

## THE BON AIR PULPIT

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Scripture: *John 15:1-8*

Sermon: ***Drawing Resources from God***

There are *two great misconceptions about the Christian life*. The *first* is that *many people think they have to work, do many good deeds, to make themselves acceptable to God*. There are many people on a life long-journey, trying, working, striving to finally get God to save them. We, as Christians, understand that we call Jesus our Savior, for we recognize that we cannot save ourselves. We come in gratitude and thanksgiving to Him for what He has done for us and not what we have accomplished ourselves. The *second* major misconception is that *after you become a Christian you have to struggle and try and work hard to live the Christian life*. Someone has said the Christian life is not hard, it is impossible, which simply says to us that *we cannot by our efforts become what God wants us to be, but rather it is He who works in us and through us to accomplish that*.

In the fifteenth chapter of the book of John, Jesus helps us understand how you live the Christian life. Where do you find the strength, where do you find the power to accomplish it? Before I read it, I need to remind you about the setting. It is the last night of Jesus' life, it is Thursday night; by noon the next day He is going to be on the cross. His disciples didn't know that, but He knew it, and in the last moments He was telling them some very important things. Let me ask you, for example, if you knew that tomorrow you were going to die and tonight was the last night you could be with business associates, friends, or you family, what is it that you would really want to impart to them? Now you understand a little bit more the urgency of what Jesus is trying to say. He is saying this is the last moment, this is what is really important and I really want you to understand where you can find the strength to live for me. He probably had a visual; he took out a grape vine. The grape vine is the national symbol of Israel; it is on their coins; it is on the door of the temple; carved on the throne of their king; and he said, *"You know about a grape vine, now I want to remind you how a grape vine produces grapes. If you can see that visual and begin to learn it, then you will understand the principle of how to live the Christian life."* So let me read for you the

first eight verses of John, chapter 15. *"I am the true vine, my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so it will be more fruitful. You are already clean through the word I have spoken to you,"* and then there is a word in my translation which *remain*. In some of the translations, it is *abide*. He is going to say it eight times, and I will try to note it with emphasis and you will see how many times he used the word. *"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. 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. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers, such branches are picked up and thrown into a fire and burned, but if you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask what you will and it will be given to you. This is my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourself to be my disciple."*

On May 21, 1941, one of the decisive Navy battles in history took place in the North Atlantic. It was between a group of the British Navy and a battleship of the German Navy, called the Bismarck. When Hitler decided to go against the world in war, he commissioned the building of, at the time, the largest and most powerful battleship that had ever been built, and they named it after the person who pulled all the Germanic tribes together, Bismarck. The purpose of the ship was to go all across the North Sea and to intercept anything that came from the United States trying to make it to Great Britain, either troops or supplies; and if he had been successful, maybe that war would have turned out different. It was built on revised plans of the Titanic. It was called the unsinkable Bismarck. One day a British plane spotted it 450 miles north of Great Britain and every plane Great Britain could put into the air they used to bomb the Bismarck. It began to sail toward the coast of France where it could be safe; it could outrun any ship. The pilots began to notice that instead of going in a straight line, it began to weave back and forth, and so the slower ships could catch up with it. When they began to try to bombard the ship, all of a sudden it turned directly back and headed toward the British fleet. It took three days for twelve cruisers, destroyers, and battleships to destroy it, but finally the Bismarck went down. The British found that it had been hit just below the water

line and the rudder had been decommissioned. Here was this tremendous ship, with all of its power, engineering, and speed, which could not save itself because it did not have a rudder.

On the last night Jesus was alive, he turned to His disciples and said, *"I have given you so much, and now I know you are getting ready to go on this journey of the Christian experience and what I want to make sure you have a rudder. I want you to understand how to guide your life, direct your life, because if you don't know how to do that, then you are going to be in serious trouble."* The rudder, Jesus told us, is the *how* you can really live the Christian experience. Jesus pulled out the grape vine and He said, *"There are some things you need to know about a grapevine so you can understand what I am going to tell you. The first thing you need to know is grape vines never grow by themselves. There is no such thing as good wild-grapevines. Grapevines have to be tended, taken care of, and I want you to know that in your Christian life God is the one who is going to take care of you. You need to understand before I say anything else to you that God is committed to your growth. God is not like a father who creates a child and then goes off and leaves it, but God is not only going to save you but God is going to commit Himself on a day-by-day basis to help you grow and develop in your Christian life. You can know that God is not somewhere up in heaven waving and telling you to do the best you can, but He is walking beside you, sustaining and helping you. Please understand God is committed to your growth. You will understand a little bit about how He does that when you understand just a couple of words about how a farmer takes care of a grapevine. Every year the farmer prunes it back, because if he doesn't he will have a lot of leaves and no grapes. Know that God is in the business of cutting back in your life the things that are sometimes painful, sometimes hard, but please understand that the reason it is happening is that you will produce a greater fruit. The second thing a farmer has to do is when he notices branches on the vine that grow faster than all the other branches, and have lots of leaves, is take them off, because they won't have any grapes."* On a tomato plant, which also has the same fallacy, the branch is called a sucker--not because it is dumb, but it sucks all the strength out. There are things in our lives that, if you are not careful, will suck the life out of you. God has to come and cut them back so you will be fruitful. The farmer always has to come when the

leaves fall off and get in the branches. The branches get diseased and the leaves fall off and get little balls, and the sunlight can not get in. God comes and takes the debris out of your life.

Now if you have followed carefully what I have just said, you can understand how God is working in you. God is cutting back sometimes what is very painful. God is pinching off those things which are stretching out and are going to do nothing but produce leaves and not any fruit. God sometimes has to get all of the debris out of our lives so we can be better for Him. That is the way God works in your life, and God is committed to do that in your life.

Then Jesus took the vine and said *"See the vine? Out of the vine are the branches. I am the vine, you are the branch."* How does the branch live? It lives because of the life that is in the vine. How does the branch receive the strength to produce the grape? By the life that is in the vine. How do I live the Christian life? *I live the Christian life by receiving the life of Christ in me and letting Him produce the fruit that God wants*. You need to understand that Christ died for you that He may live in you, and the Christian life is not what you are doing for God; it is what you are letting God do through you. If your Christian life is not growing and developing, then the problem is very simple. Eight times Jesus said, *"You are not remaining in me. If you remain in me, then you are simply the instrument through which the life flows. If you are not growing in me, you go back and check your connections, because you are not abiding in me."* Many times Christians have not understood that that is the way it works. I can't struggle to be a good Christian, I can't strive to produce what I need to do. If it is going to happen, it is the miracle God works in my life of producing the fruit through me.

One of my children had a car recently that she and her husband wanted to get rid of. They had a good friend who was going into Christian service, and they wanted to give the car to that person. That person lives not too far into North Carolina, so they brought the car to my house and I took care of it until that person could come and get the gift of a car. The young person came and I took her out and I said, *"This is the car. I put new tires on it for you, cleaned it up, so now get in the car and I will try to show you*

all the little things that will help to make it work.” I cut it on, drove her around, and then I got back out, turned to her, and said, “Here are the keys to the car.” The young person said, “Thank you very much, thank one of your children for giving me this car,” and I looked up and she was walking down the road. I stopped her and said, “Where are you going?” She said, “I am going back home.” I said, “Don’t you have a key in your hand?” “Sure.” “Didn’t I just give you the title to this car?” “Yes.” “The object is to get in and drive back home.”

You say no young person is that stupid. But that is exactly what most of us are trying to do in our Christian lives. God comes and says, “*You can’t make it by yourself. Here is this tremendous strength and power called Jesus Christ and He lives inside of you. If you will let Him, He will provide for you the strength to enable you to get where you need to go.*” and then we say, “Isn’t that nice,” and we start walking on back as though we have to do it ourselves. Please understand what Jesus is saying. *You must remain in me. The life is in me.* You are simply to remain so attached to me that the life can flow through you. What is going to happen in your life is a miracle. I need to look you in the eye and say *you are a miracle waiting to happen.* God wants to do things in your life you never understood before if you will just provide Him with the opportunity to be the strength in your life.

Many times I think Christians are like the man I heard about recently. The doctor turned to him and asked, “Have you ever been real sick?” He replied, “No, but I have never been real well, either.” A lot of us have not been real sick, but we have not been well either. We have not been demonstrating what God can do in a human life. God wants to produce in you a miracle. A miracle of how He can change and transform a human life, but you understand that the power and the strength comes from Him. *Your job is to abide.* That helps us understand what your and my problem is. My problem is that when I think I really need help I abide, but a lot of times I think I can handle it myself. Then I take myself away from Him and just go out and do what I need to do. I make a mess out of things and then I come back. The problem is so many of us will stay for a while, and then we are gone. We are very fickle. I call us malaria Christians, we get chills and fever. We are there for a while, and then we are gone for a while, we never recognize that all of our life is Him. We are not talking about religion, we are not talking about church. We are talking about life. *We are talking about how you can live your life; and the only way*

*you can live it is to find the strength and the help from Him. I need to remain abiding in Him.*

