

Automatic Transcription of "What It's All About" message by Tom Schoeneck

Introduction by Tom Zimmer; This message was presented at Faith Evangelical Free Church by Tom Schoeneck to the church body, and to the church body of the Spanish church that was also meeting in our building at the time. The references to Lee or Pastor Lee are referring to the pastor of the Spanish church.

I also removed a reference near the beginning of the message to Herbert W Armstrong and Garner Ted Armstrong, because the references are confusing and not relevant to the message. The removed lines below and the reference to a video are referring to a change in theological direction for Garner Ted Armstrong. I spoke with Tom Schoeneck to get this information and he approved the change.

[Begin removed lines]

Of course I'm old enough to understand who Herbert W. Armstrong was, and who Garner Ted Armstrong was, I used to listen to sometimes some of the radio programs, I know the great transformation that has taken place.

Lee gave me the video and I watched it and it truly is a miracle.

[End removed lines]

[Begin Transcription]

The major portion of my message this morning is going to be out of John 15, so if you have your Bibles with you and want to turn to John 15, that's fine.

The key passage is printed for you in the bulletin, and we are going to be jumping around a little bit, but the other verses will be up on the screen as I use them.

It's been a real joy for me to get to know Lee a little bit.

I don't know how you address Lee, around here I'm Pastor Tom, so I don't know if it's Pastor Lee or not, but anyway, it's been a joy for me to get to know Lee.

And I say all that by way of introduction because I've been a believer for 42 years, and it wasn't until I assumed the pastorate up here about 8 years ago, 8 and a half years ago, that the Lord did a dynamic transformation in my life too, in the understanding of the Christian life.

And I've been preaching that and teaching that and my church family has very graciously endorsed that and I hope absorbed a lot of that in their own life as well.

To really understand what it means to live by grace.

I always thought the Christian life was to be empowered by the Holy Spirit and live for God.

And that the Christian life was something I did for God in response to his great love for me.

And in one sense that's still true, I live the Christian life for God.

But I live it in a totally different way than I ever understood before.

And that's what I'd like to share with you all this morning.

Kind of a review for those of us in my own church family.

And somewhat of a, hopefully, give you an understanding of who we are and how we live.

And the joy that we have found in grace.

And I want to just start out by addressing something those of us who are a little bit older have already done, but some of the younger people may still be wrestling with it.

The great philosophical questions of life.

Who am I?

Why am I here?

Where am I going?

What is the meaning of life?

And then we can ask that as a Christian as well.

I've now put my faith in Christ.

My sins are forgiven.

I'm born into the family of God.

What now is my purpose and meaning?

What is the point of it all?

And then the night that Jesus was betrayed, they're done at the upper room.

They're done at the last supper, what we call communion and the Lord's Supper that we remember.

They're traveling from the upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane and they pass a vineyard.

And in that passing, Jesus takes in John 15 and 16, a great time of teaching, the last great message of doctrine that we have for his disciples.

Kind of his last words.

And I think most of us relate to the fact that last words are really important.

If you know you only have a little time left, what you say to the people you want to implant something with is important.

You're hoping they get it.

And so we have in these first 11 verses of John 15, what's called the vine and the branches.

And I really think out of all the totality of the scriptures, when it comes to answering the questions, who am I?

Why am I here?

What's the meaning of my life?

As a Christian, the answer is found in these 11 verses, very simply.

And I believe if we get a handle on this foundation, we will know as we see an unbelievable joy.

There are two things here that Jesus speaks of that I'd like to highlight.

And maybe for some of us, it's a reminder.

There's something called the Westminster Confession, which the English reformers put together to both explain how they understood Christian life is to be lived and also as a catechism for their young people.

If you've never seen it, it is unbelievably detailed and unbelievably clear.

But the first point of the Westminster Confession is the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

And I think we find that in the passage that we're looking at this morning.

If you look at me either in your Bible or in the bulletin at verse 8, by this is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

The chief end of man is to glorify God and Jesus says by this is my Father glorified that you bear much fruit, bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

And then, and enjoy him forever.

