

Remaining in Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 September 2005

Preacher: Edward Lobb

[0 : 0 0] Well, our passage for this morning is John's Gospel, chapter 15, and really verses 1 to 8. And I'd be grateful if you'd turn that up with me. John, chapter 15, verses 1 to 8.

And our subject is remaining in Jesus. Remaining in Jesus. And just in case at this stage in the service your grey cells are settling down for a few minutes rest, just beginning to yawn and stretch themselves and cross their legs one over the other, let me shock them into action for a moment by asking them a question.

As you run your eye down over these first eight verses of John, chapter 15, I think you'll see that Jesus has in mind a means and an end.

Now, the end is a particular goal for his disciples, and he is teaching them in this passage the means to that goal or that end. Now, here's my question. I'd like somebody to raise a hand and sing out an answer.

My question is, what is the goal and what is the means to it? Have a careful look at verses 1 to 8. What is the goal and what is the means to it that Jesus is teaching?

[1 : 1 1] Would someone like to attempt an answer? The goal and the means to it. The Father's glory. The Father's glory. Yes, that's part of the goal.

What else? Yes. The more room for lone rangers. Lone rangers. No room for lone rangers. Yes, that's all part of the story, but it's not quite the thing. What is the goal? I'll give you a clue.

It comes in verses 4 and 8. What is it that Jesus wants to see his disciples being or doing? Fruitfulness. Thank you very much. And what is the means to it?

Abiding or remaining in him. That's it exactly. The goal is fruitfulness. Let's have a look at those verses. Verse 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. And then again in verse 8. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit. Showing yourselves to be my disciples.

[2 : 0 8] So remaining in Jesus, although in a sense it's the dominant theme of this passage, that is not an end in itself. The end here is for the followers of Christ to be fruitful and remaining in him is the means to that end.

Now, of course, you'll be asking, what does Jesus mean by fruitfulness? And what does Jesus mean by remaining in him? And we'll come to those important questions as we go along this morning.

But let me come into the subject from a slightly different angle. When I was growing up through childhood and teenage, there were certain values that my father tried to instill into me.

Tried to din into my blockhead as a youngster. And particularly values like honesty, politeness, telling the truth, and behaving with good manners.

Now, I suspect that many children of my generation were brought up in much the same way. Now, in my own family, although we did go to church regularly as a family, we didn't actually open up the Bible at home.

[3 : 1 3] So although I had some knowledge of Jesus from church and also from RE lessons at school, which were called scripture at my school, I had some knowledge from those means. I was pretty clueless about what it means to be a Christian.

And I should add that the Anglican church that we went to when I was a youngster was a pretty middle-of-the-road Anglican church. And there wasn't a clear gospel taught there either. So I was fairly clueless about what it meant to be a Christian.

In fact, I had the general impression that honesty, politeness, telling the truth, and behaving with good manners summed up the Christian life. In other words, to be a decent, polite, well-mannered,

and truthful boy more or less equaled being a Christian.

And I guess that a number of us here, particularly those in the over-45s age group, may have been brought up in a similar way. And if somebody in our youth or our childhood had said to us, follow the example of Jesus, we would have had little difficulty in knowing what we were being asked to do. And we would have said to ourselves, right, I know what that means. I must be courteous, well-mannered, truthful, and honest, because that's what Jesus was like. And I must follow his lead and his example.

[4 : 25] But if somebody had said to us, do you belong to Jesus? Or even if they had said, are you remaining in Jesus? I think we might have been stumped.

I certainly would have been stumped. I would have said to myself, remaining in Jesus? What kind of double Dutch talk is that? I can understand remaining in my house, or in my classroom, or in London.

But remaining in another person, what on earth can talk like that mean? But whatever it means, it is obviously important. Because Jesus says here in verse 6, If anyone does not remain in me, he's like a branch that is thrown away and withers.

Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire, and burned. Which doesn't sound very good, does it? And it's not at all good. So for our own future happiness, we need to understand what it means to remain in Jesus Christ.

A great deal depends upon it. Alright, let's look more closely at our passage, and also at an important Old Testament idea which lies behind it.

[5 : 38] You'll see in verse 5 that Jesus says, I am the vine, you are the branches. And he's using here a detailed picture or metaphor to describe the kind of relationship that he and his disciples enjoy.

