

Gospel John Chapter 15 -- John Karmelich

1. Ever wondered what does Jesus expect from us?
 - a) How does Jesus expect us to act on a daily basis?
 - b) How does Jesus expect us to act with other Christians?
 - c) How does Jesus expect us to act with non-believers?
 - d) How can we expect believers and non-believers to treat us?
 - e) All these questions are the discussion of Chapter 15.
2. These are the questions Jesus asks in a “walking discourse”
 - a) Have you ever heard a lecture or a speech while you’re walking down a road?
 - b) That is what Jesus did with his disciples in Chapter 15
 - i) The last verse of Chapter 14, Jesus said “Come now; let us leave.”
 - ii) Most believe the dialogue in Chapter 15 & 16 was on the road to the garden where Jesus was arrested (Chapter 18)
 - iii) Consider the fact that Jesus *knew* He was going to be arrested in the next few hours.
 - iv) If you had only a few hours left to live, what would *you* like to tell people?
 - v) If I had only a few hours left to live, I would try to pass on the most important facts I would want people to know.
 - vi) I believe that is what Jesus is doing here.
 - c) With that introduction, let's go to Verse 1.
3. Verse 1: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener."
 - i) Remember Jesus and the disciples are walking down the road.
 - ii) Jesus was either pointing to all the vineyards growing around Him,
 - iii) or he was pointing at the official symbol of Israel “The Menorah”
 - a) This is a seven branch (one stem) candlestick.
 - b) There was a giant one on the side of the Temple.
 - c) To an Israelite, it is symbolic of how we are all *based* in God.
 - d) Jesus is saying in Verse 1 that He is the true vine.
 - (1) The Old Testament has *many* examples of how God compares Israel to a vineyard.
 - (2) Jesus is not saying Israel is a false vine.
 - (3) Jesus is saying he is *true* vine Israel is symbol (prophecy!)
 - (a) Remember that Jesus said the Scriptures (Old Testament) testifies about Him, (John 5:39)
 - (4) Jesus needed to emphasize the fact that He is the “true” vine as opposed to Israel. Many of the disciples would be kicked out of Judaism for their beliefs.
 - (5) Remember Jesus’ quote about the Scriptures:
 - (6) You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are
 - iv) The other half of this verse compares God the Father to a gardener.
 - a) A good gardener is one who works diligently to make the flowers and trees be as strong and healthy as possible.
 - b) This is a good example of how God works with us. God does not want to judge us. He wants us to mature, healthy, and lead productive lives *here on earth*.

4. Verse 2: He (speaking of God the Father) cuts off every branch in me (Jesus) that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.
 - a) The first part of this verse can make you a little nervous.
 - i) Does this mean that if I don't bear fruit will God cut me off?
 - ii) (Don't panic, if you're reading this, the answer is NO!)
 - b) As best as I can tell, there are 3 views regarding what this passage is saying about the believer's position in Christ:
 - i) View #1: People can be cast out (like "bad branches") are those who, though once true believers. They end up in Hell for a lack of fruit
 - a) This is the view that one can lose their eternal salvation. While some people make an argument for this, I don't take this view.
 - (1) If you are born-again, how do you become "un-born"?
 - (2) Our salvation is based on His faithfulness, not ours!
 - b) The reason some people don't like to take the position of "once saved, always saved" is they fear you will *now* live a sinful life knowing you can't lose your salvation. The answer is *if* you are saved, *then* I want to live a grateful life in service to Christ. That is the *proof* (i.e. 'fruit' that I am saved.)
 - ii) View #2: They are pseudo Christians are never really abiding in Christ, and go to Hell (like Judas)
 - a) If this is the case, Jesus is talking about *all* people of the world. Those who abide in Him are the believers.
 - b) This view would apply to cult members. People who say they believe in Jesus, but in a way that is contrary to the basic beliefs of the Bible.
 - (1) For example, people who *just* believe Jesus was a great prophet, or a good teacher, but not God.
 - iii) View #3: The "branches cast out" are fruitless Christians who live wasted (burnt up) lives.
 - a) I lean toward this view. These are people who confess Jesus as their Lord, but continue to live a life of sin. I usually find people like that end up withering away from the church.
 - (1) In Acts Chapter 5, there is the story of God bringing an end to the life of Ananias and his wife, Sapphira. I take the view that God rarely goes to this extreme. God wants *all* to repent and is always giving us the opportunity. In these types of dramatic situations, God wants to set a public example for others to learn.
 - (2) I really don't spend a lot of time worrying if God is going to cast me out. Do I sin? Yes. Do I fail? Yes. But I am depending upon His faithfulness, not mine! Despite my failures, I *know* (and so can you) that I am abiding in Him. Through prayer life, gathering with believers and Bible reading time, I am trusting in His faithfulness, not mine.
 - (3) Jesus says in this chapter we can *know* we are his disciples if we have love for one another (John 13:35)
 - (4) Jesus says that whoever comes to him, he will not cast out (John 6:37)
 - iv) Real fruitfulness is only determined over an extended period of time: "Genuine conversion is not measured by the hasty decision but by long-range fruitfulness" (Erdman)

5. Verse 3: You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.
 - a) We are clean because of the Word of God. This is a salvation issue. If we trust in the Word of God (and act upon it as proof of our faith), then we are clean.
 - i) "The real test which reveals whether a person is genuine in his relationship to God is whether he is studying the Word of God and whether he is letting it have its way in his life! God intends for us to be obedient to His Word."
J. Vernon McGee.
 - ii) While reading J. Vernon McGee this week, I also liked this quote:
 - iii) I believe that the people who are really dangerous are the ones who are as active as termites in our churches but who are reluctant to study their Bible."
 - b) This ties back to the lesson Jesus taught about foot washing in Chapter 13
 - i) Jesus answered, "A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. " (John 13:10a NIV)
6. Verse 4: Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.
 - a) Have you ever seen a branch struggling to grow fruit?
 - i) Does a fruit tree grit its teeth and push itself to bear fruit?
 - ii) No, a branch simply *abides* in the tree. This is the command of Verse 4
 - a) "Remain in me, and I will remain in you"
 - iii) God is the one working in our lives. We don't have to struggle at it. By simply *abiding* in Jesus, he will abide in us, and work *through* us.
 - iv) This is why it is essential as a Christian to regularly abide in God. This includes daily prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other believers.
 - b) Verse 4 has 3 sentences.
 - i) The first is the promise. Abide in me and I in you.
 - ii) The second and third is a warning. Without God we can't. Period.
 - c) The key words to this verse is the opening: Remain in me and I will remain in you."
 - i) It takes both to be a "fruitful" Christian
 - a) "Remain in me: Stay close to Jesus, depend upon him
 - b) I will remain in you: let God work in your life, obey his commandments.
 - d) Paul understood this too. Here are two quotes from Paul:
 - i) "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."
(Galatians 2:20a NIV)
 - ii) I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:13 NIV)
7. Verse 5: I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.
 - a) Here is the last "I am" statement of the Gospel of John. He also states in verse 1 that I am the "true" vine, (as opposed to Israel).
 - b) Verse 5 says Christians will "bear fruit.: So how do I "bear fruit for God?"
 - i) "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23a NIV)
 - ii) "for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth"
(Ephesians 5:9 NKJV)
 - iii) If you are like me, I look at "fruit scriptures" like a checklist. If I'm having a bad day or week, I *don't* need to try harder (remember, fruit branches don't try harder!), I need to get back to *abiding* in Christ and letting Christ *abide* in me.
 - iv) Some people argue that fruit-bearing is winning souls to Christ. Sharing your belief with someone is the fruit of the spirit. (If you love someone, you *can't help* taking about them!) The actual *conversion* is up to God and the individual.
 - a) The fruit will *naturally* grow out of me.

