

9.2.25 am Isles Study Conference

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Date: 09 February 2025

Preacher: Sinclair Ferguson

[0 : 00] Good morning. Good morning. A warm welcome to the service this morning. It's good to see so many and a warm welcome, especially to those who are visiting with us.

It's clear to see there are many visitors from the study conference this weekend and it's good to be able to host you as a North Harris Free Church. After the service this morning, there is a cup of tea and you can go through to the hall and help yourselves to tea and coffee.

If you're able to stay behind, please do so. I'm not going to take time to go through all the notices that have been on the screen. You've had the chance to read them before the service, but I want to just highlight a couple of things.

The first is to say that the afternoon session, which is advertised as afternoon focus, that was going to be happening over in the hotel.

It's actually going to be happening in the church here instead. And so that's half past three for the afternoon focus. I think Colin is going to be speaking about chaplaincy. There's time for questions and answers, so be encouraged to come to that if you're able.

[1 : 11] For our own congregation, we've been speaking over the last few weeks about the POV, which is old. It's a new talk for the term quinquennial, and that's happening on Wednesday.

Normally, our prayer meeting time is half past seven. The committee are coming and wanting to meet with us and have a time of worship at 7pm. So for Wednesday, please be encouraged, congregation of North Harris, to come out and to meet with the committee from Presbytery.

The final thing is to say that it was with great sadness that we heard of the passing of Alistair MacLeod that we've been praying for over the last few weeks.

There is a wake-on in Scalpy tonight at 8pm, and the funeral service is in Scalpy tomorrow morning at 11am. And so we continue to pray for Angusina and the family, some of whom are with us week by week.

So let's pray for them and pray for the island of Scalpy who've gone through so much loss over the last few weeks. It's great to be able to introduce our preacher this morning, the Reverend Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, who, although many of you haven't met him, you've heard a lot of quotes from him over the years.

[2 : 39] So most of the things in my sermons that have been helpful and clarifying have come from Sinclair. So it's nice to have him here with us leading worship this morning.

So I'm going to hand over to Sinclair in just a moment, but before I do, let's just take a moment and let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for this, your day.

We thank you for the privilege of being able to come together as your people in your house. And we thank you for the promise that we have that you will be with us, that where just a few of us gather in the name of Jesus, you will be present.

So we ask that we would know your presence with us this morning. We pray that as we wait upon the Lord, that you would renew our strength and that you would speak into our lives, into our hearts. We thank you for Sinclair, for his ministry over many years, through books and through sermons that we have listened to and benefited from.

[3 : 44] We pray that as he stands to lead us now, that he would know the help of the Holy Spirit and that he would know the presence of God and that he would have that sense that he is amongst friends here as we gather together in worship.

We pray for those who are absent this morning. We think especially of those whose hearts are sore. We pray for those who are grieving and we think of the family in Scalpy this morning and we ask, Lord, that as they prepare to come together this evening as a community and then tomorrow again, we ask, Lord, that they would know your presence, that they would know the peace that comes not

from this world but that comes from heaven and we pray that as we come together, we would once more be encouraged, even in our sorrow, that we would be encouraged by the hope of the gospel. We pray for all who grieve and especially those who have come together in grief so frequently over past weeks in the island of Scalpy and we ask for your special blessing and presence and comfort to be given to them this day and over these next few days.

So hear our prayers, help us, we ask, go before us, lead us and guide us as we come together in worship and we ask all these things in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake. Amen. Thank you, Sinclair. I'm going to hand over to you now. Well, may I, just before we begin, take a moment to thank David and those of you who are members of the church here for the welcome you've given to the invaders from the north end and to someone who's from neither end and it's really, it's been wonderfully impressive how your office bearers and your people have served us in these last couple of days and been a great blessing to us.

[5 : 49] So let's come together to worship God. I want to read some words from the 95th Psalm to encourage us. O come, let us sing to the Lord.

Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving. Let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise.

The Lord is a great God and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth and the heights of the mountains are his also.

The sea is his for he made it and his hands formed the dry land. O come, let us worship and bow down.

Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. and let's praise him in Psalm 95. We sing verses 1 to 7.

[6 : 52] Psalm 95 verses 1 to 7. O come, let us sing to the Lord. O come, let us sing to the Lord.

O come, let us sing to the Lord. O come, let us sing to the Lord. A joyful noise made to the Lord. O come, our salvation. Let us sing the Lord.

Before his presence come, with praise and thankful voice, let us sing sound to him with grace and make a joyful life.

For God and great, God and great King above all gods he is.

[8 : 50] Deaths of the earth are in his hand.

