

## Gospel of John Chapter 15 - John Karmelich

After over 15 lessons on the Gospel of John, most of you know by now this study of John's Gospel has turned into a discussion of big theological questions. I should state for the new members that my basic question for this ministry is based on the question, "I believe Jesus is God and all that, so now what?" I needed to state that because Chapter 15 is Jesus saying in effect, "How do you live as a Christian when I'm (Jesus) not in the room?" In other words, what does Jesus expect of us once we turn our lives over to Him? That ties well to my theme of "I believe in Jesus, now what"?

To state the obvious, history is full of people who have done great things, but don't believe in Jesus. It's not the issue here. There are really nice people in the world who deny Jesus is God. While the issue of "now what" includes how we live our lives, the underlying issue's a matter of wanting to be pleasing to Jesus. Obviously Christians (along with other major religions) believe God will judge each of us, and I believe He will. On that day God won't ask how many people we were nice to or how much money we earned! God expects believers to be good witnesses for Jesus. With that said, Chapter 15's continues a three chapter sermon by Jesus on how to live in this world as a believer. In other words, this chapter is a set of instructions on how to act as Christians, and the things we should expect as believers. Some of it is positive and some is negative (warnings). OK, I've beaten that question to death without answering it. Let's see what Jesus says about it:

Let's begin by remembering where we are in the story: Chapters 13 to 17 are called "The Upper Room Discourse" because it mostly takes place in a room where Jesus is giving a speech to his disciples. It is a little misnamed, because in the last verse of Chapter 14 Jesus says, "Let us go from here." Therefore, I suspect Chapters 15 to 17 occur as they walked from that room the "Garden of Gethsemane" which is on a hillside east of the walls of the old City of Jerusalem. Anywhere, that's the "where." Time to focus on the "what," which is a speech by Jesus teaching the disciples and us, how to be a witnesses for Him!

Verse 1 of this chapter is the first verse after Jesus says, "Let's get moving," so most likely it was given while they were walking. Jesus starts by comparing Himself to the root of a vineyard vine that God has planted. Obviously it's an illustration to be followed. The first key point is when He says, "any branch in Me that doesn't bear fruit, God the Father gets rid of." No, it doesn't mean we can lose our salvation, even if we believe Jesus is God. It means God saved us for a purpose: to glorify Him with our lives. It is what "bearing fruit" is all about. No, it's not about how many people we lead to Jesus. It is the Holy Spirit's job to save people. Our job is to be good witnesses for Him. If you have ever used your time to draw people closer to God or testified as a believer, those are examples of being a good witness. What about children who die before an age of accountability? My view is God will judge people fairly. God didn't call us to judge such things, just be good witnesses for Him.

The illustration continues with the point that, unless we "abide in Him," we can't be used by Him. That isn't an argument to be perfect, just perfectly forgiven. We abide in Him by a regular habit of prayer, as well as seeking Him through His Word. For the lack of a better word, I think of God as a "gentleman". It simply means God never forces us to draw close to Him, but it's His desire we abide in Him by daily making an effort to draw close to Him.

The next reminder is to "Keep His Commandment," which is about showing love for others. What He means is if we show how we care for others more than ourselves, that draws people close to God. No, it doesn't mean we have to go broke giving to everyone who asks. The idea is that Jesus expects us to be good witnesses for Him, and that means we care about other people and want to see them also draw

close to God. Then we get the "reward" comment: God promises we'll be full of joy when we use our lives as witnesses for Him. Bottom line, "that's how the ballgame of life is played." It's not about how much stuff we have when we die. It's about our lives having a purpose, and there's no greater purpose than to be used by the God who created everything to be used by Him.

That leads to verses 12 to 17:. In effect, God calls us both His slaves and His friends. It says He'll love us if we do what He commands! I thought, "What kind of friendship is that"? Then I remembered that He's in charge and we're not! That's why the Bible emphasizes the dual concept that we're His slaves as well as His friends. The text emphasizes that the Bible teaches us all we need to know on the topic is to use our lives for His glory. It also emphasizes that God chose us and not vice versa. I realize each of us made a decision to accept Jesus is God and Lord of our lives. Since He knows all things, we accept the fact God knows in advance who will be saved even though we have no idea who that is. The text gives another emphasis that the reason God saved us is to bear fruit for Him. Again we're back to the idea we were created for a purpose, and I can't imagine a greater reason to live than to be used by God! It leads to a life filled with joy, so again, I can't imagine a better reason to live!

We've finished the good news, now comes the bad news: Verses 18-24 are warnings that all believers must deal with. The short version is the "world will hate us." While we may not feel hatred, it is true that more Christians have been killed for their faith in the 20th Century than any time in history. What I suspect is the 21st century will be no easier. Keep in mind that Satan knows His ultimate fate. What he wants to do is delay it from occurring as long as possible. If that means killing believers, he will do that. I admit I pondered that if Satan knew Jesus had to die for our sins, why did Satan work so hard to have Jesus killed? Satan knows eternal life is well, eternal. I suspect Satan did not want Jesus running around drawing people close to Him, so Satan thought killing Him would solve that. No, it didn't help, but what the devil does for bad, God can use for good. Meanwhile, we got to accept that nonbelievers don't want us running around being witnesses for Jesus. As I learned when I first got in ministry, "Bad things will happen when one is making a difference for Jesus." I've learned to accept that as a "badge" that I'm bearing fruit and using my life for His glory. Bottom line, it is worth all that struggle knowing our eternal glory is far greater than all the struggles we have in this life.

So why suffer? Why not keep our mouths shut and just go through life? Because Jesus wants as many people as possible to believe the Gospel, or at least have no excuse for rejecting the Gospel message. It is a matter of not having any excuses for being sent to hell for eternity. God created us so we'll use our lives to glorify Him. That includes accepting the fact many people will reject what we teach. Near the end of the chapter Jesus even quotes the Psalms where David says, "they hated me without a cause." It is the idea that applies to believers that when we suffer for His sake, it's because we are good witnesses for Him. There's no rhyme or reason to explain most suffering in the world. All I know is usually such situations can be used for His glory. I've seen it many times in my life!

The final two verses are about the Holy Spirit. The disciples may have wondered, "If Jesus goes away, how will we know what to do"? The function of the Holy Spirit is to guide us on what to do. Of course He does not say, "Turn left, then turn right, then talk to the next person you meet"! The Spirit helps us recall God's word so that we use what He teaches to glorify Him. With the power of the Spirit working inside of us, then and only then can we make a difference for Him by abiding in Him (again, by regular time in His word and prayer), and then and only then does God use us for His glory, whether we feel it or not. God doesn't work by "feeling" as much as trusting in Him and being willing to be used for Him to glorify Him with our lives. Hope that helps!

If you liked this little study, I wrote a more detailed account about twenty years ago! To read the other one, click on one of the two links on this page. Thanks again for reading this. John