

John 15:9-17 – Fruit that will last

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: love each other."

Background

The passage we are looking at this morning is part of Jesus' instruction to his disciples after he had eaten the Last Supper with them – a Passover meal in which he spoke to them of how he was soon to die for them. Jesus knows that the time he has left with his disciples is short. Within a few hours he will be seized, dragged off to a mockery of a trial and handed over to the Roman authorities to be flogged and crucified. In these words of Jesus to his disciples he is opening his heart to them. He is saying, "These are the things I want you to remember when I am no longer with you. Remember these words so that you may bear fruit, fruit that will last."

And we get to listen in on these words. They are recorded here because they are his words to us also. This is what Jesus wants *us* to hear and for *us* to take to heart.

Jesus loves his disciples

Jesus wants his disciples to know that he loves them. He is going to be leaving them, but this is not because of his lack of love for them. Quite the reverse, it is because of his great love for them that he is going to lay down his life for them: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

But look at the words Jesus uses when he describes his love for his disciples: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." How has God the Father loved God the Son? It is a love which is beyond our imagination. The Father delights in his Son and loves him with a joyful, strong and eternal love that can never be broken – a love that takes deep pleasure in the one loved. Remember the voice that came from heaven when Jesus was baptised, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). This, says Jesus, is the same love which he has for his disciples.

This is the love that Jesus has for us this morning. It is a love that delights in us, embraces us and takes us into the family of God himself. It is an eternal and everlasting love. It is a love which nothing can break. And it is a costly love; he loved us and gave himself for us – laid down his life for us that we might have life in him.

Do you begin to see how much Jesus loves you and how much he wants you to know and enjoy the embrace of his love and all the blessings of belonging to his family?

Jesus wants his disciples to return that love

Having told his disciples of his great love for them he says, "Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."

Jesus wants his disciples to return his love, to love him as he has loved them. And their love for him is to be shown particularly in their obedience to him.

Our obedience to Christ – listening to his voice and following him – is our glad *response* to his love for us, the *evidence* of our love for him and the *means* by which we remain in his love.

Now we need to understand this carefully. We do not *earn* Jesus love through our obedience any more than Jesus *earned* the Father's love through obedience to him. Jesus delighted to do the Father's will because the Father loved him and he loved the Father. We are not to be neurotic children, always fearful that we might not have done enough for God to love us or for Jesus to continue to care for us. We are loved, loved beyond measure and were loved deeply before we ever became aware of that love. Now Jesus wants us to delight in doing his will because he loves us and we love him in return. He wants us to remain in his love, to live gladly in the realm of his love.

In particular, we are to live in the realm of his love by loving one another. Just in case we don't get the point, Jesus says it twice; in verse 12, "My command is this: love each other as I have loved you" and then again in verse 17, "This is my command: love each other." Such love is not about warm and woolly feelings for one another, it is love like that of Jesus who laid down his life for us. It is practical concern for one another and a readiness to spend our time, energy and resources to bring blessing to others.

Living to bring blessing to others is living in the love of Jesus.

Such loving obedience will fill us with joy

Jesus' supreme joy was found in obedience to his Father – even when that obedience meant going to the cross for us. Obedience to the Father was never a matter of reluctant duty for Jesus, it was his joy. And Jesus wants us to share in his joy: "I have told you this", says Jesus, "so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." When we live lives of love, rooted in Jesus love for us, we share in *his* joy.

Did you notice what Jesus says in verses 14-15? "You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

What is the difference between a friend and a servant? Let me illustrate the point from the army. Suppose an army general tells his driver, his servant, to fetch the car for him at 10.00 and be ready to drive for him. The driver must do as he has been told. He can't say to the general, "Where do you plan to go today, is it somewhere interesting?" If he tried talking like that he would get himself in trouble and probably receive the blunt answer, "That's none of your business. Just go and do what I've told you to do."

That's not how Jesus views us. We are not merely servants who don't need to obey the master's commands without knowing his business. He has called us his friends and has shared with us all that the Father has taught him. He wants us to understand his mind and heart and so to share in his passion to redeem a lost world and bring it back to God. He wants us to be intelligent partners in his mission and to share in both its demands and its joy. He wants us to share in his joy, the joy that comes from knowing and serving God.

This is the life for which we were created and the life that satisfies the deepest longings of the human heart.

Do you want to know joy, joy in all its fullness? It's to be found here in following Jesus Christ, learning of him and sharing in his joy.

This relationship with Christ is one designed for fruitfulness

Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last."

Bramley apple tree ...

Jesus had chosen these disciples and had chosen them for a purpose. He had chosen them to share in his mission and to continue that mission after his resurrection and ascension. He had chosen them to bear fruit – fruit that will last. We today are part of the fruit of their discipleship as the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ has been passed on to us also.

And now these words are addressed to us, we who have come to trust in Christ and follow him. We too have been chosen by him. We may think that we chose to follow Christ, and in one sense this is true. But before ever we came to know Christ and follow him, his hand was on our lives, he loved us and wanted us to be his own. Paul in his letter to Christians in the city of Ephesus tells them that they were chosen in Christ before the creation of the world. It was because Christ loved us and wanted us for himself that he came into this world and gave himself for us.

But Christ is not concerned to collect useless ornaments. He chose us that we too might bear fruit; that we might be partners with him in the work of the kingdom, radiating the love of Christ and drawing others into the embrace of his love. Our lives can bear fruit that will last for eternity, both for ourselves and for others whose lives we touch.

Are we living lives that count, count for eternity?

This fruit that will last is the result of prayerful communion with Christ

Jesus says, "whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you." Fruitfulness, lasting fruit, is the result of prayer offered to God our Father in Jesus name.

What does it mean to ask the Father for something in Jesus' name? It is not some magic formula – simply adding the words "in Jesus' name" to the end of our prayers. Rather it is prayer that comes out of an intimate relationship with Jesus and which knows his mind and his heart. It is prayer brought to the Father which is shaped by the mind of Christ and so is pleasing to the Father.

Here we get a glimpse into something of the mystery of prayer. Prayer is not twisting the arm of God to obtain something we want. It is learning the mind and heart of God himself through Jesus Christ and coming on board with his desires and purposes. It is voicing those desires to God in the confidence that he will answer the desires which he himself has placed in our hearts. It is praying:

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven

Acknowledging that

The kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

In summary

Jesus sacrificial love for us calls us to similar lives of love and fruitfulness. Such lives, characterised by service and prayer, bear fruit that will last for all eternity.

Make your life count for eternity.