So he is the stem, or the trunk, the main plant of the vine. And those who belong to him are the branches, or the shoots of the vine. And if the individual branches of the vine are to be fruitful, the most important thing they have to do is to remain part of the vine.

Because if they're cut off, of course they will wither and be useless. They'll be fit only for the bonfire. But God the Father is also involved as Jesus builds up this picture.

The Lord Jesus explains in verse 1 that it's the Father who is the gardener or the vine dresser. He's the one who looks after the vine and superintends the whole project.

Then in verse 2, he tells us that the Father cuts off every branch of the vine that bears no fruit. But he also prunes, cuts back, the branches that are fruitful so as to make them even more fruitful.

[6 : 49] I guess horticulture or viticulture hasn't changed much over the centuries. We do exactly the same thing in our own gardens, if we're gardeners, with our rose trees, our apples and plums.

The useless and dead-looking bits we cut off when we throw into the bonfire, but the good bits we prune down so as to stimulate them into greater fruitfulness and productivity.

Each branch, of course, has to remain in the mother stem or the trunk, if it is to be fruitful. But look at this goal of the process again, expressed in verse 8.

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, and thus show yourselves to be my disciples. So if the branches of the vine are fruitful, verse 8 is telling us that there are two main results.

The first is that the Father, God the Father, is glorified. In other words, fruitful Christians bring honor and praise to the Father and his name.

[7 : 46] And the second is that those branches, those individuals, show themselves to be truly Christ's disciples. There are many things in the New Testament which reveal who are the real disciples of Jesus.

And this is one of them. There is real fruitfulness in those lives. So in Jesus' picture, the Father is the gardener or the vine dresser. The Lord Jesus is the vine. And Jesus' disciples are the branches which are pruned, which remain in him, and which bear much fruit.

But why should Jesus have chosen this particular metaphor? Well, it's not a random choice or an accidental choice on his part. But he's picking up an important idea from deep in the Old Testament. And perhaps at this stage, you'd like to turn with me back to Psalm number 80. Psalm 80. And we'll see if we can do a little bit of sleuth work. Detective work.

And I think that will help us to understand better where Jesus is coming from, literally. So Psalm 80. And I'd like to read here from verse 8. But let me say first that this is a sad and painful psalm where the writer, identified as Asaph, is lamenting the hard times on which the people of Israel have fallen.

[9 : 05] Have a look at the refrain which comes in verse 3 and again in verse 7 and again in verse 19. Restore us, O God. Make your face shine upon us that we may be saved.

So you'll see there from that refrain that the writer is praying that God's people should be restored because of the state of collapse and ruin that they have fallen into.

So let me read from verse 8. You brought a vine out of Egypt. You drove out the nations and planted it. You cleared the ground for it. And it took root and filled the land.

The mountains were covered with its shade. The mighty cedars with its branches. It sent out its boughs to the sea. It shoots as far as the river. Why have you broken down its walls?

So that all who pass by pick its grapes. Boars from the forest ravage it. And the creatures of the field feed on it. Return to us, O God Almighty.

[10 : 02] Look down from heaven and see. Watch over this vine. The root your right hand has planted. The sun you have raised up for yourself. Your vine is cut down.

It is burned with fire. At your rebuke, your people perish. Let your hand rest on the man of your right hand. The son of man you have raised up for yourself.

Then we will not turn away from you. Revive us. And we will call on your name. Now in this psalm, the vine is obviously the people of Israel.

Verse 8, you'll see, is about the exodus. You brought a vine. That's the people out of Egypt. You drove out the nations. Do you remember all of those nations? The Hittites and Amorites.

The Girgashites, Perizzites and Jebusites. You cleared them out of the promised land. And then in that land, you planted the vine. And then in verses 9, 10 and 11 of the psalm, we see how the vine flourished.

[11 : 02] How it spread. It sent out its boughs, verse 11, to the sea. That's the Mediterranean and the west. And as far as the river, and that's the river Euphrates up in the northeast. And the writer there is talking principally about the reigns of David and Solomon.

When things went very well for Israel. But after Solomon, everything began to collapse. And that is why verses 12 and 13 speak of the vineyard's walls being broken down.

Its grapes scrunped by passers-by. And then wild boars and other beasts coming in and causing mayhem. So the writer of Psalm 80, writing perhaps several centuries after Solomon's reign, is begging the Lord God to look down and put the vine right.

