

INTRO:

So we're continuing through the *Gospel of John*, and specifically, through Jesus' "farewell discourse." This set of final instructions, in *chs.13-17*, which He gave to His disciples, before His crucifixion, ABOUT what "**Life With God**" is to look like post-resurrection... *Now, let me ask you:* When you think about *life with God*, what comes to mind?... Cuz I think that's an exceedingly important question these days, since for many people, confusion ABOUT that question is why they HAVE no life with God. They assume it's just about some kind of moral conformity or specific social agenda, so I mean why bother *right?* While others feel it's simply about having a little extra inspiration, which if I can get that elsewhere, why deal with the hassle of religion? Even IN the church, I think we often equate *life with God* to, simply, religious activity and spiritual maturity/this kind of conveyor belt of, basically, getting saved, until we can become in ourselves, people who didn't really need saving in the first place. Ya know, cuz we're, more-and-more, doin' the thing and masterin' the stuff. Or, as is often taught with respect to THIS passage; that you're saved by grace alone through faith alone; and that faith produces fruit in your life; SUCH THAT if you're NOT producing fruit, you were never saved in the first place, and stand to be thrown into God's metaphorical "burn pile."

What I want you to see today is that the way JESUS defines *life with God* - which is what He's talking about with this organic metaphor of a vine and branches - is as He says there in *v.11*... "*joy.*"...Joy! "*These things I've spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full.*" That's why He's instructing His disciples here. Not to warn em to be producing spiritual fruit or else risk being thrown into that "burn pile." If this were a warning or Jesus prescribing some formula for spiritual growth then He woulda said, "*These things I've spoken to you, that you may be warned,*" or "*so that you know how to grow.*" No! What He's saying isn't a warning or a formula, but news!... *That life with God/the life God wants to have with you is about pure joy!*... So let's take a look at 3 Things Jesus tells us here: **First, WHY Life With God Is About Joy**, which you see there in *vv.1-11*. **Second, How That Joy Impacts The Way We Relate To Each Other/as a church family**, which is there in *vv.12-17*. And then **Finally, How It Impacts The Way We AS a church family, Relate To Those Around Us**. So 3 Things!

TEXT:¹

First, Why Life With Jesus Is About Joy. Cuz of course, that's not how most of us tend to think about it *right?* As pure joy? But let me ask you this: *What is maybe THE quintessential moment of joy in just about every child's life?*... Christmas morning *right?* And don't be overly spiritual here. It's because of the presents *right?* In other words, the joy of Christmas for a child... is in the receiving. Cuz when you stand to receive something great/and not just at Christmas, but say something like recognition or favorable news, as an adult - there's a kind of joy that comes along

¹ Works Consulted:

- Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here Is Your King! With Study Guide*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 218-27
- Merrill C. Tenney, "John," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: John and Acts*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol.9 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 152-56.
- Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 448-69.
- 51 - Christ the True Vine - John 15:1-6 // 52 - Christ the True Vine (Concluded) - John 15:7-16 - AW Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1923-1945), 800, 821.
- "Growth In Grace - John 15" - *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).
- "John 15" // "A Generous Spirit: Gospel, #6: John 15:12-15; 1 Timothy 6:17-19" // "Gospel: The Revolutionary Power of the Christian Life: "Community": John 15:12; 13:34-35" // "John 15:16 - Mission" - J.D. Greear
- "We're Branches, Bro" - Jan. 31, 2023 - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000597395980>

