

YOUR HIGHEST CALL

John 15: 1-11

This Friday night we begin a series of revival meetings. Revival meetings are not as common in churches as they were a generation ago. Full time evangelists will tell you they do not get near as many invitations to preach four day revivals as they used to. Many churches now have one day revivals or what they call “Harvest Days”. And I would say that if that is what God chooses to use in a particular church then that’s what they should do. All I know is one thing – however a church feels led to seek revival is what they need to do with all of their energy, because there is no doubt that we desperately need revival! Our evangelist for next week, Terry Chupp, told me that he was in a meeting recently with some representatives from Southwestern Baptist Seminary who said that by the year 2030 half of all Southern Baptist churches will have closed their doors! Now beloved, that just sounds too sensational to be true to me. But nonetheless, based on current trends, that’s what he said. We need revival!

But not only does the church need revival, lost people need to be saved! Every single day that we read or hear the daily news we are reminded of the depraved, dissolute, perverted condition of the human heart. Just this week another school shooting in Washington, and a kidnap attempt of a coed on our own U of A campus. Imagine how that makes every female student feel who walks alone to class. Some of you read in the Tuscaloosa News this week about the rampant problem of dating abuse, physical and psychological. And get this - in the ages of 12-14 it’s the girls that are more likely to physically beat up on the boys! I tell you, if I were a middle-schooler and my girlfriend beat me up, I’d be too embarrassed to go back to school. But what in the world are kids

dating for at that age, anyway? But friends, that's the culture we live in. We live in a culture of no restraint, no prohibitions from any craving of our sinful flesh. And parents don't restrain kids because parents don't restrain themselves. And the result is untold heartache and misery, and masses of souls all around us being swept into hell every day.

Now, if I were to come up to you after the service and ask you personally, "Would you like to see these things change?", every one of you would say, "Duh! Yes, Bro. Mike!" All of us would say we want these things to change! We abhor the thought of half of all of our Southern Baptist churches dying in the next 15 years. Just like Lot was tormented in Sodom, we are sickened to our souls when we see and hear of the hedonism that rules in our land. But here's the more important question, if things ever do change, who's God going to use to bring it about? Well, He certainly isn't going to use those who are enslaved in sin. God is going to use His people, His church, you and me. But if people like you and me don't step up like Isaiah did and say, "Here am I, send me!" change will never happen. And beloved, there is not a day to waste. If we are ever going to respond to God's call and make a difference, the time is now!!

So today I want to talk to you about God's highest call upon your life, a call you must answer if you are to ever make a difference with your family, with your friends, or in this world. You know, our Lord Jesus Christ has issued some pretty important calls to His followers. But they are not just calls, they are actually commands. Jesus commanded His followers in Matt. 6 not to lay up for themselves treasures upon earth, but to lay up treasures in Heaven. He commanded His followers in Matt. 28, "Go and make disciples of all nations". We read a third command He issued to all who follow Him in John 13, where He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another as I have

loved you...” And in John 14 Jesus orders His disciples, “Keep my commandments”. “Lay up treasures in Heaven”. “Make disciples of all nations”. Love one another”. “Keep My commandments”. All pretty huge, wouldn’t you say?

But there is a command that Jesus gave to everyone who names His name that is more important than any of these. In fact, it is the key to our obeying every other command Jesus ever made. So let’s learn about the vitally important command today.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to John 15: 1-11 (read). In these verses Jesus teaches a spiritual essential. It is amazingly simple, but no one has ever been greatly used of God unless they mastered it. And the essential is, **abide in Christ or fail**. If you and I are to accomplish anything of merit for the glory of God, we must abide in Christ. We can sing like a mocking bird, we can preach the lights out, we can give the shirt off our back, but if we don’t abide in Christ all of these good works will have accomplished a big fat zero and will go up in smoke.

