

Reside In Him

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Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 00] Well, I want you to imagine for a moment that we get to watch an exclusive interview, Kate, with Jesus' first followers, Jesus Remembered.

The interviewer asks, you were close to Jesus for a long time. Do you remember the last thing he said to you? I'll never forget, came the reply.

The last thing that he said to me was, Thomas, blessed are those who have seen, not seen, and yet have believed. Peter, you follow me.

The other Judas, take heart, I have overcome the world. Parting words have a way of sticking with us, don't they?

And in this gospel, John has recorded lots of Jesus' last words. We've been taking them in together as a church, haven't we, the last few weeks? Grasping these truths that Jesus gives us to hold on to in a world where he is not here.

[1 : 11] And today we come to some of his very last words. If you see that very last words in chapter 14, he says, come now, let us leave.

So now Jesus has stood up, ready to go, very shortly, to be put to death. He won't see his disciples again until he has been raised from the dead.

And it's as if he pauses on his way out, then, to say one very last thing. Because, of course, in chapter 15 we just read, he carries on speaking, doesn't he?

Now people have wondered why Jesus carries on after he has just said, let's go. One of the best explanations, my personal favorite, is that Jesus and his first followers began the great church tradition of lingering.

Okay, we know what it's like, don't we? It's time to go. Someone's at the back flicking the lights off. But no one stops talking. No one moves, of course.

[2 : 13] We don't want to go. We want to stay. Don Carson, a writer, puts it like this. The delay in departure depicts, yet again, Jesus' profound love for his disciples.

And his concern to drill into them certain stabilizing truths that would see them through the crisis ahead. He did not want to leave them without saying these things.

These are his last, last words before the cross. And those words would stick with you, wouldn't they? You would never forget them. Do they stick with us as Jesus' followers today?

How will we live in a world where Jesus is not here to be seen and heard and touched? Well, here is how. He says, verse 4, remain in me.

Remain in me. This is the truth that he gives us to hold on to this morning. Remain in me. Now, what does that mean? Well, to help us to understand what it means to remain in Jesus, he first shows us this picture of life in the vine.

[3 : 22] Life in the vine. I am the true vine, says Jesus, and my father is the gardener. Now, the image of the vine, which we've picked up in this service, haven't we, in our singing, in our reading, it's famous in the Bible because it's a picture, a national symbol, if you like, of God's old covenant people, Israel.

We use plants in that way today, don't we? If I said thistle, you'd say Scotland. Or rose, you'd say England. And so when Jesus says vine, everyone in that room thinks Israel.

Okay, so listen again to Isaiah's love song about the vine we heard earlier. My loved one had a vineyard, he said, on a fertile hillside.

He describes how the vine owner gives the vine the perfect growing conditions. But then he says he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

The word is literally rotten or stinking grapes. But Isaiah is using this song to tell the story of God's old covenant people in their relationship with God.

[4 : 42] Verse 7, he says, The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, the people of Judah, the vines he delighted in. See, the story God cared for and loved and rescued his people. He planted them in a safe and good and rich land. But in return, throughout history, they showed God rotten hearts.

And hard hearts. And stinking worship. And that is the story, the symbolism and the history that is in the background when Jesus now says he is the true vine.

That is not the false vine. He is claiming to be all that God's people down through the ages should have been, but were not.

He's claiming to be the only one who produces what God comes to look for. A pure heart and a holy life and right worship.

[5 : 48] So what would that have meant then to those guys in the room with him that night? Well, who they were, where they were from, could not put them in a right relationship with God.

Only Jesus could do that. And the same is true of us today as we hear Jesus say these words. Whoever we are, wherever we are from, it is not because we are good enough or faithful enough that we get right with God.

We cannot be. No, it's because Jesus is the true and faithful one. And so we become right with God through him. Now, that might be news to you this morning.

If you are here in church for the first time or you're new to church, you need Jesus to come rightly to God. But remember here, Jesus is speaking to his followers.

And so the question for us is, is it still possible as Christians for us in our hearts to rely on something to bring us to God that is not the true vine, not Jesus?

[7 : 00] Is it possible for us to rely on coming to church or filling a rota or being part of the right group or a prayer that we prayed once as a substitute for relying on Jesus now?

Is there something that makes us feel that we are right with God that is not actually Christ? A kind of placebo that gives us a temporary spiritual boost that is not the real thing?

Friends, we are not the true vine. Neither is our church. Neither is anything that we are involved in or do or belong to.

I am the true vine, says Jesus. And so he says to us, we need to remain in him. One of the things that was new to me when I moved up to Scotland was people didn't ask you, where do you live? But rather, where do you stay? Where you stay is where your home is. And that is what Jesus is getting at with this word remain.

[8 : 20] Have your home in me. Reside in me. Stay in me. You see, when you become a Christian, you get a new address, if you like.