with that! The same is true as it relates to **life with God**. If life with God is about what you have to do FOR God, then there's gonna be very little joy. HOWEVER, if it's primarily about what God, in Christ, has done for you, well then we're talking about the possibility of a TON of joy... And that's EXACTLY what Jesus is trying to get you to see with this vine and branch analogy here: That life with Him is you RECEIVING all the way through. Cuz notice what represents what here. **First**, He says in **vv.1** and **5** that "*HE'S the vine.*" So in viticulture/vine-growing language, which the disciples woulda been familiar with, given that the vine was a main symbol in Israel, Jesus is saying that, "*AS the vine*" He's the source of all life. Cuz of course, vines exist to do one thing...bear fruit **right?** A vine literally lives, to give it's life, to fruit-bearing. So Jesus is saying, "*that's who I am. I'm the one giving life, BY giving MY life.*" So He's the vine!...But then you see in **vv.1-2**, He says His Father/God the Father is "*the vinedresser,*" meaning the gardener/the expert caregiver, entrusted you see, with two things: **One** "*taking away*" or literally, "*raising up/lifting up*" "*every branch that does NOT bear fruit,*" and **Two**, "*pruning every branch that DOES, so that it bears MORE.*" Cuz the deal with branches is: they can't control how they grow. So on the one hand, branches'll often start growing toward the ground, which ends up depriving em of sunlight and therefore rendering em unable to "*bear fruit.*" So what a vinedresser would do is come along and "*lift that non-fruit-bearing branch up*" /positioning it back to where it can receive sunlight and hopefully BEGIN bearing fruit. While on the OTHER hand, branches too, will often shoot-off from the vine in a way that sorta leaves em only tangentially connected TO the vine. So they're connected, which means they're drawing resources FROM the vine and away from other branches, but not connected ENOUGH to actually bear fruit. So what a vinedresser'll do in THAT case is come along and prune em back. My stepfather-in-law, whose long been in agriculture calls em, "sucker branches." Cuz if they're not properly pruned, they'll suck nutrients away from the healthy branches. **So here's the point:** EVERYTHING with respect to the life of the branch - it's growth; it's development; it's maturity; it's EVERYTHING - depends on BOTH the vitality of the vine and the expert ability of the gardener. Which is WHY you see, Jesus says that, if "*He's the vine,*" and "*the Father's the gardener,*" then you and I...are merely branches. That when it comes to **life with God**/your life as a whole, you and I aren't "junior vinedressers," ya know, tasked with helping God produce life, growth, change. We're not even the fruit. We're simply "*branches.*" Which is to say, RECIPIENTS...all the way through!

And that's because, what Jesus is saying here, is that Christianity is not about moral reformation. You know, some set of challenges or rules to help you become a better/more improved version of yourself. No! It's about RE-CREATION. The life of Christ recreated inside of you! Christianity, you understand, is not a religion that's gonna tell you exactly how to live in every circumstance. No, what it's gonna do is direct you back to God, who recreates His life inside of you FOR every circumstance. C.S. Lewis said it perfectly. Said, "*Improvement's not (the same as) redemption, though redemption always improves people...No! God became man (not just to reverse the curse of death brought about in the Garden of Eden, but) to turn creatures into sons (and daughters): NOT simply to produce better men (and women) of the old kind, but produce a NEW kind of (person altogether).*" He said, "*it's not like teaching a horse to jump better. (Rather it's) like*

turning a horse...into a winged creature."² That's what Jesus is talking about, and subsequently what separates Christianity from every other religion. Cuz in Christianity you're RECEIVING the whole way through, rather than earning or meriting.

Which is WHY, you see, Jesus' grand application throughout this metaphor/if you can even call it an application, is to simply *"abide in Him."* Says it repeatedly in **vv.4-7**. Cuz if He's the vine, the Father is the vinedresser, and we're merely branches, then **life with God** is simply about *"abiding."* **Ya know what "abide" means?** It comes from the Greek work *meno* literally meaning, "to sit, stay put...make your home in..." **Listen:** Your whole job in **life with God** is to "abide." You say, *"abide in what?"* Look in **vv.9-10**. Jesus says, *"As the Father has loved me, so I've loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you'll abide in my love, just as I've kept my Father's commandments and abide in his."* **You hear what Jesus is saying there?** It's crazy/He's saying, think about the Father's love for me. Parents, think about the love you have for your kids. It's beyond anything we could ever comprehend **right?** And that love is just a shadow of God's love for His Son. Jesus is saying, *"THAT'S the love with which I love you. Abide/hold-to/make your home...in THAT!"*