Now, let’s try to see what this idea of abiding in Christ is all about. Jesus begins in vs. 1 by saying, “I am the true vine”. Literally it reads, “I am the vine, the true”. Now, the imagery of the vine was not new to the disciples. It has been already used quite a bit by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea. And in the OT the vine was a symbol of the nation of Israel. And the prophetic word concerning the vine and Israel’s immediate future was not good. Jeremiah calls Israel a “degenerate vine” (2:21). Ezekiel calls Israel a vine that God will throw into the fire to be consumed, because it persisted in unfaithfulness (15:8). Hosea writes that Israel was a vine that brought forth corrupt fruit, and would be judged for her wickedness (10:1-4). And just days before Jesus’ teaching here on the vine, He told a parable where He likened the vine to the Kingdom of God. And Jesus said that the Kingdom would be taken from the chief priests and Pharisees and given to

another nation bearing the fruit of the Kingdom. And the bottom line of all of these prophecies was, Israel was a failure (Morgan, *in loc*, p. 252-253). And their failure was blazoned across the sky just hours later as they crucified their long promised Messiah. And so Jesus tells His disciples in His final discourse to them, “The old vine is rejected. Now, I am the vine, the one and only true vine”.

So Jesus commanded His disciples in v. 4, “Abide in Me”. The word “abide” was a favorite one of John’s. In the gospel of John and in his three epistles he uses it over 50 times. And the idea is to continue in a certain position, to remain in a certain place. It carries the idea of permanency. For instance, did you know that the lifespan of a large mouth bass is about 23 years? So let’s say that Jerry Glover and Tommy Woods have been going to a certain fishing hole on the Black Warrior for 20 years, and every now and then they see a huge bass jump out of the water, almost at the same spot every time. Must weigh at least 12 pounds. And they fish and fish that hole, but never catch it. And Jerry says to Tommy, “That old bass has been abiding in this hole a mighty long time”. He found him a spot he loved and never left.

That’s what Jesus is telling His disciples. I’m the spot! Remain in Me and never leave. Now, there is a sense that every Christian is abiding in Christ, all of the time. 1 John 4:13 says, “By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit”. If we have the Holy Spirit we are abiding in Christ, and we know that once the Holy Spirit enters our lives He never leaves. So all the saved are in this sense abiding in Christ.

But there is another aspect of abiding in Christ. And that is actively drawing near to Christ day after day, just like the writer of Hebrews exhorted in Heb. 10:22, “Let us **draw near** with a true heart in full assurance of faith”, and just like James writes in James 4:8, “Draw near to God.....” Jesus told the church at Ephesus that they had left their first love. And listen to what He

said in Rev. 2:5, “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works...” Those believers were abiding in Christ at one time but had fallen away. And Jesus said, “Come back! Abide in Me once again”. Now, just to show you how important it is to abide in Christ, if you were to count them up, in v. 1 through v. 10 of John 15 you will see the word “abide” ten times. And that just reinforces the spiritual essential Jesus is teaching, **abide in Christ or fail**.

Now, I want us to look briefly at several precious truths related to abiding in Christ for the next few minutes. First of all, the **purpose** of abiding. Look at v. 5. The **initial** purpose of abiding is bearing fruit. Jesus says that He is the vine and we are the branches. It is the branches that bear fruit in a grape vineyard. But what if a branch somehow gets severed from the vine, and is hanging onto it only a few splinters? It may still have some leaves, but it won't have any grapes. For any branch to bear grapes, it must be fully connected to the vine. And so it is with us branches of Heaven's vineyard. In order to bear spiritual fruit, we must be fully connected to the Vine. We must abide in Christ.