Paul writes to the church in Colossae. The address that he puts on the front is this. To the brothers and sisters in Christ at Colossae. And so you, if you're a Christian this morning, you are the brothers and sisters in Christ at Bon Accord.

Because if you are united to Christ in Christ, well, he is where you stay. He is the first line of your address. So when Jesus tells us he is the true vine and we must remain in him, he is saying you need to have your home in me.

Have your life in me. That is how you come to God. But sometimes, that's very reassuring, isn't it?

If you are in Christ, that he is the true vine. But sometimes these verses, what Jesus says, can put Christians a wee bit on edge. If you just have a read of verse 2.

[9 : 30] I am the true vine, says Jesus. My father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. And every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

The father, he says, is the expert gardener. He comes with his spiritual secateurs. He cuts off dead branches, makes room for fruitful branches.

That is gardening 101. But where, we might ask, does that leave us spiritually? Is simply trusting in Jesus not enough?

Are we at risk one day of being cut off? If our lives are not good or fruitful enough? If we're struggling spiritually? Well, Jesus answers that question in the next verse.

Look in verse 3. You are already clean because of the word I've spoken to you. He did not want those guys to worry about where they stood with God.

[10 : 35] They are already clean. Their life in Jesus has started. They are branches in the vine. And they are bearing fruit because they have believed in his word, the gospel.

That is what has knitted them into him. So if your trust is in Christ this morning, then by the power of his gospel, by the power of his spirit, you have been grafted into Christ.

His life is in you. And if his life is in you, you will bear fruit. So who is it then who's being cut off here if it's not us?

Well, sadly, it's those who have refused to trust in Jesus. We've seen time and time again in this gospel the rotten grapes of God's old vineyard sprouting up.

Jesus held out true and eternal life to God's people, his old people. Yet as he said to them in chapter 5, you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

[11:43] And so they were being cut off. But friends, whoever we are, that is far, far from what God wants for us. Here is what he wants for us this morning.

Verse 4 says Jesus, It's a kind of strange picture, isn't it?

We don't often think of a branch living in a vine. The branch just is in the vine. It grows out of the vine. The branch doesn't have to try, does it?

Or struggle to stay connected to the vine. The branch doesn't have to wake up in the morning and go out and find the strength to squeeze out some fruit.

That day. The vine simply gives life to the branch. And the branch grows good fruit. And so if we are in Christ, he is saying, I give life to you and you grow into a pure heart and a holy life that glorifies God, true worship, as we rest in him.

[12:59] That is how we grow in the Christian life, isn't it? Sometimes we think of being a Christian in kind of two acts. You first act, God saves us.

And then in the second act, we grow and change. Here Jesus says, actually, there's no break. It's just one act. There's no scene change.

If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Our union with Christ, it's not a dead union, but a living union.

His life flows into us. We don't do our growing separately from Jesus. No, all our life, all our growing, all our fruit, our worship, it comes from remaining in him.

Brothers and sisters, we cannot glorify God apart from Jesus. We can't do it. Apart from me, he says, you can do nothing. I don't know about you, but day to day, I tend to slip into believing, actually, that I can do something for God.

[14:12] Something in my own strength. Something in my own planning, by my own gifts. But friends, that is not true. Jesus is saying our dependence upon him is total.

Apart from him, no life. In him, life to the full. And so, if we take nothing else from these words of Jesus, let it be this.

We need him. We need him. Every moment. Every hour. Every day. Every week. We need him. So, he says, remain in me and I in ye.

But what does that mean, then, for us? As we go from here, this morning, what does living in the vine actually look like? Well, this is our second point. Jesus brings this picture to life to show us it's not just life in the vine.

It is living in the vine, an activity that we enter into. So far, he's spoken, hasn't he, about us remaining in him?

[15:20] He remaining in us. But now, if you just glance at verse 7, what does he say? If ye remain in me and my words remain in ye.

He's taken us on a little bit, hasn't he? What does it look like for us to live in Christ? Well, it looks like his words living in us. And then see verse 10.

It takes us on a bit further. Remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love. So, what does it look like for us to live in Christ?

Well, says Jesus, it looks like living in his love by his words living in us and us living out his commandments. It is a true and ongoing living life.

Now, we saw last Sunday, didn't we? This has everything to do with the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings Jesus' presence to live in us.

[16:24] And part of how he does that is by bringing his words to live in us. He keeps Christ's words alive in our hearts. And Jesus says, now, that grows fruit in us.

It does that in a couple of different ways. Firstly, notice in our prayers, verse 7. If you remain in me and my words remain in ye, ask whatever you wish and it will be done for you.

This is to my Father's glory that ye may bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. His words in us bring words out of us.

His words go in. Our words come out. What glorifies the Father is growing much fruit in us. And what Jesus desires above all is to glorify the Father.

