

Between Good Friday and Easter Sunday there was a whole day that often goes forgotten. To jump quickly from Good Friday to Easter Sunday's celebration is to forget an entire day. Saturday. A day where the disciples were thinking as we sometimes do today: *it's not supposed to be like this.*

There's a power in worshipping on the Saturday before Easter. Jesus is risen indeed. Yesterday, today, and forever. Yet there's sorrow and grief. Pain and brokenness. We're an Easter people living in a cosmic Saturday. That takes faith- faith that Sunday came for those disciples, and a Sunday is coming for us.

But the real gamechanger of Easter doesn't just deal with death's defeat. It's the arrival of life. ETERNAL life.

Easter and salvation for many has become about Jesus punching our ticket into Heaven. We too will step out of our graves and ascend. But this perspective by itself doesn't effect the land of the living as much as the end of our living. And when we've punched our ticket into Heaven, we clock out on Earth.

Eternal life isn't just about living forever in Heaven.

Eternal life starts now.

We think of eternal life on the length spectrum, but eternal life is also about depth of life we experience now. Eternal life in its essence isn't quantitative. It's qualitative.

And the chief quality of eternal life: **relationship with Jesus Christ.**

Jesus says in **John 17:3** - *Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

Because eternal life isn't tied to a **place**, it's a relationship with a **person** – Jesus Christ

Eternal life isn't defined by Jesus as a transaction in the future.

Jesus defines it as a relationship in the present.

Eternal life is in its essence a daily, moment by moment relationship with the Almighty Creator Savior King of the Universe – into eternity.

But to Israel at the time of Jesus, that would have seemed like a lofty aspiration.

The temple they knew had a **veil** that separated the commoners from entering into God's presence. This was by God's own discretion and design.

Yet at the moment of Christ's death, what does the Gospels tell us? That same veil was torn top to bottom, as if from Heaven down to Earth, torn by God's own hands.

And because Jesus came down and died, we can now have relationship with God in a new way.

This is eternal life: that we know the one true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He sent.

That means it's open season on eternal life.

Or as the philosopher and theologian Dallas Willard would put it:

"Eternal life is now in session."

The veil in the Temple was torn on Easter opening the door to eternal life, but there are often veils in our mind that keep us from walking through it.

Those veils are perspectives and misconceptions that mislead us.
These next few weeks will dig into nothing but eternal life and salvation.
The work of Easter. Why Jesus came. And what he said about it.

Because eternal life is relationship with God.
And how we think about Jesus affects our relationship with him.
It affects how you relate to him and what you receive from him.

JOHN 15:1-17

“I am the true vine, you are the branches”

Context of John 15 in the moment.

They had just had the Last Supper. Jesus takes them on a walk. This walk would take them past arguably Jerusalem’s greatest monument – the temple. They would pass it as they walked from this upper room in Jerusalem to the Garden of Gethsemane, this urban garden at the base of the Mount of Olives where he would soon be arrested.

Archaeologists and historians tell us with confidence that on this walk there would have been a point where vineyards full of grapevines would have been on one side, and on the other side there would have been the entrance to the temple with its giant golden vine adorning it. This vine made of gold was so big that the historian Josephus said that some of the grape clusters in the sculpture were the height of a man.

It’s HERE that many assume Jesus opened with his words in John 15:1 **“I am the true vine.”**
We think- *OK, give Jesus some points for a nice word picture...*
But this analogy and statement would have been explosive in Jesus’ day.

In the Old Testament **Psalm 80** gives us this picture of God’s relationship with the Israelites:
“You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it ... and it took deep root and filled the land”

Over time the vine became the patriotic symbol of Israel – much the same way the Eagle is a patriotic American symbol, the rising sun is a Japanese one, or the lion is an English one.

It was for this reason that the massive golden vine adorned the entrance to the Temple.
If you weren’t an Israelite and you wanted to worship the God of this Temple- the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob- you had to take on their culture and customs, from dietary restrictions to circumcision.

But ultimately the Israelites themselves failed miserably.

Isaiah 5:1-4 says: Now, you people of Jerusalem and Judah, you judge between me and my vineyard. What more could I have done for my vineyard that I have not already done? ***When I expected sweet grapes, why did my vineyard give me bitter grapes?***

Jesus says these words – **“I am the true vine.”**

Not just the vine. The *true* vine. Which means there are counterfeit ones.

In our culture how many habits, products, relationships, or alike do we attach ourselves to, thinking it will give us life? And mind you- it will... for a season. It's so many lesser vines keep us disconnected from Him – the one true vine that gives eternal life.

But for the listeners of Jesus' time, he was saying don't attach yourself to a nation or rituals or a people. Attach yourself to a person - Jesus Christ. Jesus was saying that the place of rootedness was no longer a place. No longer a people. But a person. Jesus.

God's kingdom wasn't and isn't about the expansion of territory. It's about capturing hearts. And we often talk about Christ in our heart when it comes to salvation for this reason.

One of our culture's most common ways of talking about salvation and stepping into eternal life is that we **“invite Christ into our hearts.”**

Christ comes into in my life. That's not heretical or unbiblical. But unchecked, this perspective on salvation can translate to:

He comes into MY life... as if he's a branch added to our vine. He takes up a room in our house. The shotgun seat of my car. I keep living my life and he tags along.

And yes, the idea of Jesus in us is in the Bible. It's right here in John 15.

Thought it's worth noting, each time Jesus speaks to being in us in John 15, it immediately follows and it tied to us being in Him.

Elsewhere in scripture we see that the idea of “Jesus in my heart” is used once.

The phrase “Christ in me?” It is used five time by Paul. **FIVE.**

But do you know how many times Paul talks about believers being **IN CHRIST?**

165. That's one hundred and sixty five.

Do you know why I think this would have been such a resounding reality for Paul?

Think about his perspective shattering, supernatural encounter with Christ as he was on his way to imprison, persecute, and even kill followers of Christ.

What does Christ say?

“Saul, Saul, Why are you persecuting me?”

Not why are you persecuting my people.

Not why are you persecuting my church, the people who worship me.

No - Why are you persecuting **ME.**

This moment didn't just reveal Jesus to Paul.

It revealed something profound about the depth of life we're supposed to have **in HIM.**

Like a branch to the vine, when we unify ourselves to Him, we become a part of HIM.

Jesus gives us this picture of the vine. Abiding in him, the vine. Remaining in him, the vine. How does this speak to eternal life – knowing God and Jesus Christ who He sent? How does this speak to how I live my life tomorrow?

CONTINUOUS

I recently got a new phone – not because I'm one of those people that needs the newest model. The problem with my old phone was it was so old that the connection was broken. It would plug in but wouldn't always connect a charge. If it wasn't at just the right angle I'd come back not to a charged phone, but a dead one.

Spiritually speaking - how often do we settle into the unideal... where our connection with Christ is on and off again. How often do we feel dead because of it, rather than full of life?

Cell phones... our Roomba... it's a gamechanger. Cordless is great.

We think, man everything should be cordless!
We settle into a version **Cordless Christianity**.

We picture our relationship with Jesus as plugging into the Word, prayer, or church every now and again before returning to whatever else we were doing. Totally compartmentalized. And we think that's what will sustain us. But often- like my old phone- we find ourselves waking up without life.

Jesus doesn't talk about doing just enough for sustaining.
He talks about remaining. He talks about abiding.

Vs 4 & 5 - *Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.*

He's saying the same thing twice. He's trying to make it abundantly clear and unmistakable. Apart from him- unplugged from him- we can do absolutely nothing. Oh you'll be active. You'll produce *things*. You'll be a branch that looks alive. You'll have leaves. But you won't produce **fruit**.

Vs 7 compares remaining in Christ to remaining in his word.
"If you remain in me and my words remain in you"

80% of American who check the box for Christianity don't open their Bible outside of Church. We have misconceptions misleading us because we've all but misplaced our Bibles.

