

## 83 – Staying Attached

John 15: 1-6

Salvation isn't a transaction, it's a relationship. We don't do something to get something; we meet someone and then walk with that person for the rest of our lives. Then, when we arrive at our final day, He carries us through the veil of death into eternal life. It's a relationship that connects us to the Creator, the One from whom all life flows. Life does not originate from an organic process, it produces an organic process. It comes from God and is sustained by God. One of the most amazing statements John makes in the opening to his gospel is this, "In Him (Jesus) was life, and the life was the Light of men" (Jn 1:4).

That means that life, organic life and spiritual life, comes to us through the Son. To be in relationship with Jesus is to be connected to the source of life. To be detached from Him is to die. His presence transforms whatever it touches. It heals things that are sick, it restores things that are broken, it frees things that are bound, it resuscitates things that have died, it even reveals things that are hidden, it restores sight to those who are spiritually blind. This is what Jesus came to make possible: a restored relationship, a reconnection to the Source of life.

Somewhere in Jerusalem, by the light of a full moon, Jesus continued to prepare His disciples for His departure. And, at its heart, that preparation was based on a warning. They were heading into an entirely new season. No longer would He be physically present to guide them, teach them, correct them, and comfort them. No longer would they be able to stand beside Him and watch Him perform miracles. Now they would have to learn to minister in God's power for themselves. And the spiritual climate in the nation was already changing. Violent persecution lay ahead, not only for Him, but for them as well. Many forces were waiting to pull them away from Him, but they must not let that happen. They must keep their relationship with Him alive at all costs. He would return in spirit to be with them. He would do His part to protect that relationship, but they must do their part as well. To explain how important that would be, He used a grapevine as an illustration. He said, like the green canes that grew out of the woody stock of that vine, they must stay attached to Him or they would die. And He wouldn't have said that if it were impossible to become detached. They needed to do their part, and in the time they had left together, He told them how. We need to listen, because we need to stay attached to Him as well.

### Lessons from a grapevine

• DBS (Sat-Sun)

#### The warning (v6)

Then Jesus restated that warning in unavoidable terms. He said, "If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown outside, as is the [lifeless] cane, and is dried, and they gather them together and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (literal). A farmer would take the canes that had become detached, and therefore fruitless, and he would place them in a pile outside the vineyard to dry. Then, when they were completely dried, he would burn them. I'm sure those words made the disciples very uncomfortable. They knew what He meant. He was telling them that they had started on a journey they must finish. They had entered a relationship they must not let wither. If they did, they would be lost.

#### God's side

Needless to say, that warning still worries us, which is why so many Bible teachers have spent so much time trying to convince us that Jesus didn't really mean what He just said. And I think what frightens people is the thought that we are the ones who are responsible to keep that relationship with Jesus alive. We are all very aware of our own weaknesses. We've watched our willpower cave in many times when we faced temptation. We've struggled to consistently read the Bible or pray. Our schedules may make it difficult to gather with other believers. So, we think to ourselves, "If my eternal life depends on my strength, my discipline, my wisdom, my ability to do what's right, I'm in serious trouble! If I'm keeping this relationship alive, then it's only a matter of time before I'm doomed." And, I think, that's an accurate assessment of the situation. If remaining attached to Jesus depended only on us, we would all become detached. But the reason we don't is because this is not a one-sided relationship. He is more committed to preserving the relationship than we are. Paul said it this way,

"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Php 1:6).

In other words, Jesus never lets go. He keeps pursuing us and guiding us back onto the path He has for us. He knows our weaknesses better than we do, and He knows that we won't make it without Him. Paul explains how God does this in Romans, chapter 8. He reveals the Father's profound commitment to us by this statement,

"He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him, freely give us all things?" (Ro 8:32).

Then He assures us that there is no end to God's mercy to forgive our sins. Listen,

"Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us" (Ro 8:33, 34).



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And finally, Paul declares that God promises to protect us from every spiritual power that would try to take us away from Him. Listen, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ro 8:38, 39).