Then what are Jesus' words going to help us to pray for? What are we going to ask if his words live in us? Well, that we would grow and bear fruit in our walk with him.

[17 : 36] That we would grow a pure heart and a holy life and right worship. And it's a prayer, it says Jesus, God promises to answer with a yes.

God is not going to say no if you ask him to grow ye in Christ. But you also don't need me to tell you this morning that God's yes is not a quick fix.

How does he grow fruit in us? Well, verse 2, every branch that does grow fruit, he says, he prunes. Every branch.

If you are a Christian, God prunes your heart. Wisely, patiently, sometimes painfully.

What does it look like to prune a thing, to cut at it? He cuts away from our hearts what is old and dead. But why? To bring new growth.

[18 : 38] So that over the months and the years, we might grow more fruits that glorifies him. It's the work of the surgeon who cuts you to heal you.

The work of the gardener who prunes to grow. And he does this, okay, not on an hourly timescale, but on an eternal timescale.

The Puritan preacher Thomas Boston wrote this, pray for it and pray in faith, believing that for the sake of Jesus, you shall certainly have it in time.

In this life, too, if it is good for you, but without doubt in the life to come. God always answers our prayers for spiritual growth with a yes.

But we need to remember, it takes a lifetime to grow fruit that lasts forever. And so, brothers and sisters, if you are worn out this morning, if you are listening to this and thinking, I've tried that.

[19 : 49] If you are worn out praying for growth and change, you're struggling to see God's work in your life, the fruit that it bears, hold on to this promise.

Okay, take verse 7, write it out. Stick it in the cover of your Bible, blue tack it to your desk. Keep soaking in Jesus' words and keep asking him to grow ye.

Because this is a prayer that God loves to say yes to. Because secondly, notice Jesus' words in us grow us in faithfulness to his commandments.

There in verse 9, as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love.

Just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. Now, what sort of love is his love? Okay, just let this sink in.

[20 : 51] As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. The love that the Father has had for his Son forever in eternity, before the beginning of time to beyond the end of time.

That is how Jesus loves us, he says. Now, if we even grasp a bit of that, we know that that is a love that is worth remaining in, isn't it?

That is a love that is worth having our home in it. And he says we stay in his love, we remain in his love by listening to his words.

Okay, maybe at home you have house rules or family values. You know, take off your shoes when you come in. Tidy up the mess that you make. Well, Jesus' commands are like house rules or family values.

Because his word has brought us into the family of God. His word, he has just said, has given us a home in him. And so now he tells us how we're to live in God's family home.

[22 : 02] Living in his love means keeping his commandments. And everything we've just seen then about our relationship with him is love for us. It tells us he's not saying, is he try harder or do better?

Or if you get it wrong, you're going to be cut off and kicked out. No, because if we are branches in the vine, well, obedience to his commands will naturally grow in our lives.

If we are resting in Jesus, we will love to follow his words. How do his commandments fit with his love? You know, our culture would tell us those things don't go together.

True love, we hear, doesn't come with a list of demands. But as Tim Keller points out, well, love always comes with limits. Love always comes with limits.

Friendships require time. Marriage involves sacrifice. Children need us constantly. In fact, the limits actually grow in our lives as our love grows.

[23 : 13] But as any engaged couple knows or any expectant parent, if it's true love, well, we take on those limits with joy. And so what about the supreme love of Jesus?

Well, he makes his limits so clear to us in his word, his commandments. And so remaining in his love, it does bring limits into our lives.

But if we know how great his love for us is, as the Father has loved me, so I have loved ye. Well, we will accept those limits gladly.

Because they're his. His house rules. His family values. Indeed, he says, he gives us his commands. Verse 11.

Why? So that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete. And perhaps that surprises us. Even as Christians.

[24 : 15] Perhaps we live functionally believing that our real happiness and our real joy in life comes from doing things our own way.

And actually, living for Christ, then, is a bit of a drag. And it's a bit of a chore. And we might wish, maybe, maybe he hadn't asked us to do it this way.

You either thought that our greatest joy could be found in keeping Jesus' commandments sounds like a total contradiction. Especially to our world.

And so if we believe that, we won't, will we, fully give ourselves over to his words and his ways?

Well, if that is you this morning, if that is where you are, listen to Jesus' invitation.

That there is real, lasting joy for ye to be found in living within the limits of his great and everlasting love.

[25 : 18] Because it is the unchanging and eternal love of God himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that we live in when we put our trust in Jesus.

And so this is what living in the vine looks like, friends, for us day in and day out. This is what it feels like. Jesus' words living in us, shaping our prayers, pruning our lives, changing us so that we grow into more and more something that pleases and glorifies God.

And so the question for us is, isn't it, is that what our lives are about? Do we love his commands?

