

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 1/23/94  
John 15:9-13 "The Portrait of a Fruitful Christian"

**Intro:** We've had a hamster for over a year. His name is Mickey. He's fun to watch. When we first got him, I got a kick out of watching him run on his wheel. He'd run and run and run. I'd watch him and think, "Man, doesn't that frustrate you, going around and around, and not getting anywhere?!"

Do you ever feel like that, like you're going through the motions in life? Oh, we're busy, we're active, but something seems to be missing. So we run faster, and harder, and longer. This whirlwind syndrome can creep into the way we approach our Christian life, too. We can be doing all the right things--reading our Bible, saying our prayers, showing up for church, the whole bit--yet we have this nagging sense that something's missing. And it is.

What's missing? And how do we get "it" back? We'll find the answer by considering what Jesus taught in Jn 15.

Context: John 15

When Jesus spoke the words recorded in Jn 15, His earthly ministry was nearly over. Soon He would complete His redemptive work, and return to heaven. His followers would not see Him again until He returned.

In Jn 15, Jesus tells His disciples what life will be like in the interim period, the time between His 1st and 2nd coming. To describe what life would be like, Jesus used a common image--A Vine. Vv 1-8 are an extended metaphor, a visual illustration depicting the Christian life.

v 1 "I am the true vine, and My Father is the Gardener."

v 5 "I am the vine, ye are the branches."

The vine image is a beautiful picture of the Christian life. But what really does it mean? I think commentator D.A. Carson (91) is right when he observes, "Few passages in the Scripture are better known, at a superficial level, than the first few verses of John 15."

What does Jesus want us to get out of this picture, this image? Two weeks ago, we learned from vv 1-3 what's required for fruitfulness: Pruning (1-3), and Abiding (4). And last week, we learned that we have great potential when we abide in Christ (vv 5-8). But what should all this talk about a Vine and branches and fruit and abiding mean practically in our Christian lives?

We find out beginning in v 9. In vv 9-16, Jesus gives us His own exposition of the vine picture in vv 1-8. Vv 9-16 interpret the meaning of vv 1-8. In fact, vv 9-16 reveal what it is that is missing from so many of our lives that's robbing us of fruitfulness. The title of our study this morning, "The Portrait of a Fruitful Christian."

**Proposition: According to John 15:9-13, if we're experiencing fruitfulness in our lives, it will show up in two areas.**

I. If our lives are fruitful, we will experience Intimacy with Christ (9-11).

A. It affects our Aim (9)--His Love.

- B. It affects our Actions (10)--His Commands.
  - C. It affects our Attitude (11)--His Joy.
    - 1. Joy is found in Jesus, and nowhere else.
    - 2. Joy is connected to objective truth.
    - 3. Jesus wants us to experience Joy.
- II. If our lives are fruitful, we will experience Intimacy with one another (12-13).
- A. We have a Mandate (12a).
  - B. We have a Model (12b-13).

**I. If our lives are fruitful, we will experience Intimacy with Christ (9-11).**

What do we mean by intimacy? To be intimate is to be near, to be close. Right here is one of the baffling and mind-boggling truths of Scripture. The God of the universe invites us to experience intimacy with Him. He wants us to be close to Him.

A lot of people don't know God in those terms. To them, He is only an Awesome Being, One Who is far off. He is mighty. He is high and lifted up.

True, God is that. Yet listen to what He says about Himself in Isa 57:15, "For thus saith the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

He offers to us intimacy. We need to know that if we want to grasp what it means to be fruitful. Fruitfulness is not the result of living according to a list of do's and don'ts. It's not mechanical. It's not going through routine. Fruitfulness is linked to a relationship. Fruit is the evidence of an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.

READ vv 9-11

In vv 9-11, Jesus emphasizes His love, His commands, and His joy. If I am experiencing intimacy with Christ, it will affect my life in 3 ways.

A. It affects our Aim (9)--His Love.

V 9 "As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you."

Did you catch that? How much does Jesus love His own? How much does He love us? He loves us "as" God the Father loves Him. He loves us with the same type of love.

