. Jesus is the true vine and true Israel (15:1):
 - God is fulfilling the Abrahamic Covenant through Jesus in making a people of his own.
2. The Disciples are the Branches (15:2):
 - True disciples will persevere to the end and bear fruit.
3. The Fruit of Abiding in the Vine (15:3-11)
 - We abide in Christ for God's glory and obey his commandments out of joy.

Application

1. Jesus is the true vine and we can only be fruitful by abiding in him (15:5). In what ways are you trying to bear fruit with your own efforts and apart from him?
2. Jesus gave his disciples the privilege of answered prayers by praying according to his will for his glory (15:7). How does this truth shape and affect your prayer life?
3. Jesus described abiding in his love through the means of obedience to his word (15:9-10). How does the fruit of obedience look like in your life now?
4. True abiding in Christ is out of joy (15:11). How can we encourage one another with the gospel to trust and obey God joyfully in all circumstances?

Guide for Study Leaders

Use the C.O.M.A. (Context, Observation, Meaning, Application) method to work through the biblical text.

Context

Pay attention to the surrounding verses, paragraphs, chapters, events, etc. to see how this passage fits within the context of this particular book of the Bible.

Note how this passage fits within the larger storyline of the whole Bible, i.e. how God is saving a people through Jesus Christ to live under his rule in his place.

Observation & Meaning

Make careful observations of the biblical text. Notice details such as linking words (eg. "for", "if", "therefore"), repetition, dialogue, narrative, OT quotations, etc.

To understand the meaning of the biblical text, we need to discern the author's purpose or intent: Why is the biblical author writing this?

Helpful questions to ask include:

- Who is writing and to whom?
- What is the situation of the author and of the readers?
- Are we made aware of any problems that need to be addressed?
- Are there any repeated themes, or a single idea that holds everything together?

Application

Apply God's word to the heart. Move beyond merely addressing circumstances and behaviour by asking good "heart" questions. For example: Why do we do what we do? What do we really desire?

Always connect the gospel to application. For example, what difference does knowing Christ make to our obedience to God?

Ask what the passage teaches us about God, ourselves, salvation in Christ, the church, the world, etc.