

Christmas Series 2011



I am – Carols around the Christmas Tree 2011

John 8:45-60

TITLE

OLD PIC

The Christmas story is very familiar to us. Our usual view of Christmas is something like this old picture. But how would it have been in our modern society with the internet, Facebook and what have you. Well, maybe it might have gone something like this.

VIDEO

Whatever the technology or whatever, what's central to the Christmas story could never have been changed by us, because it involved someone being born – Jesus. What I'm going to be doing in my Christmas series is look at this question. WHO IS JESUS?

Just who is Jesus? I could have used many of the great words of Christmas to answer that and we have already come across some of the descriptions, names and titles of Jesus in this evening's carols and over previous weeks of Advent. They are all descriptions and titles used of Jesus by prophets, angels and wise men associated with the Christmas story: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, a Saviour, the King of the Jews, the Son of God, the Word and many others.

But I'm going to use the words of Jesus Himself to answer this question. Let me read to you from the Bible which gives us one answer to the question from Jesus:

READING John 8:45-60 - New International Version (NIV)

48 The Jews answered him, "Aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon-possessed?"

49 "I am not possessed by a demon," said Jesus, "but I honour my Father and you dishonour me. 50 I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge. 51 Very truly I tell you, whoever obeys my word will never see death."

52 At this they exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that whoever obeys your word will never taste death. 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?"

54 Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. 55 Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and obey his word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."

57 "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"

58 "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"

"VERY TRULY I TELL YOU," JESUS ANSWERED, "BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS BORN, I AM!"

Who is Jesus "I am". Just "I am" What on earth does that mean. "I am". Let me read you a bit of the Old Testament from Exodus where God encounters God in the desert at the burning bush.

VERSES

Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

"I am" is the name God uses to describe Himself. He's the great I am. And Jesus uses these words of Himself. When we celebrate Christmas we celebrate someone's birthday. That someone is Jesus. But this evening I want to ask you this:

WHICH JESUS DO YOU FOLLOW?

Is it the baby in a manger? Is it a nice guy? Or is it the One who is called I AM. And if He is God then it automatically asks the question - why? And that answer is because of me and you. This Christmas we are going to remember again Jesus, the I am, God become a human being in order that we may know God, to die for us that those things that keep us from God can be broken down, put aside and we can follow Him.

Jesus came to die for you and me so that if we are prepared to accept Him, put our trust in Him, follow Him, we may know Him in our day to day lives and forever. So which Jesus do you follow.

Here's a song that answers that question and we are going to hear some of it:

TODD AGNEW – WHICH JESUS DO YOU FOLLOW?

WHICH JESUS DO YOU FOLLOW? If you follow Jesus at all. Jesus wants us to know Him tonight.

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Tree Service 17/12/11
(c) Mark Reid 2011*



I am the Light of the World – The Other Christmas Service

John 1:1-4, 10-14

WHO IS JESUS?

Who is he in yonder stall?

Just who is Jesus? I could have used many of the great words of Christmas to answer that and we have already come across some of the descriptions, names and titles of Jesus in this morning's carols and over previous weeks of Advent. They are all descriptions and titles used of Jesus by prophets, angels and wise men associated with the Christmas story: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, a Saviour, the King of the Jews, the Son of God, the Word and many others.

Instead I'm going to use the words of Jesus Himself to answer that question over the next three short sermons. The first one relates to our reading this morning.

VERSE 1

4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

What does it mean for Jesus to be the Light of the World?

VERSE 2 In Him was life and that light was the light of men – and it shines in the darkness. These words remind me of a searchlight, the rays of light cutting into the night. Some of you who lived through the last war will remember searchlights and how important they were in air raids.

PICTURE

The German bombers were invisible until the light picked them up and it made it easier for anti-aircraft gunners to hit them. The light revealed the truth of what was there in the darkness – deadly enemy aircraft. The light had exposed that which could not be seen even though their effects could be seen as they bombed our cities.

SOURCES OF LIGHT

Light is an important way in which we perceive our world – without light life becomes more difficult as any blind person will tell you. Even at night, if we don't have light, life is difficult, which is why people have found many ways of producing light to allow us to see once the sun has gone down.

HOW MANY?

Q: How many lawyers does it take to change a light bulb?

A: How many can you afford?

Q: How many Psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Only one, but the bulb has got to really WANT to change.

Q: How many 'Real Men' does it take to change a light bulb?

A: None: 'Real Men' aren't afraid of the dark.

Q: How many TV evangelists does it take to change a light bulb?

A: One; but for the light to continue, send in your donation today.

Q: How many Anglicans does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Ten; one to change the light bulb and nine to say how much they liked the old one.

Q: How many Baptists does it take to change a light bulb?

A: Change?

SEARCHLIGHT

But most of all, I want to talk this morning about spiritual light, because that's what this passage is about. In him was life and that life was the light of men. When Jesus came, he shone a light into people's lives. People are naturally blind to God and the things of God. Like someone who has always been blind, we naturally don't know any better. Yes it's true that we have some understanding of God and of right and wrong. We have our religious systems, but our spiritual eyes aren't open to the truth of God – and as a result it's rather like someone going along a main road in their car at night without their lights – they can see something, but they can't see enough to stop themselves coming to grief.

We even have all the sayings to go with it - "I'm in the dark about this. I seem to be just poking around in the dark." It's what spiritual darkness is all about. Sometimes we equate darkness with evil. That isn't quite right, but it's when people are in a state of darkness, not knowing and understanding God's ways, that the enemy is able to deceive people, to ensnare people and to lock them in spiritual chains. Walking in darkness leads to spiritual death.

And into that the Word shined life into people's lives and illuminated them.

SEARCHLIGHT AND VERSE

The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. The light shines in the darkness – what does it mean for the darkness to not have understood it? Let me explain it with an illustration.

When the Bastille, a castle-like prison in Paris, was about to be destroyed in 1789, a convict was brought out who had been confined in one of its gloomy cells for many years. But instead of joyfully welcoming his liberty, he begged to be taken back. It had been such a long time since he had seen the sunshine that his eyes could not endure its brightness. His only desire was to die in the murky dungeon where he had been a captive. In the same way, the "world" rejects the Saviour because darkness cannot stand the presence of light. (Adrian Dielmann)

CHILEAN

If the man had just decided to stay in the light, his eyes would have adjusted in the end. I remember when the Chilean miners were rescued last year, the first thing they did was to walk into the light wearing sunglasses so they could become accustomed again to the light.

The Son of God came so He could shine a light into people's lives, so that they may understand the things of God and realise how amazing God really is.

VERSE

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Are you in the dark about God? Jesus was born that the human race may be offered to opportunity to walk in the light rather than in spiritual darkness. Are you blinded by the light, not understanding it? Allow God to make your spiritual eyes become accustomed to what He wants to communicate with you. Because when you do walk in the light you see God's way for you.

VERSES

And just what is that way? *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.*

Jesus came to shine a light into my life and yours. As his light shines in it shows us all the things in our lives that keep us apart from God – all those times we haven't been bothered with thinking about God – probably most of it, all the things we've done wrong, all the people we have hurt, the unforgiveness and bitternesses we harbour. And all these things God calls sin and it means we are separated from Him.

But as light shines in we also are given the understanding that Jesus has dealt with the issue of sin in our lives when He died on the cross, so they could be dealt with. Why? Because desires that we should be part of His family *to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God*. We have a God who desires to make each one of us, without exception, a part of His

family – now and forever.

He doesn't force that on us, but makes it our choice. We give gifts at Christmas because God gave us the gift of His Son. A Son who died on the cross for us so that God could give us the gift of life and membership of His family.

You have a choice. People have had that choice down the centuries. *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.* Many just rejected Him, but some became children of God. *Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.* What about you?

My Lord and my God.

I have lived life my way.

I have done many wrong things.

I repent of all my sin.

Please forgive me.

Lord Jesus, I trust you now to be my Lord and my Saviour.

Thank You for dying in my place.

I ask You now for Your gift of eternal life.

I give my life to You and want You to be my Lord.

Help me to live for You by the power of Your Holy Spirit.

These things I pray in Jesus' name.

Amen

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Felixstowe 18/12/11
(c) Mark Reid 2011*



I am the Good Shepherd - Candlelight Service

John 10:11-15

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Imagine you are in a shopping centre doing your Christmas shopping. You've had a busy morning and you're just grabbing a quick lunch in the shopping centre when something unexpected happens...

FLASH MOB VIDEO

I'm not sure if you've ever witnessed this kind of impromptu concert by a Flash Mob. How would you have responded – surprise, pleasant surprise, shock, worry, horror?

SHEPHERDS PICTURE

2000 years ago some shepherds were sitting in the fields with their flocks when someone came along with an unexpected party. It was the angels. They were shocked, horrified, afraid then that turned to pleasure as they realise that they were privileged with a message – and they were the first people to find out.

The flash mob video has become viral with over 35 million people watching it and even more people in church viewing it. Why? Because they were singing a great song of praise from Handel's Messiah. It is a good news song praising the risen and exalted Jesus. And these folks spread that joy to people in the shopping mall. And the shepherds, having heard the good news, saw the baby and told others.