Look at verse 11, these things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full.

This teaching I have just given you, this analogy between the vine and the branches, I'm giving this to you so that you'll understand how to glorify the Father, which is your purpose and meaning in life and also that you might know the richest, fullest joy possible.

And so I'd like to start with verse 8 and go into a little bit more detail and chase us around a little bit and hopefully we can all keep up.

What does it mean to glorify?

The Greek definition of glorify simply means this, to enhance the reputation of another, to enhance the reputation of another, to cause the dignity and worth of someone or something to be clearly seen, understood and acknowledged by another.

I know a couple of our people have seen it, have any of you seen the latest Indiana Jones movie?

Have you told anybody how good it is and to go see it?

Yes?

You glorified the movie.

You enhanced the reputation of the movie.

In its non-biblical sense, in its non-theological sense, in its non-doctrinal sense, if you just get down to real life, to glorify means to enhance the reputation of someone or something.

Anytime you recommend a TV program or a book or a movie or a restaurant or whatever, in that basic definition of the word, you are glorifying that entity.

And so we cause the dignity and the worth of God to be clearly seen and understood when we do something, when we glorify God, and we're going to see how to do that in just a moment.

But in essence, Jesus says, we glorify God when we bear much fruit.

Who do we glorify?

Who do we make God known to?

There's a passage of scripture that tells us this, keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, in this case non-believers, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may, on the account of your good deeds as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.

I really believe that when I'm bearing fruit, it will have an impact on the people around me.

I believe that God brings the life of Christ and the truth of Christ and the reality of God to life in other people, and we're going to see what that entails.

But even if nobody, even if nobody responds in this time frame, there will be coming a time if you and I are doing what Jesus admonishes us to do here, and we are bearing fruit, and we'll see what that fruit is in just a moment.

When Christ returns, they will have to glorify God because of what he has done in my life, in your life, and in our life as a community.

And in order to understand what it means to bear fruit, I think we have to go all the way back to the beginning.

And this is, oh, okay, wasn't supposed to do both of them at the same time, but I'm technologically challenged, so you have to let me go here.

But in Genesis 1, 26, it says, then God said, let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.

Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.

And the Hebrew word simply means a copy or a replica.

And yet it says something deeper than that.

There's another nuance to it.

It means to express the essential nature of the thing that's being copied.

To express the essential nature of the thing being copied.

And I don't know if you're blues fans or not, but downtown in Austin, that's a statue of Stevie Ray Vaughan.

I like the blues.

Stevie Ray Vaughan was one of the greatest blues guitarists that God ever put on the earth, and sadly, the Lord took him home many years ago after a concert.

But that person standing there looking at the image of Stevie Ray Vaughan is seeing a copy of Stevie Ray Vaughan.

I couldn't find an up-close-and-personal picture, but I've seen it, and it looks just like him.

So in that sense, it's an image.

It's a reflection.

It's a copy.

And as he stands there looking at that statue, does he understand the essential nature of Stevie Ray Vaughan?

No, he doesn't.

He might think he was a musician because he's holding a guitar, but even just if you didn't know who Stevie Ray Vaughan was, looking at that statue wouldn't tell you.

But it doesn't tell you anything about the essential nature of Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Doesn't tell you whether he was an introvert or an extrovert.

You know, we think he's an entertainer, he has to be an extrovert, not necessarily.

Some people who get up on the stage and perform are the shyest people when you meet them.

Was he a nice person or an unnice person?

Was he kind of happy-go-lucky or was he depressed?

We don't know anything about his essential nature.

So when we talk about being made in the image of God, we're not talking about visibly looking like God, but we were created to express the very nature of God himself.

And we'll look in just a moment and see what I think that nature really is.

But of course we know that Genesis 1 isn't the end, it's only the beginning, and we run into problems because our original parents sold us down the river as it goes.

And Jesus said this when he was talking to a group of religious people who were criticizing him and his disciples because they didn't keep all the external religious things.

Jesus said this, do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated, but the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart and those defile the man.

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

These are the things which defile the man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man.

The Bible describes what happened to us after Adam and Eve fell in a variety of ways, but Jesus was saying spiritually speaking we ended up with a heart problem.

We ended up with a heart problem.

We have the knowledge of good and evil, but in the center core of that heart we now have is a prideful selfishness that warps even the good things we know to do.

And all of these things I would offer to you, all these things are the opposite of the essential nature of God.

I would like to have you ask yourself a question this morning.

If you were in that group, that group of Jewish leaders, religious leaders, and you were in that group of disciples, when you heard Jesus talk about the heart and the need for a new heart, what do you think went on in their minds?

I personally have a conviction that a prophetic utterance came to their remembrance, a prophetic utterance where the prophet Ezekiel had prophesied that God was going to do something wonderful with this heart that was our problem.

And I believe as men who knew the Old Testament, even the disciples, the common fishermen had instructions.

I believe they knew exactly what Jesus was referring to.

And we read this in Ezekiel, then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean.

I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh and I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will be careful to observe my ordinances.

Now if you notice, there's three things there that are linked together.

I'm going to give you a new heart, I'm going to give you a new spirit, and I'm going to put my spirit within you.

Sometimes when we try to bring the Christian message down to a simple answer, that simple answer ends up being a very judicial answer.

Jesus Christ died for your sins so that you get to go to heaven when you die.

Your sins are forgiven, God can now welcome you into his presence for all eternity.

And I believe that's totally true.

But I think that, in one sense, is just the beginning of what Christ and God the Father had ordained for us.

Because God is not only interested in us spending eternity with him in heaven, he wants to get us back to what he created us to be, so that we could be truly images of him.

That was our purpose, to be able to express the essential nature of God.

And Jesus said, the problem is you have a bad heart, so my Father's going to give you a new heart.



And notice the process, then I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean and I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

That's what Jesus did on the cross when he took our sins.

And I know it's not an analogy that fits 110%, but think about a surgeon, when they're going to do surgery on us, they sprinkle all that antibiotic all over us where they're going to open us up, because they don't want the germs and the bacteria to infect us.

In one sense, God had to get the filth out of the way so he and his purity could interact with us.

And so yes, the cross is vitally important.

It is the place where our sins are totally forgiven, past, present, and future.

But it's only the beginning of what God did.

He gave you and me a new heart.

Our old heart, a heart of stone, was what?

Self-orientated, pridefully selfish.

And out of it flowed fornications and thefts and murders, and we're going to see a whole list of other things.

And so God says, I'm going to give you a new heart with new potential.

And with that new heart, I'm going to give you a new human spirit.

I'm going to give you a spirit that is drawn to me, wants to know me, hungers for me.

And in the process, I'm going to put myself, I, the God of the universe, I'm going to come and live within you in the personhood of the Holy Spirit to empower you, to manifest me in you and through you.

There's another verse from the New Testament that relates to this that I really find, whoops, I go too fast, there it is, okay, oh, I told you I was technologically challenged.

This is taken from 2 Corinthians.

This is how Paul is inspired to describe us.

He says, if therefore, if any man is in Christ, any person is in Christ, they are a new creature.

The old things passed away, behold, new things have come.

And the Greek word translated new things means something unprecedented, something never in existence before.

You and I restored to intimacy with God through the forgiveness of our sins are even different than Adam and Eve were, because God now has placed himself in us, the Holy Spirit in us.

They walk with God in the garden.

But we know there were times when God was not present with them because after they sinned, what did they do?

They heard God coming and they went and hid.

So that means in that moment in time, he wasn't physically with them.

And that will never happen to us once we've accepted Christ.

God himself resides within us forever.

We are something never in existence before.

Now in the bulletin, I put a list of things if you want to look at that and just because there's a comparison between these old things and these new things.

They're taken primarily from two passages of scripture, Galatians chapter 5 and Colossians 3.

And I believe that when you look at that list of old things, that's the essential nature of our heart of stone.

That's the essential nature of what naturally flowed out of us from that old heart that Jesus said.

And the new things are the fruit of the Spirit and the new man, the new person that God has created.

We now have the potential to be that person because we have everything we need to manifest that essential nature.

And so unlike that statue of Stevie Ray Vaughan, if I'm following the commandment of Jesus as we're going to see explained here in John 15, if I'm abiding in him, then out of me comes that essential nature of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, thankfulness,

encouragement, forgiveness.

That's what lives out of me and interacts with other people.

You know, Lee gave me a book called The Great Dance.

I don't know if he's had any of you read it.

I don't know if Lee's like me, but my people get tired of me giving them books and recommending books and all that kind of stuff.

But it was a great way, The Great Dance, the author has a wonderful way of talking about how God and his community of relationship, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, welcomes us to the great dance of relationship.

And sometimes because of our culture, we think that Christianity is a Lone Ranger existence.

God is interested in me.

But the testimony of the living God, to be conformed to his image, I have to live in relationship with others.

Because remember, God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in community, in relationship.

And so in order to be in that, to be an image and a likeness of that, I have to be in relationship where the fruit of the Spirit or the new things flow out through me in an observable way.

And when they do, in community, in relationship, then you and I are living, breathing images of the living God.

So that's what I think it means for us to enhance the reputation of God, by bearing much fruit.

Those new things, as I've been empowered by Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, those new things are the fruit that Jesus says, when you bear these, when you manifest these in relationship to the watching world and to one another, my Father's reputation is enhanced.

His dignity and worth is clearly seen, understood, and must be acknowledged by others because you are miraculously different from those people who have a heart of stone and whose essential nature produces those old things.

And then Jesus says, when you do this, when this is how you live, when this is your understanding of what your meaning and purpose in life is, then His joy will be in us and our joy will be full.

You know, I did a quick search on that phrase, my joy.

I don't know if any of you are aware of something called the treasury of scripture knowledge.

Most of us know where the concordance is, you punch in a word and it gives us places in the New and Old Testament where that word is, well, the treasury of scripture knowledge does that in the same way, except for concepts or phrases.

So I punched in my joy, the joy of Jesus.

And there's very little in the New Testament about it.

Most of it goes to one place in the New Testament and that is in John, I mean, sorry, Luke 15, where again, Jesus is being criticized.

If you're familiar with Luke 15, the religious leaders are confronting Jesus' disciples.

Why is he spending time with tax gatherers and sinners?

Why is he spending time with the wrong people?

And Jesus tells three stories, two are exactly the same, and one's a little bit different.

The first two are known as the lost coin and the lost sheep, and the other is known as the prodigal son.

And he talks about how if you have 99 sheep, but you've 100 sheep, but you have 99 safe and there's one lost, you go out and search for it until you find it.

And when you find it, what you have personal joy, and you share your joy with your friends.

And then Jesus says, there's even joy in heaven.

And so it seems to me that the joy that Jesus is talking about is the joy of restoring people to right relationship with God and to right relationship with life.

Jesus is saying when you do it, as I'm explaining it to you, then you are what you were created to be.

And I have joy because my work of salvation is total.

And you will know joy because you are now living the life that you

were created to live.

And you will know it.

And it will give you great joy.

Christ came to die for our sins.

But he also came to restore us to God, restore us to what was potentially possible, what we were created for, and he takes great joy in that.

And we will know that joy when we embrace it.

But now we got to go back in the context a little bit.

Now we got to find out the how.

I've been trying to explain the what and the why.

But now we got to explain how.

How does Jesus say this is possible?

How is it possible for me to bear much fruit?

How is it possible for those new things to flow out through me in my relationships in a miraculous way?

And so earlier in the passage he says this, abide in me and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches.

He who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit.

For apart from me you can do nothing.

Apart from me you can do nothing.

This is where the astonishment started to take place.

I thought I was filled with the Holy Spirit and I would work for God, I would do for God.

I thought the Holy Spirit enabled me to live the Christian life.

And one of the greatest freedoms I've ever found in life and enjoyed in life is when I came to the realization God did not expect me to

live the Christian life.

He expected me to manifest and experience the Christian life.

Because in the analogy, I'm not a, I'm a city boy.

I don't know much about land and growing things, but I have checked some of this out with people who are on the land and who have raised grapes.

And that is if you take a branch and separate it from the vine and stick it in the ground, it will die.

A branch in and of itself doesn't have what's necessary to draw the life-giving nutrients out of the soil.

It must be connected to a life source.

It must be connected to a vine.

In one sense, grape branches, vineyard branches do not produce grapes.

That's why Jesus says we bear fruit.

I don't become different in the sense that I become that person that is the new things.

Jesus is already that person.

And when I abide in him, when I grab onto him, like a branch grabs onto a vine, his life flows through me and there's fruit at the end, which is those new things.

Because that's what's natural for him.

And it's really interesting, there's a thing in horticulture called grafting.

You know, you can take a branch of something and graft it into a life source of another thing.

You take a vine, when a branch is grafted into a vine, the branch itself sends out a few tentacles, I know I get it right, a few tentacles to get life from the vine.

But the vine grabs hold of the branch and sends out multiple tens of fibers to grab onto that branch and draw it in so it can give it life.

I cannot live the Christian life.

I cannot bear the fruit that glorifies God, that enhances his reputation.

I can only experience that.

Because apart from Jesus, who is that?

I can't.

So my wife and I have been married 37 years.

And I know it's hard to believe, but you'll have to take it on faith.

The people who know me here in my church family know this, you'll have to, you just have to take it on faith that there are times I'm hard to live with.

Now I know that that's a surprise, but there's times I'm hard to live with.

I come home, something's rattled my cage, you know, and I'm ready to veg in front of the TV, I don't want to talk, I don't want to listen, and of course Carol is waiting for me to come home because she's had a bad day and I'm her life source and she wants me to listen.

Let me finish.

You guys interrupt Leigh, I get interrupted all the time.

So I walk in the front door and I'm wanting to veg, that's my heart, that's my passion.

And Carol needs to talk or share or get a hold of me.

So I have a fork in the road, I have a choice to make.

What do I feel?

Do I feel like I want to be a husband who loves his wife like Christ loves the church and gives himself up for her?

Do I feel like that?

No.

But can I manifest that against my feelings?

Yes.

And that's where the miracle takes place.

The miracle in relationship of experience, the love of Christ for my wife, the kindness of Christ for my wife, the patience of Christ for my wife, the forgiveness, whatever.

And that is the reality of the Christian life.

Moment by moment, day by day, week by week, whatever, every day we're put in relational situations where that flesh, those old things are crying out, this is your right, be this.

And the new things are whispering out of that new heart we have in that new spirit.

This is who you are, this is what you're supposed to be, this is what you're supposed to bear.

And if you'll abide in Christ, his reality will flow through you.

And that's the choice we make moment by moment.

And that's the Christian life.

And when I'm doing that, when I'm abiding in Christ, all the commandments of the New Testament become real through me.

Now sometimes there's a debate in grace about what grace means in relationship to law, what grace means in relationship to performance.

Some people say that grace means I don't have to do anything.

And in one sense, that's true, I don't do anything to be saved, I don't do anything.

But in another sense, it's not.

The New Testament is filled with commandments.

Now in the Greek tense, they're called imperatives, but basically they're commandments.

I just quoted one, I'm commanded as a husband to love my wife as Christ loved the church.

Grace doesn't give me the option to say, I don't feel like that today.

God doesn't care.

Maybe God doesn't, but my wife would.



But there's tons of them, expectations.

Grace is not about whether I fulfill those obligations.

Grace is how I fulfill them.

Legalism tells me I have to suck it up and do that and be that myself.

Grace tells me I can choose to get life from Jesus.

I can choose to let his life flow in and through me, and I will be that person.

I will manifest that person.

It doesn't mean the commandments aren't fulfilled.

It means that I don't fulfill them.

Jesus fulfills them through me.

You think any one of those commandments is too hard for Jesus?

You think any one of those commandments Jesus doesn't do naturally out of the essential nature of himself?

Of course not.

