

Sermon Outline

“Apart From Me You Can Do Nothing”

“Desperate” series, Part 3 – John 15:1-11 – Joshua Harris – October 24, 2010

Introduction

1. The good kind of desperate is when you know you need help, and you confidently know that there is *someone* who has both the power and loving desire to help you.
2. In John 15, Jesus teaches his disciples this good kind of desperation. It tells us that we can do nothing, but it promises that in Jesus we can know spiritual life and fruitfulness.

Spiritual Life Begins Only in Jesus

1. Jesus uses the imagery of a vine to describe spiritual life. Jesus is drawing from an Old Testament imagery, which frequently described the people of Israel as a vine.
 - a. God’s specially chosen people were like a vine that God had planted. Their obedience to him and worship of him were the means by which God’s spiritual life and truth was made known in the world. The only way to know and relate to the living God was by joining oneself to the people of Israel.
 - b. Sadly, God’s people repeatedly failed in this role. They forgot God, pursued idolatry, and were faithless. They were an unfruitful vine. (See Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 2:21, Psalm 80).
2. When Jesus says, “*I am the true vine*,” he’s making a profound claim. He is stating that where the people of Israel failed to rightly obey and represent God, he, Jesus, perfectly obeys and perfectly reveals the character and purpose of God. Now, the only way to be joined to the spiritual life of the one true God—the only way to know God and relate to him—is through Jesus.
3. In verse 3 Jesus speaks to his disciples and says, “*Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.*” In the original language there is a play on words. The word “clean” sounds the same as the word for “pruned.” Jesus is saying to his disciples, you’re already pruned and in the vine, you already have new life because of the words about me that I’ve spoken to you. (See John 3:16; John 5:23-24; John 11:25-26)

Spiritual Fruit Continues Only in Jesus

1. This passage is very concerned with bearing fruit.
 - a. Verse 2: “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

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- b. Verse 4: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me."
 - c. Verse 5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."
 - d. Verse 8: "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."
2. Bearing fruit is an essential part of genuine spiritual life. Living things reproduce. If you are united with Jesus and have his life in you then there will be tangible results of this life growing out of your life. You will bear fruit.
 3. What does verse 6 mean when Jesus says branches that don't bear fruit get tossed away? It doesn't mean that genuine Christians can lose their salvation. What it does mean is that people who falsely claim to be Christians and demonstrate no evidence of new life in Jesus will eventually be revealed as dead branches.
 - a. Jesus' teaching here is meant to sober us. It calls us to evaluate our lives. Saving faith is not merely a matter of having prayed a prayer years ago. It's not about church attendance. It's not just about getting baptized and getting your ticket to heaven. If we are united with Jesus, then there will be fruit in our present day life.
 4. What is the spiritual fruit that Jesus is talking about?
 - a. Verse 7 tells us that spiritual fruitfulness is closely tied to prayer. When we begin asking for and desiring the priorities of God, God powerfully grants our requests, and spiritual fruit and life spills out of our life.
 - b. Verse 8 tells us that spiritual fruitfulness is defined by being like our Master. When we live and act like Jesus—when we love, sacrifice and serve like Jesus—this brings praise to God.
 - c. Verse 16 ties fruit to the mission of telling others about Jesus.
 5. How do we bear fruit?
 - a. Jesus says "*abide in me.*" To abide means to live in, to dwell with Jesus. The NIV translates it "*remain in me.*" Spiritual life and fruit only comes by staying close to and not moving on from Jesus. Just as a branch can only live while it's attached to the vine, so we only live and produce fruit through ongoing dependence on Jesus.
 - b. When we think about what it means to abide in Jesus, our temptation is to ask for checklist. But abiding is not a "to-do" list, a program, a methodology or a technique. Abiding is a *relationship*.

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- c. Abiding is what desperate people do who realize that they have no life, no power, no inward resources of themselves. The secret to abiding is simply being desperate for Jesus and believing that apart from Jesus you can do nothing.
6. Too often, we don't really believe that we can do nothing apart from Jesus.
 - a. We think we have enough principles and practical tips to parent our kids. We think we have enough experience and advice to enjoy a good marriage. We think we've been in enough small groups to know how to help others grow. We think we've learned enough evangelism techniques to make converts. We think we've done church long enough to safely say we can build a strong congregation.
 - a. Activity and programs and techniques cannot replace real fruit. We can accomplish nothing of lasting spiritual value apart from Christ. Apart from dependence on him, apart from daily reliance on his gospel and his resurrection power working in us, our activity is nothing more than dead religion. Real spiritual fruit only grows when we abide in Christ.

Fellowship Starters

1. When Jesus says, "I am the true vine" (John 15:1a), what claim is he making about the source of spiritual life?
2. Josh shared, "If you are united with Jesus and have his life in you, then ... you will bear fruit." What good fruit do you see growing in your life? Where do you desire to grow?
3. In John 15, Jesus stated that spiritual fruit was closely tied to prayer (John 15:7), to being like him in character (John 15:8), and to evangelism (John 15:16). Do you see this kind of fruit in your life? Do you want more?
4. In what areas of your life (e.g., marriage, parenting, job, serving, leadership, etc.) are you tempted to believe that you *can* do things apart from Jesus? Does this reveal anything about your heart or the condition of your spiritual life?
5. Josh shared, "Abiding is what desperate people do, realizing that they have no life, no power, no inward resources of themselves." How would your life change if you truly believed that you could do nothing apart from Jesus?
6. What does it mean to "abide in Christ"? How can you cultivate a desperate dependence to abide in Christ?
7. In care group, take time to encourage one another and point out the good fruit that you see in each other's lives.

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8. Take time to pray that each care group member would truly believe that they can do nothing apart from Christ. Take time to pray that more fruit would be born in each other's lives.