Why the joy? Because they had been told who the baby that was born truly was.

WHO IS JESUS?

That's what my series of short sermons is about this Christmas – focussing on who Jesus said he was. I could have used many of the great words of Christmas to answer that and we have already come across some of the descriptions, names and titles of Jesus in this morning's carols and over previous weeks of Advent. They are all descriptions and titles used of Jesus by prophets, angels and wise men associated with the Christmas story: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, a Saviour, the King of the Jews, the Son of God, the Word and many others.

The second one is contained in this passage of scripture:

11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father--and I lay down my life for the sheep.

I am the good shepherd. I don't find it strange Jesus would describe Himself in this way. We know from other parts of scripture that God has compassion on even the most lowly members of society and shepherds in those days were on the bottom of the pile. Yet shepherds displayed the greatest example of care and devotion to lowly creatures – sheep. And that's how God compared His relationship to the human race – in ourselves we are sheep without a shepherd – people who come to a bad end without someone to rescue us.

Now the eastern shepherd is quite different to the modern British shepherd. In the Middle East, the shepherd leads the sheep literally and risks his life to protect them at all costs. If you find this strange, then look at this short clip of a shepherd in Jordan – in the capital Amman – getting his sheep across a busy road.

JORDANIAN SHEPHERD

Now you can see what Jesus meant when He said "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." That's why God entered this world – to be the good shepherd to the people who He had created but who do their own thing – He came to give His life for the sheep.

THE GOD SHEPHERDS LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE

And that's the message of Christmas. Do you know where your life is headed? Do you find meaning now? Do you know where you are headed for eternally? Or are you just wandering? Without Jesus, we are like those sheep trying to cross the busy road without the shepherd. We're in danger, lost. Separated from God. Without hope.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD KNOWS HIS SHEEP

But Jesus came to give His life for His sheep – that was the measure of his care, love and devotion to us. He came to deal with those things which have separated us from God – what we call sins – the things we know we do wrong, the things we think that are wrong – and opened a way by which we can know God now, to have purpose and meaning to our lives, and an eternal hope. Jesus call us to follow Him to know Him.

DO YOU KNOW JESUS?

That's the message God has for you this Christmas. Know Him. He says: "follow me". He wants you to follow Him tonight. Are you ready?

My Lord and my God.

I have lived life my way.

I have done many wrong things.

I repent of all my sin.

Please forgive me.

Lord Jesus, I trust you now to be my Lord and my Saviour.

Thank You for dying in my place.

I ask You now for Your gift of eternal life.

I give my life to You and want You to be my Lord.

Help me to live for You by the power of Your Holy Spirit.

These things I pray in Jesus' name.

Amen

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I am the Way, the Truth & the Life

John 14:1-6

CHRISTMAS: A STORY OF ROAD TRIPS

Christmas is a story about roads. What road journeys were there on the first Christmas.

- Mary travelled to see Elizabeth
- M & J travelled from Nazareth to Bethlehem
- The wise men travelled from the east
- M & J travelled from Bethlehem to Egypt
- M & J then travelled back from Egypt to Nazareth

So for up to 4 years of Jesus' life, the family had no permanent home. Eventually Jesus did have an upbringing in Nazareth. It reminds me of something Jesus said later in life.

VERSE

Luke 9:57 As they went on their way, a man said to Jesus, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lie down and rest."

As a travelling Rabbi, he relied on people to welcome Him into their homes. He desires to travel with us throughout life and wants us to walk with Him. Jesus never saw His permanent home as being on this Earth. Part of following Jesus is not to rely on all those things people value in life when it comes to our eternal future. Jesus once also said "what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul." This morning we read that Jesus did have a permanent home, but that was with His Father.

"Do not be worried and upset," Jesus told them. "Believe in God and believe also in me. 2 There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so."

DOOR

If you know Jesus as Saviour and Lord today, you already have a room with your name on it with your heavenly Father.

M25

Until that time we journey through life with everyone else. The truth is that life is a journey. All journeys have a beginning and end. The question is, what's at its end?

ROAD TO NOWHERE

To many people it is something like this. Just a strange mist – an unknown destination. But to Jesus the destination is a clear one for all those who trust and follow Him.

JESUS HAD A CLEAR DESTINATION

In fact for baby Jesus a life's journey planned out – it had been foretold centuries before. Mary and Joseph were told that Jesus was the Messiah – He would save His people from their sins. But what they didn't understand was that to save the people from their sins Jesus had to die and His death was on a Roman cross.

CROSS

Jesus died so that a way could be opened that we could know God and that we could accept the gift of life – His presence now and His hope of a place with our name on the door. Jesus now says to each one of us "follow Me". Here's what He said in John 14.

I AM THE WAY ETC

Jesus said:

"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me.

Jesus is the way to know God – in fact He's the only way. If we're following Him already, then the message for us this Christmas is that we should keep following Him, wherever He takes us or wherever He calls us to go. Maybe it will be out of our comfort zone and out of the things that we gain most security – but we know what's at the end of it all – it's only the journey to get there that we don't know much about – only that we must trust Him.

Jesus didn't stay dead – He rose from the dead. Here's where He is now.

PHIL 2:9-11

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

DO YOU HAVE ROOM FOR JESUS TODAY?

He's with the Father and He calls everyone to be part of God's family, to accept forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life. On the first Christmas there was no room for Jesus and when Mary and Joseph did settle, they had to move to Egypt because they couldn't stay there. No room. Do you have room for Jesus in your life? Many people don't – here's some music from Graham Kendrick

GRAHAM KENDRICK – NO ROOM AT THE WORLD

DO YOU HAVE ROOM FOR JESUS TODAY?

So here's the challenge for you today. Jesus wants to be part of your life. Will you make room for Him? He wants you to discover His presence in your life today. Will you let Him in.

My Lord and my God.

I have lived life my way.

I have done many wrong things.

I repent of all my sin.

Please forgive me.

Lord Jesus, I trust you now to be my Lord and my Saviour.

Thank You for dying in my place.

I ask You now for Your gift of eternal life.

I give my life to You and want You to be my Lord.

Help me to live for You by the power of Your Holy Spirit.

These things I pray in Jesus' name.

Amen

*Preached by Mark Reid
MRBC Felixstowe 25/12/11
(c) Mark Reid 2011*

John 14:1 "Do not be worried and upset," Jesus told them. "Believe in God and believe also in me. 2 There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. 3 And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am. 4 You know the way that leads to the place where I am going." 5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way to get there?" 6 Jesus answered him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one goes to the Father except by me.



John 15:1-8

Part 1

As many of you know, I used to be a geography teacher and one thing I used to teach was agriculture as it's the most important of human activities because without being able to produce food, our modern world would collapse. There are a number of types of agriculture and one specialised form is called VITICULTURE.

Viticulture is *the culture of vines for the growing of grapes*. It's not very important in the UK, but go to slightly warmer countries and you see vineyards. Each year we travel down to Spain and we see them in many places in France, such as here in CHAMPAGNE. Although vines are grown to produce dessert grapes, the main reason they are grown is the same as in Jesus' day – to produce wine.

Over this Christmas people will have consumed a lot of wine. As many of you will know there is a big difference between fine wine and plonk. Only certain varieties of vine will produce good wine grapes and even then they require very careful tending to get a big crop that will yield a good vintage. There is a lucrative trade in high quality vine stock because only certain varieties of grapes make good wine. Trade in them is much as in breeding horses for racing.

As we come to our last "I am" saying this Christmas, Jesus uses the picture of quality vine stock to describe Himself. He uses the picture twice in these eight verses:

VERSES

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

I am the vine; you are the branches.

I AM THE TRUE VINE. The context of the word true here is in terms of real rather than counterfeit. He's the one that produces the quality fruit, not worthless rubbish.

It's only in Jesus that people get something true, real – everything else is counterfeit, rubbish – it's the same sentiment as we looked at on Christmas Day where Jesus said "I am the way ... no-one come to the Father except by me."

So, He's the real deal. Why is Jesus the real way to God and not a counterfeit? Because like the fine wine, a good husbandman (modern translations use gardener, but husbandman is more accurate) is involved who makes the difference and He's the Father. Jesus is the way to God because God the Father has made Jesus the only way to Him.

He breaks off every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it will be clean and bear more fruit. You have been made clean already by the teaching I have given you.

Producing good fruit isn't just about having the right vine stock, but in the way in which it's managed on the vineyard. The vine needs to be cleaned of useless shoots so that the shoots that are healthy and clean of rot and pests can thrive.

Are you attached to Jesus this morning? In that case we have been made clean by Father because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. *You have been made clean already by the teaching I have given you.* His body was broken and His blood was shed so that we might be clean of our sins and presentable before God. We are clean – for God's presence, ready to serve Him.

As the true vine our Lord is the source of life and strength and fruit. There is a relationship of complete dependence between the branch and the vine. The vine supplies life-giving nourishment to the branches. Apart from it, the branches have neither life nor fruit. (Bob Deffinbaugh)

Communion is a recognition that in Christ we have been made clean. It is a recognition that in Him we are dependent for our spiritual life. Only in Him can we be useful to God in any way. It's only in Jesus that we bear fruit. We are connected to Him by faith.