There is a beautiful song in our hymnal entitled *Abide with Me*. “Abide with me; fast flows the evening tide.” Abide with me. What we pray to God is that He stick with us, stick with us in daylight or dark, thick or thin. “Lord, stick with us.” I think we ought to write another song, *Abide with Me*, directed toward Christians. “Why don’t you abide with Me, why don’t you stay with Me, why don’t you understand that you can’t live apart from Me?” When Alexander the Great decided he would try to conquer the world he sent his troops on ships from the country of Greece across the Mediterranean and landed in Lebanon. Then he was going to attack Persia. Alexander stayed on those shores of Lebanon until all his troops landed. He gathered all the captains of his guards and then he said “Tell your men to go back to the shore and burn the boats.” The captains looked at their general and said, “Burn the boats? Why do you want us to burn the boats?” He said, “Because my men are getting ready to face the greatest empire in the world, the Persian empire, and it is going to get tough, get mean, and if in the backs of their minds they know there is a way back home, they will never fight on to victory.” I think what Jesus is trying to say to you and me is that there needs to come a time in your life where you just burn the boats. You simply say to God, “I am not going to go back to my old ways when it is convenient or when I think I can handle things, but now I turn toward You; and if I ever am going to make it, I am going to make it with You.” That is what you said when you were baptized. You see, baptism is in water and what it represents is dying: I am alive and I die to my old self, I die to my old life and I am raised to walk in newness of life. There has to be a death, a putting behind you. Some of us need to be reminded that one day there was a funeral, we attended it, and it was for us. We said, “Lord, I am putting it behind me and now I am going to walk with you.” If you want to know what is wrong with your spiritual life, check and see if you are not trying to get up out of the grave and go back and live like you were living before.

*The key is abiding in Him.* You say, “Pastor how do you abide in Him?” Get your pronouns right. Understand it is not abiding in *it*, it is abiding in *Him*. Christianity is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. That means I have to have time just with Him, in my prayer and meditation. You abide in Him when you

spend time just talking to Him and praying with Him. You abide with Him when you understand what He wants to teach you. This passage of Scripture said “...*if you abide with Me and My words abide in you...*,” so you need to be reading it and know how to live. You need to be involved in His church. Let me tell you what Jesus says about His church. He said, “*The church is My bride.*” I have often said to people you can say what you want to about me. I hope it is nice but if it is bad, I have heard that before and I guess I can get over it. But please don’t say anything bad about Judy. If you say anything bad about Judy...well, as a friend of mine said, he is a Christian, a Baptist, and a red neck. Sometimes he is more red neck than the other. That is my bride. Every man in this room would stand up for his wife. Christ has invested His life in His church. If you want to abide in Jesus, you will abide where He is, and that is around His bride, around His church. If you want to abide in Him, you have to be where He is working. Where is He working? He is working in people’s lives, people’s needs and people’s hurts. If you want to be with Him, you will be doing the same thing He is doing, and you realize you are walking the valley together. You abide in Him.

Listen to the last word Jesus gave us. “*If the branch is not attached, not only does it not produce grapes, but it begins to die itself.*” Finally it dies and it falls off, and people will gather it up and burn it. That doesn’t mean that you are going to lose your salvation. It does mean you will lose any influence you have with anyone else. What happens is not that God burns it, but men burn it. What they are going to do is look at you and say, “If that is what Christianity is, then I don’t want anything to do with it.”

When I was living with my parents my dad, like many of your dads, didn’t make much money. He was raising four boys. We always ate very well at our house, but Mom never put food out for anyone to get it when they wanted it. If she had done that, she would not have had enough. I remember coming home from school one day and looking on the dining room table. There was the most beautiful bowl of fruit I had ever seen. I had never seen that in our house before. You didn’t just buy fruit and put it out for four boys to come by and eat it. But there it was. A beautiful peach, apple, and a banana; and the temptation was too great. I grabbed that apple and just kept walking out the back and headed to the garage. I polished that dude up and popped it into my mouth. Then I was introduced for the first time to wax

fruit. Don’t ever try it, for once you get it in your mouth, you don’t know what to do with it. Men can make a wax apple look like an apple, but when you taste it you know it is artificial.

God is not trying to produce people who look like they are Christians. He is trying to produce genuine articles. What He said was: if you don’t stay in me, you are going to look like an apple, but when somebody really needs you to be genuine and real, and they bite into you, they know you are a phony. When you are a phony, nobody wants anything to do with you, and not only you, but what you represent. Jesus said, “*I want to send you out into the world. This is the rudder. The rudder is to stay with me and I will produce inside of you qualities of life that are unexplainable except for God’s hand on you life.*”

The person who primarily started the Methodist Church was John Wesley. John Wesley was never provided the opportunity to speak in the cathedrals in Europe, so he always spoke outside. One day a group of people gathered to hear him speak and some men thought he was disturbing the church. They got some stones and were going to hit him and run him off. Fortunately, before they started throwing they listened to him speak. They held the stones down to their sides, and after a while one of them said “You know, he almost is like God.” The other fellow said “No, he is just a man.” Finally the third one said, “Well, I guess then he is a man like God.” God wants to so work in your life that He will make you a person like God. If the life of Christ is flowing through you, then what will be produced is a person like Him. That is what He wants in your life, but you have to remain attached, abide, remain in Him, to let that life flow through you. The more you are out here trying yourself, the less the power can come. When you give up, say, “Lord, only you can do it,” then the power can begin to flow.