Usually, when we think of God's love, we think of His love for US. And certainly, He loves us (Jn 3:16). God the Father loves the world. He loves His Church. Yet don't miss this. God the Father loves His Son.

How much does God the Father love God the Son? Jn 17:24 says He loved His Son before the foundation of the world. Jn 3:35 reveals that because the Father loves the Son, He put all things in the Son's hand. Jn 5:20 reveals that because of His love, He revealed all things to the Son.

The Father's love for the Son is eternal. It's without beginning and ending. It never fails. And it's the same love we can experience! (see--Jn 17:26)

Here's the connection. Jesus says, "In the same way that the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you." Think of the implications!

Application: It breaks my heart to see the consequences people face for looking for "love" in the wrong places. Young people, Jesus loves you...

Q: What's our responsibility in light of His love?  
V 9 "continue ye in My love."

Please note the word is an imperative, a command. It's not an option. It's also the same greek word in v 4 translated, "Abide." We're to abide in Christ. We're to abide in His love.

Q: What does it mean to abide/remain in Jesus' love?  
You say, "It sounds like abiding in Jesus' love is kind of a mystical thing." Is it mystical? No. It has to do with our Aim in life. Abiding in His love is our aim.

In v 9, love is like a sphere. Suppose I drew a circle on the ground. Inside this circle is where we can taste the fruit, the benefits of Christ's love. As long as I'm in the sphere, I'm OK. But when I move out of the circle, I forfeit those benefits. So Jesus says to me, "I want to shower you with the blessings of My love. Make sure you keep yourselves in the place where you can enjoy these benefits."

Picture a Greenhouse in a vast desert. Imagine that you are a plant. Life inside the greenhouse is luscious and fruitful. Outside it's barren. But suppose you said, "I want to go out in the world. I want to go where I want to go. I want to do what I want to do. I'm tired of the Gardener making all the decisions. I want to be free!"

Let me ask you. Is that freedom? No. That's folly. Why? Because that choice will result in barrenness and destruction.

See the parallel? The Father is our Gardener. He has designed where and how we should live if we want to enjoy fruit. When we stay in the Greenhouse, when we stay within the boundaries of Christ love, we can enjoy the blessings of His fruit.

When we have intimacy with Christ, abiding in His love will be our Aim.

Q: In practical terms, how do we abide in Jesus' love? We find out in v 10...

B. It affects our Actions (10)--His Commands.  
V 10 "If ye keep My commandments..."

What are the boundaries that mark off the sphere of Christ's love? Christ's commands. The commandments of Christ are like the walls of the Greenhouse. They protect us. They guard us. They keep us in the place where we can enjoy the wonderful benefits of Christ's love.

Intimacy with Christ affects our Aim. Our aim ought to be to abide in His love. It also affects our actions. His commands determine our Actions.

Two questions...

1. What did Jesus say we are to do with His commands? "keep my commands"
2. What is true if we obey Christ's commands? "ye shall abide in My love"

Notice that. Abiding in the love of Christ is not abstract or mystical. It's very concrete, very measurable. When I obey His Word, I am continuing in His love.

When I obey Him, I am keeping Myself in a position where I can enjoy His blessings. The key is obedience.

Objection: "Wait! If you command love, it's not love, is it?"  
Look at the Divine Model.

V 10 "Even as I have kept My Father's commands..."

Can true love be commanded? Yes, because biblical love is not basically a feeling, but an act of the will. Jesus loved His Father, so what did He do? First, He obeyed Him. And second, He remained in His love.

The Bible presents Jesus as our Redeemer, our Savior, our King, our Lord, and our Master. He is all that. But He's also something else. He's our Model. He's our Example. I Pt 2:21 "For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."

Jesus obeyed the Father. He didn't do His own thing. He kept the Father's commands. When facing the Cross, He prayed, "Not My will, but Thy will be done (Mk 14:36)." We read in Heb 5:8-9, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him."

See that? Jesus obeyed the Father. He calls us to obey Him.

Obedience is a vital aspect of abiding. In order to be obedient, we have to die to ourselves. We make a choice to submit our will to God's will.

Illust:

Intimacy with Christ affects our Aim, our Actions, and...