And see Friends, not only is that WAY different than some religious or irreligious activity; it's actually way harder too. Speaking from both personal and pastoral experience: I think THIS is the hardest part of Christianity for people to learn. That God's love and acceptance are given to you not as a reward for you *"bearing fruit,"* but as a gift, that empowers you to "bear fruit." That's why it's called "gift righteousness": God's righteousness given to you, as a gift. AND it's what makes Jesus' love/the Gospel so counter-intuitive: Cuz WE think we become loved, accepted, righteous by acting a certain way **right?** Assume that the more righteously you act, the more God accepts and approves of you/I mean that's how we relate to one another. So why would it be any different with God?...But see, the Gospel's counterintuitive. Cuz IT says, you can NEVER be righteous before God, SO God offers righteousness to you, as a gift, not according to what you've done, but according to what Christ has done in your place. How HE'S first loved YOU! Such that when you simply RECEIVE and abide in that, HIS life/the life of the vine, starts flowing through you; changing not just your behaviors, but your desires. THAT'S where real joy comes from! Not being told what you need to do for God, but clinging-to what God has done for you! Friend, the secret to life with God/joy is focusing LESS on what you need to do for God and more on what God, in Christ, has DONE for you!...Abiding!

And you say, *"Hold on! What about v.10 there where Jesus says 'to keep His commandments.'* Isn't that the opposite of what you just said?" Good question! No! And for two reasons. **First** notice, it doesn't say that Jesus' love for you is a reward for having KEPT His commandments. No, it says that one of the ways we remain connected TO His love is by KEEPING His commandments. Cuz of course, when you live in a way that's consistent with God's best for you, it's much easier to know He loves you. But **Second**, notice that when Jesus says in **vv.4-7** *"abide in me,"* **what does He say right after?** *"As I abide in you" right?* In other words, however you

² Lewis, C. S.. A Year with C. S. Lewis (p. 145). HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

abide in Jesus, that has to be synonymous with how Jesus abides in you. So if you think abiding in Him means doing a bunch of stuff to make yourself acceptable, then I have to ask you, **how does that work with Jesus?** It can't be that. It HAS to be simply receiving and rooting your life in the love Jesus has for you. Cuz that's what Jesus rooted HIS life in - the love of the Father for Him. The ONLY thing that'll, NOT ONLY, keep a person, as **v.6** says, from ultimately being "thrown into the fire"/separated from God in hell forever, but in the meantime, produce REAL joy, is "abiding in Christ." THAT'S **Why Life With Jesus Is About Joy**. Cuz it's a life of being united to a perfect/unbreakable love, as a branch is united to a vine.

So **Second, That Joy Oughta Impact The Way We Relate To Each Other**/as a church family. Cuz if you keep going, you see there in **vv.12-17**, Jesus moves from talking to the Disciples about how they're to relate to Him, to talking about how they're to relate to each other IN LIGHT OF relating to Him. As He says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I've loved you." **And how has Jesus loved us?** By, as He says, "no longer calling us servants, but friends," and then "being willing to lay down His life for us AS His friends."...For those of you who are old enough to remember, you know that one of the most powerful things to come out of the tragedy of 911 was, of course, all the stories of extreme heroism by people, who literally threw themselves into the wreckage, at great risk to their lives, to save total strangers. And of course those stories are so powerful, cuz as Jesus says here, "there's just no greater love than that."...You understand, when Jesus laid down His life for you on the Cross, He didn't go into some burning tower to save you. No! He went into the burning wrath of God's judgment/stepped between you and that judgment, to the point that He didn't just risk His life; He lost it! And by the way, for you, when you weren't even a stranger. Scripture says, "you and I were His enemies." That's what He means in **v.16** when He says, "You didn't choose me; I chose you and appointed you to go bear fruit..." Him "choosing you" means: when you had no interest in Him at all, He STILL lovingly came after you, in order that "His joy might be in you and your joy might be full." How can we know that kind of love and joy and NOT have it **impact the way we relate to each other?** ESPECIALLY, as Paul says in **Galatians 6:10**, "among those who're of the household of faith."