Part 2

TWO STATEMENTS

Earlier I looked at the first of two I am the true vine statements. Let's have a look at the second that gives us words of encouragement as we pass from one year to another.

VERSE

I am the vine you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REMAIN IN JESUS?

Older translations use the word abide rather than remain. We are part of Jesus and now He says remain (abide) in me.

What does it mean to abide or remain? John is fond of this word. He uses the term (meno) over fifty times in his writings; eleven times in this chapter. Underlying the meaning of this term is the idea of belief. Negatively this is seen in chapter five of John's gospel: "*And you do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent*" John 5:38. Positively, it occurs in this sense of belief in chapter six: "*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him*" John 6:56.

But there is another sense and that's of remaining, enduring, persevering and that meaning comes out strongly here in this chapter.

VERSES

The principle behind the command of our Lord to abide is stated both negatively and positively in verses 4 and 5. Negatively, it is impossible to bear fruit without abiding. Positively, if one abides in Christ he will bear much fruit. Abiding is essential for fruit bearing.

Remain in me, and I will remain in you. John 15:4 (NIV)
Abide in me as I abide in you John 15:4 (NRSV)

There is a difference in opinion with translators as to how this sentence is translated. In the NIV it seems conditional. where as in the NRSV it hints more that Jesus abides in us so we must seek to abide in Him. The Greek is somewhere in between. The sense is we don't have a relationship with someone as much as we may like to if the other person is ignoring us! Jesus abides in us by His Spirit, but there's no relationship if we aren't doing any abiding ourselves!

It's a two way thing we abide in Him. He abides in us – Jesus want us to be closely bound together, but the choice to do that lies with us – remain in Me, abide in Me.

Why should we abide or remain in Christ? Jesus gives the reason. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. So what is abiding all about.

ABIDING BRINGS FORTH FRUIT

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. 5b If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

It's as simple as this, if we want to see spiritual fruit in our lives then we need to abide with Christ. Jesus is the vine and all life and fruit can only happen if the branches are connected to the roots.

We need to remain in Him, stick with Him, walk with Him, talk with Him, spend time with Him. What will that fruit be. I believe it's the same as in Galatians 5:22-23 – *22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

We have a Father who wants us to have fruitful lives, fruitful for Him but also fruitful for us because it will bring to us and for all who we have contact with us a quality of life that is more than just something spiritual – it will go through every aspect of our lives. In this new year the words of Jesus still ring forth: abide in Me, remain in Me.

What happens if we don't? POINT SLIDE

NOT ABIDING IS DISASTROUS

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.

To not abide or remain in Jesus is a personal disaster for believers. He is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. Jesus is the vine, life for the branches comes from the root. If they are disconnected from the vine, they wither. What does that mean?

Does it mean that God just dumps us if we don't abide in Him. Any idea of losing our salvation would be contrary to Jesus' words in John 10:28-29 which says *27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one.* Those are pretty clear words. If you know Jesus, if you have come to a living faith in Christ, then you aren't going to lose it by your own shortcomings. So what does Jesus mean by these words in John 15?

If we're not abiding in Christ, then we are living as others in the world live. Spiritually we wither. Disconnect from Jesus and a barrenness of life will start to appear as we wither without Him. And all that will bring us is a waste of life and the pain that comes with walking without Jesus. What's the opposite to love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Ouch. Painful things. The message of John 15 is - don't go there – abide in Him.

Let's end on a happy note.

ABIDING BRINGS BLESSING then VERSE

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

We have a Saviour who wants to bring blessing into our lives. When we walk close to Him then we find that our prayer life is transformed too. The words that remain in us lead to prayer that makes a difference in our lives and in the lives of others.

A VERSE FOR 2012

And that I believe is our message as we enter into a new year. We have Jesus – and He wants us to abide/remain in Him because in doing so we will experience closeness with Him, to gain strength from Him so the finest fruit comes from us.

I believe that most if not all of us who know Jesus have had those times when we haven't had much time for Jesus. We haven't spent time with Him, we haven't met to worship with God's people. And what happens, barrenness enters into our lives. One pastor wrote this comment which I found had resonance with me: *Perhaps my greatest burden as a pastor is the constant realization that so many of my people so often live far beneath their privilege in Christ. Life in this compromised world seems to entice us toward settling for far less than what Jesus Christ actually died and rose again to provide for us.* (Preachers' Magazine)

I believe that God wants to bring us into a new closeness to Him as a church that will change the spiritual quality of our lives, that will transform our prayer lives – and that we will grow. And others will be drawn to us as they see Jesus in us.

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