To repair the damage that has been done. To restore the people of Israel to their former glory and prosperity. But while in verse 8, you'll see the vine is obviously the people of Israel.

A little bit later, verse 15, the vine, the root planted by God, begins to be identified with an individual. With the son that God has raised up for himself.

[12 : 10] Verse 15, the root your right hand has planted. The son you've raised up. And then even more so in verses 16 and 17. In verse 16, the vine seems to have come quite to an end.

It's been cut down, burned. The people of God are perishing. But in verse 17, there is new hope expressed in somebody who is called, significantly, the son of man, whom God has raised up for himself.

Now, are you beginning at this point to pick up the scent? Beginning to see what Jesus is talking about in John chapter 15. Well, let's turn on a little section or two of the Old Testament to Isaiah chapter 5.

If you work through the Psalms, and we have Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, and then into Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 5. Because we get further clues here about what is going on.

Let me read a few verses from verse 1. We'll start with verse 1. I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard, says Isaiah.

[13 : 18] You can imagine the prophet almost picking up his guitar in one of the main squares of Jerusalem and sitting down and gathering an impromptu crowd around him to listen to his song. Everybody loves to hear a love song.

It was happening even before the days of Frank Sinatra. So Isaiah begins his song, and it starts happily, but it does not end happily. So the song begins halfway through verse 1.

My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well.

Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. Yuck! Horrible! That's the reaction we're supposed to feel.

And at that point, Isaiah stops singing, and we then, in verse 3, hear the Lord God himself speaking, and it's a terrifying message. Now, you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

[14:22] What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? Now, I will tell you what I'm going to do to my vineyard.

I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed. I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briars and thorns will grow there.

I will command the clouds not to rain on it. And then verse 7 is the interpretation of this little parable of the vineyard. The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight.

And he looked for, here's the good fruit, justice. But what did he see? Bloodshed. He looked for righteousness, but he heard cries of distress. So let me sum up this Old Testament material before we go back to John chapter 15.

Both of these Old Testament passages, the one from Psalm 80 and this one from Isaiah 5, are designed to shock the reader, to shock us. The shock stems from the contrast between something that should have been lovely and something which, in the event, proved wretched and useless.

[15:44] What God did was consistently lovely. He chose the best vines, the best of the Cabernet Sauvignon, whatever it was in those days. He prepared the soil.

He cleared it of stones. He rescued this very precious vine from Egypt and planted it in the Promised Land. He provided a watchtower for its safety and a winepress to process the fruit. God's care, God's preparation were faultless, flawless. But the shock is that the only fruit it was capable of producing was bad, sour, horrible.

And the consequence, in Isaiah 5, verses 5 and 6, was not merely that the vine or the vineyard would of itself fall into disrepair. The consequence is more horrible.

God himself was going to remove its hedge and break down its wall and turn it into a wasteland, which means that the one who had nurtured and loved this vine so deeply would later become its destroyer.

[16:46] And yet, wonderfully, 700 years after Isaiah's time, Jesus said to his followers, I am the true vine.

Why the true vine? Because the old vine of Israel had proved false. There was no future now for the old people of Israel unless God were to do something by way of recreation and regeneration. But that is exactly what God has done by sending Jesus into the world. Jesus is Israel. He is the people of God regenerated.

He is the vine made new so that its branches can now be full of good fruit. And it means that if you and I belong to the Lord Jesus, we are his branches.

And if we will but remain in him, and if we won't fear the Father's pruning secateurs, we will be fruitful. Because fruitfulness comes not as the result of our own puny efforts, but from the pulsating sap and power of the vine which pumps his own fruit-bearing life into us.

[17:55] Well, let's turn back now to John chapter 15. And I'll try to draw the main points out of these opening few verses of the chapter.

And let's bear in mind from verse 8 that the hallmark or the authenticating badge of the true disciple is that he or she bears much fruit. So let's look at three marks of the real believer, the real Christian from these verses.

That's where we're going now. We're looking at three marks of the real believer. So first of all, the real believer bears much fruit. Jesus is emphasizing here not simply fruitfulness, but a considerable degree of fruitfulness.

So in verse 2, for example, you'll see the Father is not satisfied with just a small yield of fruit from a branch. He prunes it back so as to make it even more fruitful.

And then look with me partway through verse 5. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit. Much fruit.

[19:00] And again in verse 8. This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit. Now, of course, the \$64,000 question is the question, what kind of fruit is Jesus talking about here?