So can I get a little personal with you here? What this means is that Christian love is not just an idea to be assented to, or even a doctrine to be articulated...It's a lifestyle to be lived...most CLEARLY within the church. And at THIS church, it needs to be lived out more. Cuz ya know, sometimes churches like ours are decent at the preaching, doctrine, articulation parts...but not so good at the demonstrating parts. And I don't say that to, IN ANY WAY, shame you. More just to say, that there's at least 3 things that are common in our culture that should NEVER happen here if we're really loving each as Christ has loved us. **3 Things: One**, no one should EVER get **Ghosted**. Cuz to ghost someone is to be completely dishonest with em **right?** To not let em know your intentions/just leave em hanging... Friend, that's the opposite of love. Certainly the love of Christ. Cuz even though He had EVERY RIGHT to ghost us, given our posture toward Him, He nevertheless continually pursues us. Ghosting should be anathema here...Same **Too**...with **Canceling!** No one should EVER get canceled at this church...no matter what you do/this should be the safest place in the world FOR you! Now, does that mean we excuse sin/don't hold each

other accountable to it and to repenting OF it. Of course not! It just means that to cancel someone is to give up on em! Again, the opposite of love, ESPECIALLY the love of Christ, who we're repeatedly told in the Scriptures "*will NEVER leave or forsake us.*" ***If Jesus never cancels you, how could you ever cancel someone else?***... And then ***Third***, it means we don't ***Flake Out*** on each other/*we don't Flake Out*. Or to say it positively, we show-up-for and are committed-to each other. And I know we live in a very non-committal culture in which everyone's always trying to keep their options open. But you understand, if you really love someone/certainly if you understand the love of Christ and how He's committed to you, then flaking out on each other... isn't an option. In a GOOD way, we don't have the luxury of saying, "*yeah I'll be there*" and then not. "*Yeah, I'm here for ya,*" but we never hear from ya. "*I'm all in,*" but ya never give or serve. Or more practically, treating Missional Family Meetings/THIS gathering each week as optional and something you participate in ONLY when there's no better option. Friend, even when it's not always convenient/and I KNOW it's not always convenient, THIS is where and when our family gets together. If you never went to family-dinner/prioritized family reunions, you'd have to question if loved your family. Cuz you know who, in a family, doesn't consistently attend and participate in those things? People who aren't in or are estranged FROM the family. And given the incredible love and joy of Christ, NOBODY should ever be estranged! **This Oughta Impact How We Relate To Each Other.**

But then ***Finally***, you see there in ***vv.18 through the beginning of ch.6***, that it **Oughta Impact The Way We Relate To Those Around Us Too**; namely, our neighborhood, city, and world. And I don't have enough time to really unpack this, so I'll just simply say that, what Jesus is saying IN those verses, is that as people who know the greatest love and joy imaginable, WE are to be people, who even when rejected, despised, hated, sometimes killed... nevertheless LOVE and point people TO Christ's love!... Cuz the keyword in this set of verses is there in ***v.27***/the word "*witness.*" We're to "*bear witness*" to Jesus. ***See that?*** See sadly, the church has often been known for a kind of militaristic, congesting posture where we're all the time fighting "culture wars" and "trying to take our culture back for Jesus." But notice, JESUS says nothing of that here. Simply says, and I'm paraphrasing ***vv.20, 25 and 1-4***, "*Understand, if people were willing to hate and ultimately kill me, then expect the same if you represent me. HOWEVER, it's ok! Because your job isn't to beat em, defeat em, or even change em...It's to love em... 'witness to em.'*"... Which, you understand, is just a fancy word for, "share what you know to be true." Cuz that's what a witness is ***right?*** It's not someone who argues or tries to WIN a case. That's an attorney. A witness is simply someone who shares the facts of what they know to be true!... Friend, if you know it to be true that ***life with God*** is about joy because it's a life of being united to a perfect/unbreakable love, as a branch is united to a vine, then how can you NOT share the news of that joy with everyone around you? Your neighbors/those in your norms/your networks - understanding that when hardship comes/and it will - people'll think you're weird; reject your invitation; maybe even stop talking to you; or worse - REMEMBER: You're not the "*vinedresser*" entrusted with "*bearing fruit.*" And nor are you the vine in charge of bringing life. You're simply "*a branch*" And as a branch, you're graciously, perfectly, and joyfully united to the love of Christ. So Friend, receive that love today if you never have. And then make your home in it/"abide" in it. And may WE be a people who delight to "abide" in that love together,

for the good of those in our neighborhood and city, who don't yet know that love! May it be!...
Let's Pray: