

See the Son. Believe for Life

Defining the Relationship – John 15:1-8

Each person here this morning has a variety of types of relationships in your life. You have friends, some have children, some have a spouse, co-workers, neighbors. If I handed you a list of people you know, you could probably go down and write what sort of relationship you have with each person on that list.

It's important that you understand the type of relationship you are in because that will determine how you act. There was a point in my relationship with Bethany in the year 2003 where we had a "define the relationship" talk and our friendship moved to a dating relationship and ultimately into a marriage relationship. It would be weird and uncomfortable if you treated your co-worker as one of your children.

In our study of the Gospel of John we are reading about Jesus' last night with his disciples before He is crucified. He's going away and their relationship with Him will fundamentally change. How so? He's promised them several gifts and He's sought to enable their obedience to Him after He's gone, but now, in chapter 15, He's going to get to the nuts and bolts of defining their relationship with Him.

And in order to define the relationship for them and for us, he's going to give us a beautiful picture or metaphor to help to solidify what type of relationship we have with Him. So today, in John 15:1-8 we are going to see **2 Vital Features of Our Relationship to Christ.**

1. The Nature of Our Relationship (vv. 1-3)

Look with me at verse 1 where Jesus lays out the metaphor that defines our relationship to Him. Over and over again in the Gospel of John and in chapter 14 in particular, Jesus has talked about how He is in the Father and the Father is in Him and how we are to be "in Him." Listen to John 14:20. Sometimes for us that language can be a little abstract, so now Jesus uses a word picture to help us visualize our relationship to Christ and to the Father.

Now, it hopefully will come as no surprise to you that Jesus did not just randomly come up with this image. He is using the picture of a vine and the farmer or vinedresser because it is used throughout the OT. In the OT God is the

vinedresser, or farmer, or vineyard owner and Israel is the vine or the vineyard. Listen to Isaiah 5:1-7. Now turn with me to Psalm 80. Let's begin in verse 8 and read through verse 16. There's a hope and expectation in this Psalm that God will ultimately accomplish His purposes for Israel. But the question is, how would He do that? Well, look at verses 17-19.

Here's the point. When this imagery is used in the OT regarding God and Israel, it's always showing how Israel has failed to accomplish God's purposes. What were God's purposes for Israel? They were to be a light to the nations and mediate God's blessings to the world as they obeyed His commands and lived in relationship with Him. But they failed this over and over again.

So, Jesus picks up on this OT imagery and inserts Himself into it. Why? Because He is the fulfillment of God's true purposes for Israel. He represents the nation and obeys where they failed. With the coming of Jesus and His death and resurrection God has brought about a new covenant where Jesus becomes the focal point and the channel of blessings to the nation. Here's the promise of the New Covenant that comes through Jesus. Jeremiah 31:33-34. It's the promise of a new heart and the gift of the Holy Spirit that leads to obedience.

Which is the result of this relationship in verse 2. So, Jesus comes as the fulfillment of the expectations and responsibilities of Israel in the OT and He brings about the New Covenant, which results in a new heart and new desires because of the forgiveness of sins. This new covenant gives to those who are connected to Jesus as the vine the ability and life to bear fruit. And fruit becomes the key indicator of whether or not one is connected to the vine.

Look again at verse 2. Jesus is the true vine. He has resurrection life in Him. To claim to be connected to Him and not bear fruit is to deceive yourself and others. 1 John 1:5-6. On the other hand, when you do bear fruit, God will do His pruning work in order to bring about more fruit. This doesn't sound like the most comfortable thing in the world, but it's certainly not done out of spite or frustration. When you bear good fruit because you are connected to Christ, God will work in you and on you by pruning the sin out of your life so that you can become even more fruitful.

What fits into this category of fruit? All sorts of things. Certainly the virtues listed in Galatians 5 as the fruit of the Spirit. Any sort of love and service for Christ.

When you begin to reflect His patience and grace toward others. When you encounter a frustrating circumstance at work and respond with wisdom and kindness. Who can bear fruit like this? Look at verse 3.

We've heard language like this before in 13:10. The word translated clean in verse 3 is very similar to the word translated "prune" in verse 2. The "clean" branch is the branch that has heard the word of Christ, the teaching about who He is, and has responded in repentance and faith and has been initially pruned or cleansed from sin and death and given new life. This was true of the disciples, and this defined their relationship with Jesus.

So, what have we seen about the nature of our relationship with Christ? He is the vine, the fulfillment of Israel's mission and expectations. Life and fruit now do not come through an ethnic connection to the nation of Israel. Jesus is now the focal point and centerpiece of God's plan. He's the fulfillment of the promises and the pathway to true life. He brings about cleansing and forgiveness of sins with the goal of growing true fruit in those connected to Him.

Since this is the nature of our relationship, how do we respond to this? This is our second vital feature of our relationship to Christ.

2. The Necessary Posture of Our Relationship (vv. 4-8)

If you were to adopt a child, there would come a moment when that adoption becomes official and the nature of your relationship with that child changes forever. There's a posture or a way of life that the newly adopted child will take on that will be different from what it was like before. The status of the relationship determines the activity of the relationship. Jesus now explains the fundamental posture of the believer to Christ since He is the vine, and we are cleansed and in Him. Look at the first phrase of verse 4.

This is a command and the word abide means to stay, to dwell, or to remain. It's used to tell people to stay in the same house or to remain on the ship. It's interesting that this is a command given to the branches here and we obviously wouldn't normally put the responsibility on branches to stay connected to the vine. But the whole phrase I think gives us insight when Jesus adds "and I in you."

The command He's giving is for the disciples to continually cultivate their connection with Him. The reality of the word picture of a vine and branches is

quite simple really. Look at the rest of verse 4 and verse 5. I mean, if you have a grapevine and one of the branches gets broken off in a windstorm or by hand, it simply won't grow grapes. Why? **It's no longer connected to the source of life and nourishment.** It's not receiving the nutrients it needs to grow fruit. It's the same way for a disciple of Jesus. We cannot grow fruit apart from Christ.

What does this actually look like? We will get into the "how" more next week in verses 9-16, but I think this is helpful. *"This spiritual relationship must be nurtured if Jesus' followers are to remain connected to their exalted Lord."* Andreas Kostenberger

I think the first thing that has to happen is to recognize the nature of the relationship you have with Christ is a spiritual relationship. Listen, so often in the NT we are not given commands to obey until we are told what has already been done by Christ. **It's like the New Testament is giving us a true picture of reality and then guiding us on how to act within that reality.** So, our responsibility is to see our relationship with Christ for what it is and then nurture it if we are to stay connected and draw spiritual life and strength from Him.

How does one nurture a relationship? Time and attention. Interaction. Communication. I think these are the types of actions Jesus is getting at when He says to abide. **Stay in the reality of the relationship.**

Earlier this year I read a short little book on Christian leadership by a pastor named Rico Tice. **In the book Rico gave his own personal daily catechism, which consists of four questions and answers that he rehearses every day during the first hour of the day to reorient Himself to the reality of His relationship with Christ.** I won't read the whole thing but here are a couple:

Q: Rico, how does God feel about you? Answer: He is delighted with you because he is delighted with Jesus his Son, and you are united to Jesus by faith. A righteousness from God has been revealed, and it has been given to you. You are a sinner, and you are justified. Rico, say today what Gresham Machen said on his deathbed: 'I thank God for the obedience of Jesus'. Your identity is in Christ, and whether others accept you or reject you today does not make you any more or less valuable or accepted or loved.

Q: Rico, why is today a great day? Answer: Because today is the day that God has planned for you, and if God says it's good, then it's good. Whatever God brings into your day – the things you'd choose and the things you definitely wouldn't – he will work in them for your good. And your good is to become more like Jesus. So today, one way or another, whether you see it or not, you're going to grow to be more like your Savior. That's a great day.

This isn't the only way to remain in the reality of what Christ has done, but it is a good way. Now, our second point here is that this posture of abiding is necessary. Verses 6-8 show us why. 3 reasons as to why it's necessary. One in each verse. First, in verse 6, to abide and bear fruit is necessary because of the reality of judgment. Fire is often used in Scripture as a symbol for judgment. This verse is not saying that you can get saved and lose your salvation because you fail to abide in Christ. But there are people who claim to follow Christ and they may even become involved in a church and have Christian friends and yet, they were never truly connected to the vine and so, they wither and don't produce fruit. Their end is judgment because they never actually had Christ.

Second, in verse 7, abiding in Christ gives us unlimited and real access to God in prayer. Notice here that abiding means you are in God's Words and know God's Word and so, when you pray you pray according to God's will because your desires are God's desires. When this happens you bear fruit because that's what God wants too. This would have been immensely encouraging to the disciples after Jesus physically left the earth. He keeps telling them that they will have direct access to Him through prayer.

Third, in verse 8, when you abide in Christ you bear fruit and prove the reality of your discipleship, this results in glory to God. Who gets the honor and glory for the award-winning grapes or the wine that is produced at the vineyard? The vine keeper. The one who patiently prunes, waters, and tends to the vine and branches. But we only bring glory to the Father because of the Son.

So, let me encourage you this week to get up every day and lean into the spiritual relationship you have with God through Christ. Enjoy the reality of the cleansing you have received and the forgiveness of sins and keep your thoughts there. Let's pray.

Sermon Reflection Questions

11/13/22

- Where in the OT do you see this language of a vine and vinedresser? Who is it referring to?
- Why does Jesus pick up this language and use it for Himself?
- Pastor Nathan mentioned that Jesus' use of this language points toward his inauguration of the New Covenant. What are the key promises of the New Covenant? What are some ways in which the New Covenant is different from the Old Covenant?
- Jesus now becomes the channel of blessing and the centerpiece of God's work instead of Ethnic Israel. Why does this matter for our salvation?
- What are some examples of the pruning work that God might do? (v. 2)
- What sort of fruit is God looking to produce?
- What does Jesus mean in verse 3 when he tells the disciples that they are already clean? How does this cleansing take place?
- Explain this phrase: "The status of a relationship determines the activity of the relationship."
- How would you explain what it means to "abide" in Jesus?

- Often in the NT we are not told what to do until we are told what has already been done by Christ. Can you give any examples of this? Why is it so important to grasp this order?
- What are some ways that you seek to remain in the reality of your relationship with Christ?
- Is verse 6 teaching that you can lose your salvation? Why or why not?
- Why does it honor the Father when we bear fruit through abiding in Christ?
- What's one way you can use this passage to encourage or help a fellow believer this week?