8. Verse 6: If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.
 - a) Like verse 2, I take the view this verse applies to believers. There are good scholars who take the opposite view and believe this applies to non-believers.
 - b) Here is my argument for why I believe this verse applies to believers.
Let's read from 1 Corinthians, Chapter 3, beginning at Verse 12:
 - i) If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; *he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. (emphasis added).* (1 Corinthians 3:12-15, NIV)
 - a) Remember the story of the "3 little pigs". The houses of straw and wood burned down, but the brick house survived (I bet you didn't know the 3 little pigs was Biblical! ☺)
 - b) 1 Corinthians, Chapter 3:12 compares our works to gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw. The first 3 (gold, silver, costly stones) are *non-flammable* and will not "burnt up" as described in Verses 13-14.
 - c) The last 3 (wood, hay or straw) *are flammable and will be burnt up.*
 - d) These verses imply that one is still saved (re-read verse 15), but will lose his or her rewards in heaven.
9. Verse 7: If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.
 - a) "So long as the believer was seeking the Lord's will in his life, Jesus would grant every request that would help accomplish this end." (Steadman).
 - i) As stated in previous weeks, this is a combination of your prayers being to God's glory (verse 8) , and not your own. It is also dependant upon your obedience to Him.
 - ii) Remember what James said: "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." (James 4:3 NIV)
10. The next verse begins another topic, "abiding in God's love): Verse 9: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.
 - a) Jesus' love for the father was shown in his obedience for Him.
 - i) Do we believe Jesus is God? Do we trust in Him? Then, as the saying goes:
 - a) "We need to put our money where our mouth is",
or: "If we *believe* Jesus is God, then we need to *act* on it.
 - b) One of the most important things for Christians to grasp is how much God loves them. God is calling us to *abide* in that love. It is *only* by abiding that we are able to have joy, peace, and are *able* to love others.
 - c) There is a story of Dr. Karl Barth, the great theologian, who was once asked, "What is the most profound truth you have ever discovered in the Scripture?" This man, who has been called the greatest theologian of the twentieth century, said, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

11. Verse 11: I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.
 - a) It is important *have* joy as a Christian. (Again, it is not a grit and bear it kind of joy, but it comes from abiding in Jesus and Him in us). God wants us to be joyful in our lives. If you want people to see as a good example for Christ, what kind of a witness are you if you are miserable all the time?
 - i) "I am mortally afraid of super-pious Christians who have no humor in their lives, yet walk around with a Bible under their arms." J. Vernon McGee
12. Verse 12: My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.
 - a) This is a big chunk of verses, but it was important to read them as one group.
 - b) Notice Verse 12 begins where Verse 17 ends, with the command to Love each other.
 - c) So, how do you "command" to love one another?
 - i) What about people you don't like, and worse, people who don't like you?
 - ii) "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35 NKJV)
 - a) Jesus repeated his command to "love each other" because he knew that the future of the work among men *depended* on the disciples' attitude toward one another.
 - iii) This is a command of Jesus, not a suggestion. So how do we do it?
 - a) Jesus had the same problems. The disciples were rebellious. They were more concerned with who would be the greatest. They didn't get Jesus' teaching much of the time. Jesus had to rebuke them on occasion.
 - b) The better question to ask is how did *Jesus* do it?
 - (1) Jesus shows us in that he regularly spent time alone with God to *renew* himself. I believe went off to pray, to remind himself how much God loved the world.
 - (2) As God forgives men, we need to forgive others!
 - c) The secret to being loving all the time is to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5b, NIV)
 - d) Try this prayer sometime: "Dear God, what that person did to me really hurt me. I don't have it in me to love them right now. So I take this sinful and hurtful thought captive, and lay it at the feet of the cross. Now fill me with *your* love so I can love that person as Christ loved the church"
 - (1) Paul put it this way: "but be *transformed* by the *renewing of your mind*, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2b NKJV)
 - e) Remember that love is a decision, not an emotion. If you take action, the emotion will come.
 - (1) "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:34 NIV)