And it's interesting that he doesn't actually define it in this passage. And for that reason, we ought to be careful about offering a definition which is too narrow or too specific.

However, as your eye runs down over the next paragraph, verses 9 to 17, you can certainly see the direction in which his mind is moving. You'll see that in verse 10, he speaks of obeying his commandments and thus remaining in his love.

In verse 11, he speaks of his joy being in his disciples and of their joy being complete. In verse 12, he speaks of his disciples loving each other.

In verse 14, he speaks of the friendship that he and his disciples enjoy if they obey his commands. In verse 15, he speaks of the way this friendship blossoms into the disciples knowing everything that Jesus has learned from the Father.

[20 : 10] And we know that he is saying all these things with the subject of fruitfulness still very much uppermost in his mind. Because in verse 16, he explicitly returns to the subject of fruitfulness and he adds a new dimension to it by calling it fruit that will last.

Fruit that remains. In other words, fruit which is ongoing, developing, persevering, increasing, lifelong, and no doubt lasting into eternity as well.

So I think we can be sure that the fruit that the Lord Jesus has in mind here includes obedience to Christ, joy in Christ, love for other Christians, friendship with Jesus, and an increasing knowledge of the Father's will.

Because he deals with all those things in verses 9 to 17. But that's not the totality. We'd surely be missing a big part of the point if we excluded such things as evangelistic zeal, prayerfulness, love for the lost, love for the non-Christian, perseverance in suffering, being unashamed of Jesus, loving the Bible, longing for heaven, caring for strangers, obeying the law of the land.

How about that as part of Christian fruitfulness, obeying the law of the land, longing for Christ's return, supporting missionaries with real commitment, being really committed to the local church, a desire to see our children and young people taught the gospel and come to Christ.

[21 : 42] Not to mention love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, which is the fruit of the Spirit mentioned by Paul the Apostle in Galatians chapter 5, and much more besides.

Now, friends, this is not a discouraging message. On the contrary, it's an encouraging message.

The point of the passage is not that Jesus is saying to us how unfruitful you all are.

It's quite the opposite. He is saying to us, you will be fruitful, in fact, very fruitful, very fruitful, as long as you remain in me.

So there's the first mark of the real believer. He or she bears much fruit. Now, second, the real believer is sometimes pruned.

Verse 2 tells us that the unfruitful branch is cut off, and that's the end of the road for that branch, cut off by the Father. But the fruitful branch is pruned so as to make it even more fruitful.

[22 : 44] I remember in 1992, when we first moved to our house at Burton-on-Trent, which is where we came from recently, at that stage, I rather rashly bought eight blackcurrant bushes for our garden.

Now, if you buy a blackcurrant bush from the garden center, it's very small. It's only a few inches high. You stick it in. And even then, you have to prune it back a little bit. It's very small. And I little realized how much fruit that a blackcurrant bush can produce.

But the result has been that every July between 1992 and this year, including this year, our kitchen in Burton-on-Trent was turned into a jam factory for about a fortnight. I've solemnly promised my dear wife that I will only buy four blackcurrant bushes for our new garden here in Scotland so that we don't have too much.

Now, every year, after fruiting time, I took the secateurs to those blackcurrant bushes and I pruned them quite hard because I'd been carefully studying Percy Thrower's great book, *How to Grow Vegetables and Fruit*.

In fact, some years, I pruned those little bushes back so hard that I've said to Catherine, I've done it this time. I'm sure we're going to get a terrible crop of blackcurrants next year because I've overpruned these bushes.

[23 : 58] It's too severe. But all that's happened is that the crop has got bigger and bigger every year. Now, Jesus is teaching us in verse 2 that the believer is just like a branch that has to be pruned if it is to be more fruitful.

So if you and I want to be more fruitful, we need to learn to welcome the secateurs. Pruning is going to involve cutting off pieces and reducing the size and reach of the branch.

And Jesus surely wants us to understand that this can be a painful process. Is it something that every believer is going to have to undergo? Well, look with me halfway through verse 2.

Every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes. Every branch. Every one. Let me ask, have you undergone pruning at the Lord's hands from time to time?

Pruning involves the removal, possibly the painful removal, of parts of our lives which, whether we know it or not, are hindering our capacity to bear fruit.

[25 : 11] A fruitful Christian, then, will almost certainly be able to look back over his or her life and say, Yes, I've lost a number of things, and some of those things brought me joy.