Now, there are many types of fruit that a Christian can bear. The Bible tells us that souls won to Christ are fruit (Rom. 1:13). A holy life is fruit (Rom. 6:22). Gifts to the poor are spiritual fruit (Rom. 15:28). And then there is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Love, joy, patience, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and self-control. All of these things set believers apart from the unsaved world. And do you know what else spiritual fruit does? Look at v. 8 (read). Spiritual fruit glories God! And beloved, that is the **ultimate** purpose of abiding. That is why you and I are on the planet. Paul said, “Whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). We are not here just to live in a spiritual Dollywood for 70 or 80 years, listening to the Gaithers or Casting Crowns, eating out with our Christian friends,

and otherwise laying in our holy hammocks and snoozing our life away. NO! We are here to give glory to the holy, glorious king of Heaven Who took on human flesh and died on the cross for the sins of the world! We are to point men, women, boys, and girls to Jesus Christ! And we do it by bearing fruit. But unless we abide in Christ, it just won't happen. Look again v. 5 (read). Jesus didn't say without Me you won't accomplish much for the Kingdom. He said, "Without Me you can do nothing". And that brings us back to our spiritual essential again. **Abide in Christ or fail.**

Now, many Christians might hear this essential and begin to get real nervous, or even discouraged. "If I don't bear any fruit in my life I will fail as a Christian". And who wants to be a failure? But beloved, remember, bearing fruit is not your concern. God never commanded you to bear fruit. Tell me, what produces the fruit in a vineyard? Not the branches! The branches bear the fruit, but they do not produce the fruit. Fruit is produced by the sap that flows from the vine. All the branches do is hang there and remain connected to the vine, and the fruit is automatic.

Even so, all Jesus asks of you and me is that we abide in Him. And when we do we don't even have to think about fruit. It is 100% guaranteed. Look at God's promise in v. 5. "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit..." All Jesus asks us to do is to abide in Him, remain connected to Him, and we will continuously have a bumper crop of fruit year after year after year. Because when we abide in Christ, it is His actions, not ours, which comes forth from our bodies. It is His words, not ours, which comes forth from our lips. And it is His fruit, not ours, that comes forth from our lives. And when we bear His fruit we fulfill the ultimate purpose of abiding, which is bring glory to Him.

In the last few years we've seen this illustrated in a way that's pleasing to most of us here today. What is it that Nick Saban talks about when it comes to the success of his team? Nick calls it "the

process”. And the process is Nick’s whole philosophy of preparation. Physical preparation, mental preparation, emotional preparation. And what Nick says that he tells the team is, “Men, if you are committed to the process, then the wins will take care of themselves. So don’t be concerned with winning. Be concerned with process”.

So that brings us to the second truth about abiding I want us to see. And that’s the **process**. Just what is the process for our abiding in Christ. Well, to understand the process we must see God’s part and our part. First, God’s part (v. 2). (explain about pruning fruit trees. Daddy pruned away excess growth). Now, beloved, we must understand something here. If you and I are to abide in Christ, then you can be sure that there are some things in your life that you are abiding in now that will have to go. And God must prune them away. And often it will be painful. These things may be sinful or they may not be sinful, but they keep you from abiding in Christ, and God will cut them away.

And so God’s part in the process of abiding is pruning. But now look at v. 10 to see our part (read). Our part in abiding in Christ is simply to obey Him. To do what He says. Listen to what Jesus said in just back in ch. 14: 21-23 (read). Jesus said, if you want My fellowship, you can have it, whoever you are! Just obey Me, and My Father and I will come and make our home with you. That is, we will come and abide with you.

We’ve seen the **purpose** of abiding, which is to bear fruit. We’ve seen the **process** of abiding, which is pruning on God’s part, and obedience on our part. Now let’s look for a moment at the **prize** of abiding in Christ. There is a great reward for all of God’s children who will abide in His Son. Look at v. 11. The prize for abiding in Christ the joy of Christ. Oh, we seek joy in so many places and in so many ways. In people, in pleasure, in possessions, in power. But none of those things can bring lasting

joy. For they all pass away. But listen to what God says in His Word that brings joy. Psalm 16:11: “In Your presence is fullness of joy, at Your right hand there is pleasure for evermore” (Ps. 16:11).

Are you abiding in Christ? If not, what are you abiding in that keeps you from abiding in Him? What is God trying to prune away in your life today?