- d) Last, I want to talk a little about “friendship”. Jesus uses the comparison of “servants” versus “friends”.
 - i) People don’t always share their life-plans and goals with their servants (or employees). They do share them with friends.
 - ii) Although we *are* servants, Jesus elevates us to the level of friendship.
 - a) This is His privilege to do, not ours.
 - e) The disciples had not followed Jesus by some chance impulse; they had been chosen.
 - i) “He chose me; therefore I am His responsibility.” That is trust!
(G. Campbell Morgan)
13. Next comes a talk on how we can be expected to be treated by non-Christians. Verse 18: "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹ They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ He who hates me hates my Father as well. ²⁴ If I had not done among them what no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'
- a) This is another big “chunk” of verses, but it all talks about the same theme, which is the fact that since people persecuted Jesus, people *will* persecute us!.
 - b) A lot of people don’t want to hear about Jesus. They enjoy their sins and they don’t want anybody to make them feel guilt about it.
 - i) Peter noticed this in one of his letters:
 - ii) “They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation (sinful life), and they heap abuse on you”. (1 Pet 4:3b-4 NIV)
 - iii) Paul commented on this too. “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12 NIV)
 - c) There is good news to this. Notice verse 20: “If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also”
 - i) Some people *will* respond to the Gospel. We don’t know who, but God does. This is why God compels us to *be* a witness.
 - a) Remember the slogan:
“Without God, we can’t, without us, God won’t.”
 - b) God wants to work *through* us to strengthen, grow & mature the church.
 - d) There are two reasons the world will hate you.
 - i) The first is ignorance: "They do not know the One who sent me."
 - a) “Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.” (Romans 1:28 NIV)
 - ii) The second reason is resentment of Jesus' claims and standards.
 - a) The world does not hate their *idea* of God. It is Christ they hate.
 - (1) Ever heard someone say something like “Me & God are real close, He knows me and what I’m like”.
 - (2) The problem is that they have some idea what the Jesus requires of them, and they don’t want to change their ways!
 - b) Verse 23 states that Jesus and the Father belong in the same category; neither can be accepted or rejected without the other.

- e) Last thing about these verses, is that Jesus calls us to live *separately* from the World.
 - i) God calls us to be *witnesses* to the world, but not be *part* of this world.
 - ii) There is a short little poem I like to insert here: (source unknown)
 - a) "To live above with those you love: Undiluted glory!
 - b) To live below with those you know: Quite another story!"
 - f) In Verse 25, Jesus quotes from Psalm 69.
 - i) What Jesus is saying in this quote is that the people who *think* they knew the Law (Pharisee's) were fulfilling the prophecy concerning the enemies of God's servant (i.e. Jesus).
14. Last set of Verses, beginning at Verse 26: "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. ²⁷ And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.
- a) Jesus just spent some time telling the disciples they were going to be persecuted for their beliefs.
 - i) We, as 20th century Americans, tend to forget that the word "persecution" has a much stronger meaning than it does to us. (We need to constantly thank God for our freedom of worship!) Back then, it implied a death sentence. For us, it only means ridicule.
 - ii) The purpose of Jesus emphasizing the Holy Spirit was to comfort them of the upcoming trials. The emphasis on "truth" is to comfort them that the disciples will know *what* to say *when* the proper time comes.
 - a) Remember that "The Holy Spirit" is a title. His *name* is "comforter".
 - b) Two of the main functions of the Holy Spirit is to *comfort* believers as well as bring us the *truth* of Jesus
 - c) The role of the Holy Spirit is discussed further in the next chapter.
 - b) With the *privilege* of being a Christian comes the *responsibility* of being a Christian. Jesus says in Verse 27: "You must testify" for you have been with from the beginning.
 - i) So how long have we been with Jesus?
 - ii) For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. (Eph 1:4 NIV)
 - iii) To re-emphasize one of the main points of the lesson, this is not something you do by struggling and striving, it is something *natural* that comes out of us from *abiding* in Jesus.
 - c) I will close on one last example. Remember the first time you feel in love?
 - i) What was all you could think about?
 - ii) What was the only thing you could talk about?
 - iii) So how do you get that same feeling and attitude about Jesus?
 - iv) Abide in Him and let Him, abide in You!
15. Let's Pray: Father, we thank you for the lessons you have taught us this week. We desire, as your servants, and as your friends, to bear fruit. Not by struggling and striving, but by simply *abiding* in you. By prayer, time with other believers, and time studying your Word, let us spend time abiding in you. Just as important, we want *you* to abide in *us*. Let us be open to your voice, and obedient to what you call us to do. Finally, we thank you for the Holy Spirit, who comforts us and brings us joy no matter what situation or predicament we are in. For it is all for your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.