Lee gave me a copy of Plain Truth magazine to read.

And in that article, in that magazine, there was an article on law and grace, and I'm reading it, and I thought, holy cow, this author is plagiarizing a fellow that I know by the name of Steve McVeigh.

Then I looked at the title, and it was Steve McVeigh's article.

But Steve McVeigh puts it in a way that I think is best.

When you see a commandment in the New Testament, husbands, love your wives, servants, serve your master, when you see a commandment in the New Testament, is that an obligation that you must perform, or is that an opportunity to experience Christ?

So we embrace the commandments.

Grace doesn't take away from the commandments.

We embrace them because they're opportunities to experience the miracle of Christ as life, to bear the new things, to enhance the reputation of God.

Now I can't get it to move.

Oh yeah, okay.

I did move.

At the top, Jesus begins, remember now, they're going from the upper room to the garden of Gethsemane.

They're passing this vineyard.

Jesus is teaching them these truths, and he starts out by saying this way, I am the vine, the true vine, and my father is the vinedresser.

Every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away, and every branch that bear fruits, he prunes it, that it may bear more fruit.

You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.

And this is the most liberating part of it all in all.

What's the responsibility of a vinedresser?

Responsibility of a vinedresser is to produce grapes, rich, full, succulent grapes.

I'm not even in charge of what's taking place.

God the Father is in charge.

He is going to do everything he can to get me to be an abiding branch in Christ so that I can bear the fruit of God's essential nature so that I will glorify him and know full, rich joy.

God's in charge.

I don't have to worry about it, I don't have to work at it, I just have to relax and let God be God in my life.

And it says, every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away, and that's really not the best Greek translation.

The nuance of the word is, every branch in me that does not bear fruit, my father lifts up.

And in a true vineyard, a branch that has great potential might come away from the trestle and get down in the dirt and can't get the life rays of the sun and it won't bear anything.

So the vinedresser comes along and picks it up and gets it back into the sun so it can bear it.

And I think the analogy is, God loves each one of us.

He knows the great potential he has for you and for me and for each of us.

He's not some ogre waiting for us to make a mistake, to step on us.

He's a loving father that wants the very best for us.

And so he's going to do whatever's necessary to get us back.

If we've had a tough childhood, maybe a broken home, maybe an abusive parent, whatever, physically, sexually, emotionally, the Father's going to bring us to a healing of that.

If we are struggling economically, the Father we're going to see is using that to bring us to a full, rich, grabbing hold of Christ.

The Father is in charge, a loving Father.

And then it says, he prunes every branch that did bear fruit so it'll bear more.

And how do we bear fruit?

We bear fruit by abiding.

So if we're only bearing a little, it only means we're abiding a little, right?

So what the Father's going to do is he's going to bring circumstances into our life that are so overwhelming that we can't solve them.

So that we come to embrace exactly what he says, apart from me, you can do nothing.

And there's a beautiful biblical example, I think, in 2 Corinthians chapter 12.

Do you remember Paul's prayer about the thorn in the flesh?

Don't know really what that thorn in the flesh is, but he says, I prayed three times.

And what's God's answer?

My grace is sufficient for you.

My power matures or is made perfect in your weakness.

What is Paul saying?

God gave me something that would manifest my limitations so that using my terms from this morning, I will be forced to abide in Christ.

Now let go of any sense of ability on my own to accomplish this.

So whatever Satan throws at us, all the things that Satan tries to use to discourage us, loss of job, health problems, marital problems, relational problems, parent-child problems, whatever.

We embrace them because Satan is trying to destroy us and God takes those same things and draws us to be an abiding branch because we realize I can't stand against this myself.

It's so refreshing and relaxing to realize that God's in control.

It's God's responsibility.

I just have to be willing to relate.

I just have to be willing to learn.

I just have to be willing to choose to abide.

And there's one other thing going back to verse eight says, by this is my father glorified that you bear much fruit and prove to be disciples of mine.

Now a disciple is more than one who embraces head knowledge, a disciple is one who lives out life the way the teacher or the master lived out his or her life.