But the Father lovingly took them away from me so that I should no longer be encumbered by them, so that I should serve him more wholeheartedly and thus become more fruitful.

So this may mean that the Lord might remove our job, our status in the community, our money or large parts of it, our health, even sometimes our loved ones, because he loves us so much that he wants us to be even more fruitful.

The divine secateurs are sharp and painful, but the hand that uses them is full of mercy and love.

To be pruned will be painful, but let's welcome the pruning process, because the intention of it is to make us more fruitful in the Lord's service.

So there's the second thing. The real believer is sometimes pruned. And then third, the real believer remains in Jesus.

[26 : 32] Now, this is the dominant theme, the dominant motif of the passage, and in horticultural terms, it is obvious that a branch can only be fruitful if it remains a part of the main plant.

Only by remaining part of the plant can it be supplied by the plant's vitality and consequently produce fruit. Look at the sad words which conclude verse 5.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. In other words, if you're cut off from me, your future is nil. In fact, worse than nil. Look at verse 6. If anyone does not remain in me, he's like a branch that is thrown away and withers.

Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. And that is nothing less than a reference to hell and eternal destruction. But look at Jesus' promise in verse 4 here.

Remain in me and I will remain in you. He is saying, as long as you stick to me like a limpet, I'm going nowhere. I'm sticking to you.

[27 : 34] You can rely upon it. And then verse 7 adds a further element to the picture. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish and it will be given you.

So part of the art and joy of remaining in Christ is to allow his words, the scriptures, to remain in us as we regularly read them and drink them in and allow them to refashion every part of our mental furniture.

That's what happens as we read the Bible and study it. Our mental furniture is being greatly rearranged. So do you see the great choice that this passage from John 15 lays before each of us? Either we remain in him and thus bear much fruit, or we drop off from the vine and we are destined finally for destruction. Now you would think, friends, that this passage, when you see this great choice that this passage lays before us, you'd think that everyone who reads it would determine to allow nothing to stop them from remaining in Christ.

But it isn't like that, is it? I know, speaking for myself, I need to have this message dinned into my head again and again because there is something in me that keeps on pulling away from Christ and making me think that I can manage without him.

[28 : 59] And I guess you're the same as I am. Do others sometimes find that? There's some bias in us. Well, it's sin, isn't it? Which pulls us away from him and makes us think we can live self-sufficiently. So let me describe now two main essentials if we are to remain in Jesus lifelong and beyond.

The first thing is to cultivate our daily relationship of love and joy with him. You see, in verse 9, he speaks not merely of our remaining in him, but of remaining in his love.

In verse 11, he speaks of his joy being in us so that our joy can be made complete. That is such a far cry from my childhood idea that Christianity was simply a matter of being courteous and truthful and well-behaved.

Now, of course, any follower of Jesus is going to want to practice courtesy and truthfulness and good behavior. But the heart of being a Christian is being in Christ, being a branch in the vine united to him.

The apostle Paul often speaks of Christians as those who are in Christ. And that is his way of expressing the very same truth that Jesus is expressing here.

[30 : 11] Paul says, If anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation or part of the new creation. And here in John 15, to be in Christ is to be part of the new vine, the true vine, the regenerated, recreated, new Israel.

So if we belong to Jesus, let's rejoice in this amazing relationship and let's take every step we can to cultivate it. Just as a husband and wife cultivate the happiness of their relationship by constantly attending to it, let's do the same in our relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Talking to him in prayer regularly, listening to his words in the Bible, rejoicing in him, singing to him. Do you sing to him? We can sing to him in the kitchen, in the bath, or in the church.

Let's keep doing it. Do you remember his master's voice record label? There's a picture there of a dog, isn't it? It's not a Scottish terrier. I think it's a mongrel.

It's a little cur. And there's this terrier with a black patch over one eye. And he's listening very carefully into the bell of the old gramophone record because he can hear his master's voice. Now as we read the scriptures, we too are listening to him and we can rejoice in his voice.

[31 : 28] So singing, praising him, we can praise about him, praise him, not simply by saying things like Alleluia, praise the Lord. Isn't he wonderful? We praise him as we talk about him in glowing terms to other people.

As we discuss his beauty and the greatness of the gospel. We praise him and we cultivate our relationship by standing up for him when we hear him being attacked.