The strength fulfills his sins. To him the spacious sea belongs.

For he the sainted day. The dry land holds so from his hands It's born at first it came.

Oh, come and let us worship him. Let us bow down with hope And on our knees before the Lord Our major let us fall Let's join in prayer together.

Our gracious God and heavenly Father We thank you for the privilege you have given to us In your son Jesus And by the power of his Holy Spirit To come to you Thanking you for the access that we have Through his shed blood And for the energy and delight That the Holy Spirit gives us To come to you And dare to call you Abba, Father We know that you are surrounded by Angels and archangels By creatures Who cry That you are a thrice Holy God And who veil Their faces and cover Their feet Although they themselves Are holy We come to admire And to rejoice In your infinite holiness Although we have discovered Like Isaiah That your presence can

[11 : 35] Give us a sense That we are disintegrating We thank you That as a loving Father You call us to yourself And bid us enter into your presence And know that you love us And care for us We marvel at your power And we marvel too At the privilege We enjoy On these days of assembly When we feel ourselves To be in an antechamber Of heaven And surrounding those Who surround your throne And praising you We thank you for The relief it is To come to you To be able to Come with those Who encourage us And yet we know Also there are times For ourselves And one another When we not only Feel unworthy Of your presence But feel that we are Not like others In the same room Because we have sinned

And grieved you And we pray As we Begin to come Into Your courts That you will Bathe us In an assurance That you welcome us And that you see As who trust In your son In the righteousness That he possesses Clothed in his garments We thank you That you hold out Your golden scepter To us And bid us To speak to you And we pray As we sing Psalms and hymns And spiritual songs And make melody In our hearts We may also Encourage one another By our singing By our presence By our mutual love By the way We give attention To one another And by your grace Lord May it please you To enable us To speak Less of ourselves And more Of others

Because we wish To speak well Of you And we come also In different ways Hidden from one another And sometimes Even hidden from ourselves Burdened By our sin By our failures For which we seek Again forgiveness And relief And a lovely experience Of acceptance And reconciliation With you But also we come Burdened for the world In which we live Our hearts And minds Constantly range From where we are To where others are Your children We think of them In Eastern Europe And in the Middle East And in the Far East In places of strife And persecution We think of our Brothers and sisters Who are on Each side

Of these times Of strife And pray for them Pray that in your mercy They may not be Alienated from Their brothers and sisters Nor alienated From us Or us from them But as we think Of the comfort That we enjoy The freedoms That we still have The encouragement Of being able To meet in public And we think of those Who are persecuted For their faith Children Teenagers Adults The elderly Displaced Often from their homes Disallowed Disallowed From professions And callings In which they Would want to Serve you We pray that They may shine Brightly We thank you Lord For the sense We sometimes have When we meet them That we are not fit To untie their Shoelaces And we pray That we may learn From them

And we pray Again also Father For those We know And love Whose burdens Are so Personal And so great That the burdens Of the world Seem Far away From them The clouds So heavy And we pray That you would Fulfill Your promises To them That you will Be with them And never leave Them That you will Walk through them Through all The valleys Of deep darkness That whatever They may fear In their anxieties They may know That with you They need fear No evil How we hate Death And the parting It brings We pray for those Who have Enjoyed long Seasons with those They have loved And therefore We will miss them All the more And for others Known to some Of us Whose life Experience with Those they have Loved have been So short

[16 : 38] And pray That in your Mercy you would Hold them And that those Who do not yet Know you Will come to Find the Comfort that is To be found Only in Jesus Christ Lord what a Jigsaw puzzle Our world Is And what a Jigsaw puzzle Your providences Often seem to Us to be But we thank you That you know Where every piece Is And that in the Mystery of your Perfect will You are putting These pieces Together Until one day In your presence We may see The whole picture And be able to Rejoice as We are not yet Able to rejoice Because then We will see And not just Believe That our Lord Jesus does All things Well Be with us Therefore we pray As we worship You Help us Not only to Have words

To sing to You But have hearts That are Attuned To those Words And hearts That by those Words Are attuned To you That when we Go from this Place it may be With a lighter Step With joy In your word With anticipation Of the privileges Of serving You And the assurance That you will Keep your promises To be with us And never leave us And never forsake us So hear us Father as we pray And as we offer Ourselves to you Because we pray Together In our Saviour's name Amen Now Boys and girls I know I'm a stranger But I am a friend Of your minister So I'm not as scary As I look So if you would like To come forward And meet me here At the front I would love to see you Up close and personal

Please don't come off David Do they? So Anyone else coming?