And so Jesus is saying, my father's the vine dresser, you're the branch, I'm the vine.

If you abide in me, you'll bear much fruit.

And if you do so, you'll prove to be disciples of mine.

So what does that say about Jesus?

There's one verse of scripture that I think relates very positively to this.

In Peter's great Pentecostal day sermon, he says this, men of Israel, listen to these words, Jesus, the Nazarene, a man attested to you by

God with miracles and wonders and signs, now catch this, which God performed through him in your presence.

Remember a disciple is one who lives life or follows the pattern of life, lives the same way as the teacher or the master did.

And I believe this verse is teaching us that we are to be branches abiding in Christ as he was a branch abiding in his father.

Now I like to put it this way, you may agree or disagree, I no longer believe that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in the sense that he did that out of his deity.

He was an abiding branch in his father and the power of his father lived through him and rose Lazarus from the dead.

Because see what it says, miracles and wonders and signs, which God did.

And Philippians 2 says that Jesus gave up equality with God as a thing to be grasped.

And he gave us his place in heaven from all eternity and came to earth as a human being and became a bondservant, he chose to live the Christian life the same way that he expects you and I to live the Christian life.

He didn't live the Christian life out of his deity, he lived the Christian life out of his humanity with the father flowing through him.

And he was a human being just like you and I are, who manifested the reality of God, the essential nature of God.

He was an image of God as he yielded to his father.

And you and I have the same choice.

And to me that answers the questions, who am I?

Why am I here?

What's the meaning and purpose of my life?

I may be a doctor, I may be a lawyer, I may be a business person, I may be a computer programmer, I may be a mother, whatever I am flows out of the essence of who I am.

And sure there are great things to do out there, there are great places to minister and bring to that light alive.

But I like a phrase that says, I'm called to be something before I'm called to do something.

I'm called to be an abiding branch in Christ, to bear the fruit, which is the essential nature of God, to enhance God's reputation.

So if I'm a mother, and I have other mothers as friends, and I do the carpool, and I do all the rest of it, and I'm manifesting Christ, then there will be a kindness and a gentleness and a patience about me that is miraculous, that people may notice here, but they will glorify God at that day of visitation at the end.

If I'm a businessman, and my integrity because of my faith and trust in Christ means I don't have to lie, cheat, steal, whatever, that testimony by the power of Christ enhances God's reputation.

If not here, on the day of visitation, and just extend that out to everything you and I do every day.

If I abide, I bear fruit, essential nature of God is manifested, and His reputation is enhanced.

And I'm a disciple, because I'm living the same way that He lived.

And it's a miracle.

Let's pray.

Father, I thank you that I don't have to live the Christian life.

I thank you that I can experience the Christian life as I abide in Christ.

And Father, there's a lot of other things to talk about what happens when I sin, and why do I sin, and all those other things that are beyond the scope of our time limitation this morning.

But I pray that each one of us can leave this place this morning rejoicing, rejoicing in what you've done.

Not only the forgiveness of our sins, but the restoration of who I am.

And I pray, Father, that we will embrace, not arrogantly, but humbly the fact that we are something unprecedented.

We are something that's never been in existence before.

We are a human being, in-dwelt by the living God, who is capable, as we abide, of manifesting the very nature of God in all of our

relationships to your glory.

And as a result, we will know joy beyond belief.

Father, we leave this place, and it's a war out there.

The enemy wants to destroy us, discourage us.

He wants to dim the light that we are.

And he'll throw everything at us he can.

And yet at the same time, you are bigger than he is, smarter than he is, more powerful than he is.

And if we embrace those things, and understand that you have given him permission to throw those things at us, so it will draw us closer to abiding, draw us closer to a clear understanding of apart from Jesus, I can do nothing.

We can rejoice, even in the difficulties and trials.

So Father, we thank you that Family Christian Center could be with us here this morning.

Thank you for what you're doing in their lives as a community of faith.

Bless them.

Use them to your glory.

May they be individually and as families and corporately bright shining lights to your glory, to the enhancement of your reputation.

In Jesus' name, amen.

[End Transcription]