### C. It affects our Attitude (11)--His Joy.

V 11 "These things have I spoken..."

I find it incredible as I read these words how little Jesus thought of Himself, and how much He thought of His disciples. Remember, this was His hour of greatest need. Soon, while on the cross, He would endure the horrid penalty of hell. Yet there in the Upper Room, His focus was on others.

Intimacy with Jesus affects our Attitude in life. Jesus told His disciples His Words were the key that would unlock 2 doors of opportunity: One, that My joy might remain in you; and Two, that Your joy might be full.

This is great. Do you want to know how to experience Joy in your life?

Three observations about Joy:

#### *1. Joy is found in Jesus, and nowhere else.*

"MY joy"--Joy is a by-product of an intimate walk with Christ. Jesus doesn't want us to settle for a deficient Joy. The world offers a counterfeit joy. It's like fizz in a can of pop. It doesn't last. People can take my happiness, but they can't touch my joy. Bill Hull writes, "Joy is a supernatural sense of well-being that comes from knowing that we are pleasing to God."

2. *Joy is connected to objective truth.*

"THESE THINGS have I spoken"--Joy is not a sentimental feeling. It's not something we work up. It's connected to "these things."

3. *Jesus wants us to experience Joy.*

"That your joy may be FULL"--Jesus doesn't dangle joy in front of us like the carrot on the string in front of the horse. He has joy (Heb 12:2). He offers us joy.

Listen. If joy is found in Jesus, and nowhere else, then the world can only imagine what real joy is. Only disciples are candidates for joy.

Do you have joy in your life? True joy belongs to those who walk intimately with Christ.

Summary: If I am to experience intimacy with Christ, there are 3 things He offers with which I must come to grips in my life: His love, His commands, and His Joy. Ps 91:1 says, "He who dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Jim Elliot, martyred missionary to the Auca Indians, once prayed, "Lord, make my way prosperous, not that I may achieve high station, but that my life may be an exhibit to the value of knowing God."

Q: How much value do you place on intimacy with Christ in your life?

Hymn: "Close to Thee" (365), by Fanny Crosby

Tran: This morning we're looking at a Portrait of a Fruitful Christian. The first mark of a fruitful life is Intimacy with Christ.

**II. If our lives are fruitful, we will experience Intimacy with one another (12-13).**

Why? For 2 reasons...

A. We have a Mandate (12a).

V 12 "This is My commandment that ye love one another."

It's not the first time Jesus gave the 11 this command that night. He earlier told them in 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another..."

The fruit of the Spirit is love. Love is to be the trademark of Jesus' followers. We have a responsibility to love each other. And listen. If I want to experience intimacy with Christ, I have to accept this mandate, and fulfill my responsibility to my brethren in Christ.

How much are we to love each other? Notice...

B. We have a Model (12b-13).

V 12 "as I have loved you..."

Wow, what a high example! We're to love as He loved. Remember the context. He's the vine. We're the branches. He wants to reproduce His life, His love, in and through us.

We ought to resemble Him. By the way we treat each other, we ought to give evidence of His presence in our lives.

Q: What's the greatest demonstration of love? V 13

V 13 "Greater love has no man than this..."

Obviously, this is exactly what Jesus Himself would do in a matter of hours. Lay down His life for His friends. But His challenge to us is this. We're to show the same kind of selfless love to each other.

Q: Is it hard to love that way? Yes.

D.A. Carson (103), "The believer who hungers for deep intimacy with Jesus Christ must follow this new command. It is not easy. The unlovely ones in the brotherhood bring out the worst in me. The whiners get on my nerves. The gossips and the arrogant, the immature and the silly, conspire to drain my resolve. But the answer is to remember that the branch can do nothing apart from the vine, and that Jesus himself loved his friends, his unlovely, whining, gossipy, arrogant, immature and silly friends, enough to die for them."

**Conclusion:**

This morning, we've seen the Portrait of a Fruitful Christian. Fruitfulness is related to Intimacy. It shows up in two areas: Intimacy with Christ, and Intimacy with one another.

Are you experiencing this kind of intimacy in your life?

Closing Hymn: #380 "Just a Closer Walk with Thee"