Good I'm going to sit down Beside you But I may need your help To get up again I have In my hand In my hand here Something So strong The strongest thing In the world Is in my hand And it's so strong I can open my hand So if any of you Can open my hand We will find out What it is So would any of you Like to open my hand Who's going to be first?

You You have a try Maybe we need Two of you Somebody else help you Let's see Who else?

[19 : 44] Who's really strong? I am very good You come and help Because if we can't Open this hand We're not going to find out What's inside it Yeah Do you want to help?

Come over and help That's it Pull as hard as you can Right? You hold on to him So that he doesn't fall back What about the girls? Are the girls in this church Stronger than the boys?

Are you? Do you want to try? No Nobody wants to try Nobody wants to try Do you think your minister Would be able to do it?

Okay No No No I'm going to try Because if he can't do it If I'm going to do it Nobody can do it This honestly This is the strongest thing In the world That's in my hand Wow So let's see what it is Okay Oh Look Wow Do you know what that is?

It is A Bible You would not believe it But if you Your eyesight is better than mine And I'm not sure you'll be able to read it But If you'll let it upside down And back to front Look It's not only a Bible It's

an authorised version of the Bible And It has got everything in it What's the first book of the Bible?
[21 : 22] Genesis There it is It's got every book From Genesis Right through To The end of the Old
Testament Does anyone know what the end of the Old Testament is?

It's called Malachi And then What's the first book in the New Testament? It's called Matthew Go
back a few There It's called Matthew And the last book How's your eyesight?

Can anybody read this? Let's see The very last book The very last book Where my dad Go to the
hotel Oh really? Yes I will go to the hotel That's good But he'll not find my Bible in the hotel At least
until I go back to the hotel And he's got right through to the book of Revelation Now Why do I say
this is the strongest and most powerful thing in the world?

It is It's Jesus and God's Yes It's Jesus and God's book And it tells us about Jesus Doesn't it? And
one of the most powerful things Jesus does That nobody else can do Is to forgive our sins Nobody
else can do that Mother and dad can forgive you for being naughty But they can't forgive your sins
against God Can they?

And another thing this book can do is It can tell us all about the Lord Jesus Everything we can ever
learn about the Lord Jesus We'll find about in this book But I don't know what it's like The toys Well
There are some toys in this book as well But some of them are very dangerous You need to be
careful about your toys So this is the reason that we read the Bible Or we listen to the Bible being
read Mommy and Daddy reading it to us Maybe when we begin to read My dad is called the ABC
book That's a good book Yeah The ABC book That is a good place to start And then you can go on
to the 1, 2, 3 book But eventually, eventually And then my dad My dad is very good

[23 : 44] I know your dad He's just sitting I know he's sitting And your mum is hiding somewhere
But the good thing about your dad is That he knows this is the most powerful person And it can
change our minds And I It's a long time since I was your size And I I never spoke When I was
listening to ministers I admire your courage I think it would be a great presenter But it's a wonderful
thing to get to know about Jesus in the Bible Isn't it?

But it's very nice And you're getting to know Jesus in the Bible And we're getting to know you too So
that's wonderful Well let's pray together I think we're going to sing again Let's pray Lord Jesus We
thank you that you have given us the Bible We thank you for mums and dads who read it to us And
for our minister who teaches us about it And our Sunday school teachers Who love to be with us
And to teach us about it And we pray that we may Each of us learn Just how strong it really is
Because it can help us to live for you Be with us we pray Bless our teachers We ask bless our
mums and dads And our grands and grandpas And our friends And help us to love you To trust you
And to live for you And we pray this in your name Amen Amen I'll leave the last word to you
Right We're going to sing from Psalm 89 verses 15 to 18 And it looks as if one family is actually
taking over the service We've got a different pre-center Are you going to stay there for the singing?
Okay, good 89, 15 Oh, it's Gaelic?

No, the third one's Gaelic I need some time After the children To settle down for the Gaelic Oh,
greatly bless the people Of the joyful stand that know And brightness of thy face O Lord Dei
ebbaron Cialgo Dei ebbaron Cialgo Dei ebbaron Cialgo And brightness O bright face O Lord

[27 : 06] Dei ebbaron Cialgo Cialgo Cialgo In brightness Cialgo The day Rejoice Exceedingly And
in thy Righteousness Cialgo They exalteth They exalteth Be on high Exalteth Be on high Exalteth
Be on high Exalteth Be on high And in thy Righteousness Shall they Be on high Because the glory
Of their strength Doth only stand in thee

And in thy favor Shall our horn And power And in thy Our horn and power exalted be.

For God is our defense and he to us does safety bring.

The Holy One of Israel is our almighty King.