Do you do that? Sometimes perhaps you're in a circle of friends. Maybe it's the lunch hour at work and somebody says something contemptuous about Christ or about his church. Do you stand up for him?

Even though your heart begins to beat very quickly and you feel the color rising up into your cheeks. Yet you say something. Don't speak about Christ like that or whatever comes to your mind. But do you stand, are you prepared to be unashamed of him and unashamed also of his words of the scriptures?

How else do we cultivate our relationship? As we read books about him, read books that explain the scriptures to us. And also as we love his people and encourage his people.

[32 : 32] There are so many aspects of cultivating our relationship with Christ. But let's make that cultivation a top priority and a daily priority. Then the second essential ingredient of remaining in Jesus is that we remain in his church.

Do you ever think to yourself, I might stop going to church now. I can get along all right without church and still keep my faith.

Friends, don't believe it. That is one of the most successful of the devil's lies. I dread to think what multitudes of people have believed that lie and have had their feet taken off the road to heaven and put back onto the road to destruction.

Look again at verse 6. If anyone does not remain in me, he's like a branch that is thrown away and withers. Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire. and burned. A person might think, I'll stop going to church because somebody said something rather nasty to me at church.

Well, of course somebody's going to say something nasty to all of us sooner or later. That's what we're like. We're full of imperfections as we journey together towards the heavenly city. But we must brush that sort of little upset aside and get on with the job of loving the Lord and serving his church.

[33 : 55] Are we going to allow a nasty remark or an unpleasant episode in the life of the church to divert us from the road to heaven? Are we so unconcerned about our eternal future and so ungrateful to the Lord who died to rescue us?

Remaining in Christ is impossible without remaining in the church. Maybe some here were tempted this morning not to come. You were sitting there perhaps at the breakfast table and the coffee pot looked particularly tasty and delectable and you put on another slice of toast and the marmalade was thick and golden in the jar and you thought, I'll just stay here and read the Sunday papers and then get into the bath and have a long bath.

Anyway, they're running this race in Glasgow and it's going to be difficult to get in and you were tempted not to come but you came. Well, that's great, isn't it? You're here so you're practicing remaining in Christ by remaining in his body.

But those temptations will come. A couple of months ago I was speaking at a series of Christian meetings in Derby and at the end of one of these meetings I got talking I noticed a very old man in the congregation and I sat down next to him one evening and talked to him and he said to me I began preaching when I was 18 years old but I had to give it up when I was 98 because my voice became too weak but I did manage to preach he said for 80 years well I was astonished I looked at the old man and I said to him well how old are you now if you gave up preaching at the age of 98 and he said I'm 103 103 but he was still there in the congregation encouraging fellow Christians listening to the sermon praying and singing he was there he couldn't preach anymore but he was there now friends we too need to remain in the church we need to hear sermons we need to give encouragement to one another we need to receive encouragement from one another because we're all weak in the faith we need to be accountable to each other we need to bring each other up short if necessary we need to spur and goad and challenge each other on into action we need to pray for each other and to pray together we need to love each other and to care for each other we need to help each other with our marriages or with the problems of singleness or when bereavement comes we help each other with family concerns with questions of money and work and of course with our evangelism because that's never something we do on our own we do it as part of the body we can do none of these things if we stop being part of the church if we drop out of the church we will end up living only for ourselves so let's decide and determine to obey the Lord Jesus to remain in him in his body the church lifelong right up to being 103 look at the great contrast between those who drop out and those who stay in the passage here first of all verse 6 if anyone does not remain in me he's like a branch that is thrown away and withers such branches are picked up thrown into the fire and burned but then verse 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 let's bow our heads and we'll pray our dear Lord Jesus it is a great comfort to us to think of you as the vine from whom the strength and power and life flows we do indeed love you and want to learn to love you more and we pray dear Lord that you will so fill our hearts with the desire to be yours forever that we never think of dropping out of belonging to you or of belonging to your people but on the contrary that as the years go on so you will fill our hearts more and more with the desire to serve you and your people and to love you and your people and to belong to you forever so please help us especially in moments of temptation when we're tempted to desert you and your people please remind us of these things and our prayer too is that our lives as individuals and our lives as a church here at St. George's Tron will become more and more fruitful thus bringing glory to God the Father and demonstrating that we are indeed your disciples and we ask all these things for your dear name's sake

Amen Amen Amen and men Come in live here to give you Männer