So, God is completely committed to give us every resource we need; Jesus has provided all the forgiveness our sins will ever require, and God will protect us from every form of spiritual enemy that would try to take us away from Him. But Paul's not done. There's one more essential ingredient God must provide for us to be victorious. He must place His Holy Spirit inside us to give us the power we need to overcome the temptations we face, the attacks we endure, and the weakness of our own flesh. And that, says Paul, is exactly what He's done. He's given us the same power that raised Jesus' dead body to life (Ro 8:11). We are weak, but God's Spirit is in us to give us the strength we need to obey Him.

### Our side

So, the reason those disciples didn't feel condemned by Jesus' warning about the grapevine, and neither should we, is because God has done more than enough to make it possible, for even the weakest among us, to stay attached. But God's abundant provision doesn't mean we can become passive. It doesn't mean we have no part to play in preserving the relationship. If we do not have a part to play then everything Jesus said about the grapevine makes no sense. Why would He tell us to remain attached if it were impossible to become detached? No, the point of His illustration is that His disciples must still exercise their will, weak as it may be, to lay hold of the resources God has given us. Jesus said, "Remain in Me and I in you" (v4). That means we must continue to submit to Him, to depend on Him, and to seek to represent Him in everything we do. When we fail, there's plenty of mercy to forgive us, but we still have to try. And if we keep trying, in time, we will learn how. He doesn't command us to do something we can't do. He's ordering us to do something that, with the resources He's provided, we can do. We can walk with Him like He walked with the Father. We can obey Him (vs7, 10). We can learn to love one another (v12). We can go and bear fruit (v16), and we can endure in faith in the face of opposition (v18).

### Drawing close

There are many ways people draw close to Jesus, but there are certain ways that I find are absolutely essential. I think, everyone, in one way or another, needs these in their life.

- 1) Reading or listening to the Word. Our natural thoughts are not like His thoughts, and we need to keep coming back to His thoughts. We need our mind renewed, our thoughts corrected, our attitudes adjusted, our pride humbled, our shame removed, and our faith built up. Nothing, absolutely nothing, replaces His Word.
- 2) Gathering with other believers to worship. Yes, we can worship alone, and should, but something happens when God's people come together to commune with Him. Sitting alone with Him has a place too, but if that's all we do we grow introspective and lonely. There's an "us" quality about following Jesus, not just a "me" quality. It's humbling to be one among many, but it's also strengthening. God's plan is to draw together a great family, not simply relate to individuals. His heart is to draw us into community.
- 3) A sabbath. No, I'm not talking about a certain day of the week being more holy than another or of trying to define what constitutes "work." But if a relationship with God is to be formed, we must schedule time to be with Him. Busyness is one of the most damaging influences of all. It takes faith to stop working, and rest. It takes patience to do nothing but read or listen or be quiet or do something edifying with family or friends when demands are clamoring for attention. But setting aside at least a portion of a day has a huge impact. It heals us, and settles us. And, yes, it should be once a week.
- 4) Fasting is practically a lost art. But when temptations grow strong or worries overwhelm us, I find fasting is a very real help in quieting them down and restoring my communication with God. I don't fast more than a meal or two, but nothing breaks a dry spell or a downward cycle like fasting.
- 5) Regular confession of sin. Be fiercely honest with yourself. Let the Holy Spirit expose areas of failure, confess them, and then remind yourself that Jesus bore your sins and broke their power on the cross. This keeps the conscience clean, and it also releases bold faith. I like to do this every time I take communion. It's very clear what the bread and cup represent, and they give me a practical way to transfer my sin, sorrow, or sickness to Jesus.

### Conclusion

Jesus never commands us to do something we can't do, and He commanded us to stay in relationship with Him, and then warned us of what would happen if we didn't. So we must never take that relationship for granted. We must not allow ourselves to grow passive or indifferent. As we've seen, God has done more than enough to make it possible for even the weakest among us to walk securely with Him. All we need to do is to decide to lay hold of the One who's laid hold of us... for the rest of our lives. And then life really begins.

### Questions

- 1) I listed several ways that help me keep my relationship with Jesus strong. Tell us how you draw close to Jesus.
- 2) What would you tell a person who says, "I'm too weak a person to walk with God. I could never do what He wants me to do"?