Is our almighty King. Is our almighty King.

[29 : 21] The Holy One of Israel is our almighty King.

Now let's turn to scripture and read from the gospel of John chapter 15. We're going to read verses
1 through 11. In the church we attend I do preach regularly.

I'm never asked to give the children's message. And had forgotten how exciting they could be. But
although in the church I served in Columbia I would give them every morning.

And I realized at one point that I should have warned my younger associate ministers. What
happens in children's messages. And I'd actually forgotten this morning what happens.

But often when you ask questions the answers are Jesus, Bible, God and sin. And one of my younger associates was the son of an orthodontist.

[30 : 35] And got his father to make a cast of his teeth. And he began his children's address by showing them the cast of his teeth. And then I died inwardly that I hadn't warned him.

Because he asked the question, whose teeth do you think these are? So it's probably a wee while before David would ever expose me to the vagaries of children.

But let's turn to this wonderful passage. John chapter 15. This of course is part of Jesus' discourse. Parts of it a kind of dialogue with his disciples on the evening of his crucifixion. I am the true vine and my father is the vine dresser.

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away. And every branch that does bear fruit he prunes that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

[31 : 42] Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine. Neither can you unless you abide in me.

I 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. If 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. If you abide in me and my words abide in you. Ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

By this my father is glorified. That you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the father has loved me so have I loved you.

[32 : 42] Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love. Just as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love.

These things I have spoken to you. That my joy may be in you. And that your joy may be full.

Now this is the word of the Lord. And now the Gaelic Psalm. Number 73 verses 23 to 25.

I won't even dare to tell you what it is in English. The Gaelic Psalm.

The Gaelic Psalm.

[34 : 22] The Gaelic Psalm.

The Gaelic Psalm.

The Gaelic Psalm.

The Gaelic Psalm.

The Gaelic Psalm.

[36 : 52] The Gaelic Psalm.

The Gaelic Psalm.

The Gaelic Psalm.

The Gaelic Psalm. The Gaelic Psalm. Well let's turn back to the 15th chapter of John's Gospel. If you have a Bible or an appropriate phone. If you have a Bible. or an appropriate phone.

I think it would be helpful for you. to have a Bible or an appropriate. chapter 15 and a Bible or an appropriate. through 11th. I was saying to say, a few weekends, Abu Dabby in the United Arab Emirates.

[38 : 48] and the evening service. the service there with four, and the service there with four Scots people present, was a service of unaccompanied psalm singing, and the church. in a church led by an Indian pastor who had studied in Louisville, Kentucky.

So I want to urge some of you younger Gaelic speakers to take a job in Abu Dabby and teach them how to sing the Psalms in Gaelic as well as in English.

And then they really will have arrived. But the singing was actually as good as our singing here.

Very wonderful experience for me as here.

Well this is, I think for all of us, a very well known passage. Of all the passages in John's Gospel, it may be the passage that most books and articles have been written.

And especially on the notion of abiding in Christ, in which our Lord Jesus obviously is helping his disciples to understand on the evening of his crucifixion, what it means for them to be his disciples.

[40 : 01] It's one of the truly remarkable things about these chapters, the depth of Jesus' teaching.

Now here are these disciples and they are clearly, chapter 14 verse 1, in some distress.

Let not your hearts be troubled, says Jesus. And his answer to heart trouble is what? Well actually, to put it succinctly, his answer to heart trouble is to teach them about the Trinity.

And most of these chapters are taken up with Jesus' description of his relationship to the Father, the Father's relationship to him, the Holy Spirit's relationship to both of them, and because of the Holy Spirit's ministry, our relationship to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

And clearly what drives Jesus here is the simple principle that in times of difficulty, as these times are going to be for the apostles now and right into their future, the most important thing for them is the knowledge of God.

The most stabilizing reality in their lives is to know the Father and to be able to call on him in times of difficulty, to cry, to cry out, Abba, Father, as Paul says in Romans chapter 8, to know Christ as our assured Savior, and to know the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as our helper and as our comforter.

[41 : 38] And it's fascinating in that context that Jesus tells the apostles not to have troubled hearts, in the light of the fact that John has just said in chapter 13 that Jesus had a troubled heart.

And these two things go marvelously together, don't they? The reason Jesus has a troubled heart is because he is taking to himself the troubles of the disciples, especially the troubles of their sin and their guilt and their powerlessness.

And he's going to make that his own in his passion, in order that his heart of fellowship with God will be their experience.