Do we look and pray for his pruning work in our lives? Do we live out his words? And do we see these things not as something that's kind of an added extra, something that comes after, later, but as part and parcel of our living relationship with him now?

You know, our permanent home is in Jesus, but are we living and working and resting and relating in that home? Are our lives lived in him?

[26 : 38] Are we remaining in him? Living dependence on his words to give us life and to lead us in lives that glorify God.

And finally, not only in our own personal lives, but what about our church family life? This home, God's home.

You know, Jesus' focus has been so far on individual branches. But very lastly, we see that living in the vine means living in love. Living in love.

You know, Jesus has been speaking about commandments, plural. But now, if you look in verse 12, he narrows down to focus on just one commandment. My command is this, love each other as I have loved you.

How has Jesus loved us? Well, greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. That is what Jesus is about to go and do, to be arrested and beaten and mocked and nailed to the cross.

[27 : 44] To die the death for our sins in our place that we deserve because he loved us with the greatest possible love. And so, in that same way, he now says, lay down your lives for each other.

Love one another. Now, we spent a bit of time considering that a few weeks ago, didn't we? And it has been so encouraging. So encouraging, brothers and sisters, even in these last few weeks, to have heard of hospitality offered.

And kindness shown. And new friendships struck up. An act of costly service in this church family. And so much love goes unseen.

But it fills my heart with joy. And I hope it does too. To see the fruit of love growing in this church family as an evidence that our life is in Christ.

Because that is the fruit, he says, that shows that we are his disciples. Now, often those times of love, they don't often feel like the big things or the important things.

[28 : 53] Okay, for example, as I said earlier, this Sunday, next Sunday, someone might ask you to get your photo taken. Okay, now you might ask, what's that got to do with love?

Well, if your picture is in the church directory, then people can reach out to you and recognize you and get to know you. It's just a directory.

You say it's just a photo. Well, when it's up and running, okay, try it. Get in touch with somebody that you don't know so well. Have them around for dinner. Then tell me it's just a directory.

Jesus says that that love, that kind of love at its furthest stretch is the greatest thing that one person could do for another person.

It's a reflection, however faint, of what he has done for us. Love one another. Love one another.

And so the message for us, Bonacord as a church, is don't lose that love and keep it growing.

[29 : 59] It comes from God. It's his fruit. So we need to thank him for it, don't we, when we see it. And keep praying that prayer that he would help us to love one another deeply.

The easiest way to stop growing that fruit in our life is to think, we've nailed this. Okay, welcome, check, warmth, check, love, check.

Don't do that. Keep praying, asking, living this love. We can't do that out of duty, can we? You can't love someone out of duty.

Have you ever tried to do that? You try to live out this command without resting in Christ's love. And you will find, actually, that you cannot do it. That's why he gives it to us, not as his slaves, he says, but as his friends.

You see that, verse 14? You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business.

[31 : 04] Instead, I've called you friends. For everything that I learned from my father, I've made known to you. He is not the big boss, handing down the tasks from on high, new rules, expecting us blindly to obey him.

He is the father who invites us to come and sit with him, spreads the plans out on the table, talks us through what he is doing. God has told us in his word what he is doing in his world, that he has done it through the self-giving love of his son.

And so we live this love not simply because we have been instructed to, but because we are now friends of the living God, in on his plan.

Because we have been loved with his self-giving and sacrificial love. And that changes everything, does it not?

In the words of the hymn by William Cooper, to see the law of Christ fulfilled and hear his pardoning voice, changes a slave into a child and duty into choice.

[32 : 18] And so as Jesus says these words, he stands with one foot on the threshold, about to go out into the dark night to give his life for us.

And as he leaves, he leaves us with these words, remain in me. And so let us do that, brothers and sisters, this coming week, by his spirit, resting on his word, through prayer, through faith, through obedience, let us live in his love.

Be at home with God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let's pray for that together now. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. God, our Father, how we thank you that you have loved us.

How we thank you for the precious love of the Lord Jesus, that he would give his life to save us.

Father, we thank you that you call us to be at home in him and to abide in him and stay in him.

And Father, we have thought that we cannot do this on our own. We do not have the strength. We are not faithful. Lord, we pray. And so, Father, we pray by your spirit that you would enable us by faith to rest in Christ, to rest in his finished work for us.

[33 : 44] Lord, help us, we pray, to know his love for us. Each day to rest and rely upon it. And Father, out of your goodness, that you would grow fruit in us.

Help us, we pray, to grow purer in heart. Lord, that our lives might be more devoted to you than they were yesterday. Lord, that we might worship you in spirit and in truth.

We thank you, our Father, that you will not give up on that work in us, Lord, until it's complete. And so we pray, Lord, day by day, that you would help us and grow your fruit in us.

For these things we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.