The other gospel writers portray that truth in a different way. They portray it in terms of Jesus giving the cup of his fellowship with the Father to his disciples in the Last Supper, and then taking from his Father in the Garden of Gethsemane the cup of his disciples' troubles, their chief trouble of being under the judgment of God and needing salvation.

And in the midst of all this, Jesus tells them something really remarkable. He says, I'm going to leave you, but it's going to be better for you.

[43 : 05] Now that, to most of us, I imagine, is inconceivable. And certainly if we can feel ourselves into the atmosphere of the upper room, we can understand why the disciples would be so distressed and find this incredible.

Jesus says, I'm going to leave you, but I'm going to send my spirit to you. And I think we can easily appreciate if we were given the choice.

We're given the choice in the room here this morning. Which would you choose? Jesus here, standing behind the lectern, so that we could see his height, see his face, feel his presence, remember his accent, or would you rather have the Holy Spirit?

And to most of us, it's really difficult to grasp that it could possibly be better to have the Holy Spirit than to have the presence of Jesus.

And Jesus is very patiently explaining to the apostles why it is better. And the reason is because when the Holy Spirit comes to you, Jesus is saying, I will be nearer to you than I am even here in the upper room.

[44 : 26] Because when he comes to you, he will bring my presence into your very heart. So rather than me further away from you, I will actually be nearer to you through him, who has been with me all the way through my life and ministry, from the beginning, from my conception by the Holy Spirit.

He will dwell in your hearts. And that will be like having me not just with you, but having my presence in you.

And the way he puts it is, then I will be in you. And as I come to dwell in you, you will come to dwell in me.

And that must have been such a staggering thought for the disciples that now in chapter 15, in one of these I am sayings of the Lord Jesus, Jesus actually gives them an illustration to help them understand what this means and how it works out in their lives.

In a way, I think we could think about it this way, that we are in the upper room, we are in an art gallery, and Jesus pauses at one painting.

[45 : 45] And it's the painting, the very familiar picture to them of a vine. And he's saying to them, my relationship to you is like the relationship of a vine to its branches, and its branches to its fruit, and the work of the vine dresser in relationship to the vine, the branches, and the fruit.

And what I want to try and do in these few minutes this morning is, not that I am an art expert, but to encourage us to look at this picture, and to hear Jesus as an expert analyst of this picture of the

vine, explaining to us in different details of what he says as he talks to the disciples about this vine, as a picture of their relationship with one another.

What it means for us to be Christians, to have Christ indwelling us, and for us to, in a similar way, to be dwelling in Christ. So we need to have the picture in mind, it's here in these 11 verses.

And just like you've seen art experts on television, that you've seen the picture before, but they explain the significance of the details. Jesus is explaining to us here some of the details of the picture to help us understand the wonder of the relationship.

And I want us to notice three things, which is probably a thinly disguised way of saying, I want us to notice 12 things. But if you get three things, we're doing well.

[47 : 35] And the first of them is the emphasis he places on the absolute necessity of abiding in Christ. Now by abiding in Christ, he does not mean anything additional to being in Christ, to belonging to Jesus Christ.

He's not speaking about some second level spiritual experience, in addition to the reality of our faith union with the Lord Jesus, of us coming to faith in him and being born again in him.

What he's talking about is what happens as that relationship continues. And he wants to emphasize the absolute necessity, therefore, of it continuing.

And he does it in a very striking way. There's a kind of threefold stress that he points out here. The first he does by repetition. And it's interesting that I think there are seven occasions in these 11 verses where Jesus uses this language about the necessity of abiding in Christ.

And as we are familiar, when seven is a very significant number in the Bible, it usually doesn't appear accidentally. So sometimes you may say, well, why are there seven?

[49 : 00] Seven, and the answer is because there were seven. But there are other occasions when the number seven appears, without it actually being mentioned, that what the writer is doing is communicating to us just how profoundly significant this is.

The other significant number is three, isn't it? But seven, seven is the number that's used in connection with the days of creation. Seven is the number that's used at the other end of the Bible in connection with a final revelation of God.

And I think it is significant that John notices that in Jesus' teaching here, seven different times he uses the verb abide.

And by doing it, it's like a drumbeat that subliminally in the disciples' minds is saying, don't miss how significant this is.

Abiding in Christ, remaining in Christ is absolutely necessary. And then you see within that context, he emphasizes the necessity of abiding in Christ, not simply by repetition, but by negation.

[50 : 17] And he does this several times. He does it in verse two. You'll notice the way he puts it. He says, every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit, he takes away.

And then again in verse four, he says, apart from me, the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in me.

So, unless we abide in Christ, we are taken away. Unless we abide in Christ, our lives are spiritually fruitless. And then in verse five, he says, keep on abiding in me because it is only when you abide in me that you can do anything for me.

So, cut away if we don't abide in Christ. Fruitless if we don't abide in Christ. Incapable of doing anything for Christ if we don't abide in Christ.

And then again in verse six, if anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. So that in this sense, not only by repetition, but by negation, he's saying, to these beloved disciples, this is absolutely essential.

[51 : 38] Unless you are in Christ, united to Christ by faith, dwelling in that sense in Christ, you'll never make anything of the Christian life.

And it is amazing how people can read this. Religious people can read this. Church people can read this. And still turn the gospel upside down.

Some of you will have had the experience I've had of explaining the Christian faith to somebody and the free gift of salvation in Christ, the blessings of having fellowship with Christ.

And you begin to get quite excited that they seem interested and they're listening. And then the conversation ends on a low note when they say, I think I'm beginning to understand.

And I'm really going to try harder now to be better. And you realize that you have spoken to them about the blessings of belonging to Jesus Christ.

[52 : 42] But what they have heard is like a policeman saying to them, you've been bad and you need to be better. And that's why Jesus emphasizes this by repetition and by negation.

And then you'll notice also by affirmation in verse 5. In verse 5 he says, I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.

Now, I think you can understand why there is so much negation in these words. This is chapter 15. You remember what happened in chapter 13. There was a branch of the vine in the room that looked as though it was attached to the vine.

But had never been dwelling in the vine. Its name was Judas Iscariot. And he had visibly left the room and as John says, gone out into the darkness of the Jerusalem night to betray Jesus.

[53 : 53] And they had just witnessed. And now, in a sense, he was explaining to them what it means not to dwell in the vine.

Not to abide in Jesus Christ. But if they did abide as they were abiding, then he says they would bear much fruit.

Now, what does he mean by much fruit? Well, this is one of the points in the group Bible study when somebody says, the way I like to think about it is...

And then somebody says, well, you know, I've got fruit in my garden. I like to think about it like this. And when we have these instincts, we need to stop and say, how I like to think about it is virtually irrelevant.

What I need to try and find out is, what does this mean in the context of this passage? And I think Jesus himself goes on to explain what it means in the context of the passage.

[54 : 53] So, look at what he says in verse 10. He says, if you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments.

And then again, he says in verse 12. This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. You see what he's saying?

He's saying the fruit that Christians bear when they abide in Christ is actually an increased likeness to Christ.

And that's why he uses these comparisons, just as I have, so you have. Just as I have, so you have. It's the very reality Paul explains towards the end of Romans 8 and Romans 8, 29, when he tells us what God's ultimate purpose for our lives is.

That he has predestined us, he says, to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

[56 : 02] That is what our faith in Christ, our union with Christ, our dwelling in Christ is meant to produce in us.

Likeness to Jesus. If you think about it, that is the only thing about us, ultimately, that will last forever.

That we've been made like him. And you see this also, I think, you know, when Paul speaks about the fact that we bear the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, etc.

Well, what is the fruit of the Spirit? He's really just describing the different characteristics of the Lord Jesus, isn't he? And when in 1 Corinthians 13, he tells us what love is, you can almost score out the word love and put in the name Jesus.

This is why it is so essential to abide in Christ, he is saying, because it's only as you abide in me that through the work of the Spirit, you will actually become like me.

[57 : 14] Or at least we will be able to see in one another fragments of the likeness of the Lord Jesus and be drawn to him.

So, in the first place, he's speaking about the absolute necessity of abiding in Christ. And then secondly, he's teaching them, you know, he's saying, now, see that in the picture?

All of this is in the simple picture of the vine, the branches, and the vine dresser. Second, he goes on to speak about the manner of our abiding in Christ.

And as I say, this is not something additional to our basic relationship to the Lord Jesus. This is not a second step. This is a continuation in the first step of being bonded to Jesus, of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

And once again, he comes to the picture and he says, do you see this? Do you see that? I watch a fair amount of ALBA, but there aren't all that many art programs with art experts and subtitles in ALBA, but you sometimes see them on television.

[58 : 29] And if you're not an art expert, they're absolutely fascinating, aren't they? You saw a picture, but the art expert will be able to tell you the history of the picture. Just like we might talk today about the background to this in the Old Testament.

And he'll show you details. And Jesus here as our spiritual art expert is taking us to the picture of the vine. And he's saying, now, I want you to understand how this works out in our lives. And he begins in verse 3. He says, you're already made clean by the word I've spoken to you. So you see the picture.

The picture is the idea of a branch being grafted into a vine and the vine dresser being careful in what he does.

So that, in a sense, he is not infecting the vine with this alien branch. And in order for that to happen, the first thing Jesus says is that you need to be made clean by the word.

[59 : 43] What does that mean? It means, essentially, you need to hear the word of the gospel saying to you, as Jesus had said to one another during his ministry, Son, your sins are forgiven.

Go in peace. The cleansing he's speaking about here is almost certainly the cleansing of our consciences from guilt, from the burden of our sin, and the joy of the discovery that in Jesus Christ, the burden is rolled away.

And we know what it means to be acceptable in God's sight, not because of us, but because of him. So it begins by our lives being made clean by his word.

And then in verse 7, it continues, he says, by his word dwelling in us. I wonder if you remember what Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 2.13, when he says, one of the things I really rejoice in when I remember my brief visit to you is that when you received the word of God, you received it not just as the word of a man, not just as my word.

You received it as it really is, the word of God, which he says, is at work in you. So it's really important for us to understand that when Jesus teaches his word to us, when Jesus preaches to us in the preaching of the word, his preaching is not, this is what needs to be done, therefore go and do it.

[61 : 26] His preaching is like this. Here is the truth and power of the gospel, and the very preaching of it will change your life.

And most of us are conscious of that if, for example, we were brought first to faith under the preaching of the word. We realize it was the power of the word of God itself that seemed to work in us to bring us to faith in Christ.

And Jesus is setting this pattern that Paul picks up in 1 Thessalonians 2 for the ministry of the word that we frequently experience.

Lord's day by Lord's day, midweek by midweek if possible. And friends, that's only a fraction of what our forefathers experienced because they understood this, that we moderns in the Christian church worldwide today think that we are too mature to need to bother with it and we can live the Christian life on the basis of a 25-minute sermon once a week, if that much.

Because we don't understand Jesus' teaching that the word of God itself, when it's preached in the power of the Holy Spirit, does the work. And if we've ever experienced real preaching, we've experienced that.

[62 : 47] We know that the preaching of the word reaches to places in our lives that nobody in the room knew anything about and sometimes we didn't know anything about.

Because the Spirit uses the word of Jesus Christ to work, work, work in us and to dwell in us, to dwell in us.

And that's a wonderful thing to experience. That's why we need to pray for ministers and we need to pray for the ministry of the word. Not because we want to exalt ministers any more than we want to bring down ministers, but because we want this for our lives.

This is, isn't it, it's fascinating to me that as the ministry of the word of God has been demeaned in our society, the number of therapists has multiplied.

Because people are not getting the counseling that they used to get through the word, by the Spirit, in their hearts, transforming their lives.

[64 : 01] And even holding together those of us who are not very stable and guarding us. And Jesus is saying, this is how, this is how our union with Christ continues.

And it's nurtured, he says, as we abide in the vine. And then he says, very interestingly, we could almost have missed this and because I've been working down through the passage, you might

think, oh, he's missed it, but I haven't, I haven't missed verse 2, that this union with Christ is attended by the Father's pruning knife.

And that's his way. He works by his word and he sometimes prunes us by his word and he works by his providences, sometimes prunes us by his providences.

I had an elderly friend, a very successful businessman on the west coast of California who took me once to his vineyards.

And I was astonished by what I saw in many different ways, but I think the thing that astonished me most of all was that between every row of vines there was a carpet of tiny twigs.

[65 : 24] Hundreds, thousands, millions upon millions of these tiny twigs. And at first I thought, you know, some savage has been along here cutting down his vines and then I remember John 15.

His vine dressers had been pruning the vine. And what looked to me as a non-viticulturalist and frankly a non-gardener who knows nothing about growing anything, what struck me was, oh, now I understand what Jesus was talking about.

That these sharp cuts are in order that the vine may bear more fruit. That they're cutting away any dead wood and they're preparing the vine to bear what Jesus calls here much fruit.

And there is no other way. I thought to myself, I wonder what it would have been like for the vine dressers if these branches had been people.

They would have needed these Bose sound, silencing, earphones. The noise, the noise would have been horrendous in the vineyard.

[66 : 42] And while we don't shout out when the father uses his pruning knife on us, sometimes it is very, very sore. But we mustn't lose sight of the purpose.

Years ago, I came across a statement by Amy Carmichael whose book some of you I'm sure will have read. When she talks about this picture, she says, what prodigal waste it appears to be to see scattered on the floor the bright green leaves and the bare stem bleeding in a hundred places from the sharp knife.

But with a tried and trusted husbandman there is not a random stroke in it all. Nothing cut away which it would not have been a loss to keep and again to lose.

And some of us, perhaps many of us, perhaps most of us know that, don't we? But yes, thankfully, we grow through the ministry of the word but sometimes it seems God has to cut us back in order that the power of the word of God may begin to flow again through us and that's what he's speaking about here.

This is how we grow in grace and that's what leads him in the third place to speak about the effect of abiding in Christ. What is the effect of abiding in Christ?

[68 : 06] Well, it's multiplied. He says, see this in the picture. First of all, he says in verse 7, you will experience answered prayer. And that's not just a blanket statement, just think anything you want, pray anything you want and if you've got enough faith you will get it.

That's a promise given to those in whom his word dwells and that word begins to conform our wills to his will so that what we ask for is what he wants as well as what we want.

And so we're growing in that way and so verse 8, we will bear much fruit, we become useful. And again in verse 8, we prove to be his disciples and therefore we're strengthened and we get some assurance from that.

If our lives contradict the gospel, then our lives scream at us, you have no reason to be assured you're a Christian. But when we see the fruit of the gospel in our lives and when we see it in the lives of others, we're able to encourage one another, don't you see how the Lord is working in your life and working in your life again in verse 8, to bring glory to the Father.

That's astonishing, isn't it? That your life can bring glory to the Father because when we see your life, we understand there's only one conceivable explanation for this and that is supernatural.

[69 : 39] And therefore, while we're glad for your advance spiritually, we recognize that actually this glorifies God rather than you.

And then perhaps the sweetest thing of all in verse 11, look at what Jesus says there. It's, what do you see Jesus saying here?

What do you hear Jesus saying here? These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

This is like the, this is like the visual image where some people can see only one thing and some people see another like the ugly hag and the beautiful girl. So what do you see or what do you hear

Jesus saying here?

I've spoken these things to you. Do you hear him saying either that the joy I have may be rooted in what you have become?

[70 : 41] That gives me joy. Or does he mean do you hear him saying these things I've spoken to you that the joy I have may actually be shared with you in your experience and as a result your joy may be full?

And the answer is probably both because of our fellowship with him, our union with him, our communion with him. What an amazing thing this is and how tragic if we lose sight of it that the lives of Jesus' people give him joy and the reason the lives of his people give him joy is because his people are given joy by him.

And what would be a closer union? This is this is why the Bible uses marriage at its best not marriage at its worst as an illustration of the relationship between Jesus and his people because the joy is mutual.

But it's mutual because it's the joy one finds in the other combined with the joy the other finds in the one.

And so in this way our union with Christ comes to fruition. But of course as we noted at the beginning for this to be true you've got to be in Christ.

[72 : 16] And I think it would be remiss of me not to ask you are you in Christ? There's a reason I ask that question. I have taped into the back of my Bible the fragment of an order of service that was left on a pew in the church I served in Columbia and South Carolina that one of the deacons brought to me at the end of the service and I've kept it in my Bible ever since as a reminder to me that almost always in a congregation there will be someone perhaps unexpectedly someone who is not yet a believer.

And here is what the fragment that was torn off the order of service and left on the seat was Mr. Ferguson I was wondering if you would pray for me because I am not a Christian but I want to be more than anything else in the world.

I hope you find this. I don't know who he was but I hope you found Christ and I hope if that's a transcript of your heart that you will find Christ too.

Let's pray that that will be so. Let's pray together. Our Heavenly Father we thank you for your word. Thank you that you are the vine dresser. Thank you that the Lord Jesus is the vine.

Thank you that his word when we read it and especially when it is expounded to us when you speak to us through the power of your word in the power of your spirit and we recognize your voice.

[74 : 11] We thank you that it works in us to show us our need to show us our Savior and to bring us to share this mutual joy with him so that he might find joy in us and we might find joy in him.

Lord as we come to you we pray that by your grace we may be found in Christ not having a righteousness of our own that comes from the law but the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ and we pray this together in Jesus name.

Amen. Well let's conclude with the first five verses of Psalm 103. Psalm 103 verses 1 to 5.

Psalm 103 verses 1 to 5. O thou my soul west of the Lord and of that in me is be still in God his holy name to life in high and bless.

Blessed O my soul the Lord thy God and not forget to thee of all his gracious benefits he hath restored on thee!

[76 : 15] All thy inheritance to God most most gracious we forgive!

who thy! who thy deceases! all and pains doth heal and be relieved!

who doth redeem my life! my life but thou! to death may start go down who be with loving kindness thou and tender mercy crown who with abundance of good things doth satisfy thy so thy mouth so that it past the eagles age renew it is thy youth now go in peace looking to

Jesus and knowing sins too are forgiven and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all Amen