"Abiding" sounds so poetic. But it's not complex. It's simple. Let God tell you something. And then tell God something. Read until something checks your heart. Pray about it. Then go do something about it. ***"Abiding"*** doesn't need to be complex. But it needs to be continuous.

The context of continuous connection: the Bride of Christ. The Church.

When Jesus is risen, the gospel of John in chapter 20 tells us Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb. It's empty and she's distraught thinking somebody had taken Jesus' body. When she turned to leave she saw someone standing there. That someone was Jesus. But due to tears in her eyes or a head bowed in mourning, we don't really know— it says she didn't recognize him. ***“She thought he was the gardener.”***

John's gospel is the one gospel of the four that gives us the analogy of the vine and branches. And it is John's gospel that gives us this detail – *she thought he was the gardener.*

The name for a full time gardener is named traditionally in English? A **husbandman**.
KJV of John 15:1 – *“I am the vine, and my father is the husbandman.”*
Who is the **Bride** in scripture? The Church.

The Church is the context for this continuous connection to the vine, as directed by our gardener. The last verse of the passage we read tonight, the culmination of this vine analogy
“Love one another”

And again, we see Jesus say this twice in the same passage because He wants to make it clear:
“Love one another”

There are approximately **59** “one another”s in the New Testament.
Some of them, including this one, from the lips of Jesus himself.
You can't “one another” in the mirror. You can't love in solitude.
Where do we walk these out practically? Christ's bride. The Church.

Tendrils on branches of a vine will reach and extend... we reach up toward God, the true vine. Jesus implies if we turn upward to God in love, we'll turn outward in love much the same way. But the bend of my flesh is inward. Me, myself, and I.
Like vine tendrils that don't latch onto anything, we curve in on ourselves again and again.

We've talked Heaven and salvation.
Hell and damnation is nothing more than turning in on yourself into eternity.

The culture and climate of Hell in C.S. Lewis' Great Divorce isn't defined by fire and brimstone, but the absence of anything beyond this inward bend toward self. No thought to others.
Imprisoned in self, willfully, into eternity.

It's like C.S. Lewis's famous quote:
It is not a question of God "sending us" to hell. In each of us there is something growing, which will BE hell unless it is nipped in the bud.

Where God's chief concern isn't a distant crossing into Heaven, but getting Heaven into us now.
Not just relocation. Transformation.

Like vine tendrils that don't latch onto anything, we are prone to curve in on ourselves again and again. But God the husbandman, the gardener, knows how to grow us.

So like a support for the vine to grow on, He gives us the Church.
The Church is God's gift to us- this family of faith.

We're born with this perspective that the world is about us. My needs.
It's family where we learn the world is about us – and we begin to operate in this perspective of “one another.”

The family of faith does the same for us as we walk out that and those 59 “one anothers”

ORGANIC

It's not rote routine. It's not a checklist. It's not mechanical. It's natural. It's relational.
When love for your spouse becomes a checklist and rote routine, you're in trouble.
It's the same with our relationship with Jesus.

Jesus came into the religious atmosphere of his day and quotes Isaiah when he says:
These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship is a farce...

He was quoting the prophet Isaiah who defined this farcical worship as **rote routine**.
Jesus was saying sure they talk a good talk and say the right things, but they aren't abiding in me. They're far from me!

We see in Jesus' words that fruit is essential. Character. Obedience.
But we don't focus on the fruit. That's the trap the Pharisees fell into.
They focused so much on religious rituals and rote routine that Jesus says they forgot what God had placed at the center- things like love and justice.

Focus on the roots. Focus on what's at the center. Focus on abiding.
The focus is on abiding IN Christ. The fruit is a natural, organic byproduct.

A life where fruit is the product of being **IN Christ** is a gamechanger.
No longer is the goal doing something **FOR Christ**,
pausing to operate spiritually from time to time as we navigate the secular or mundane.

Instead of life seemingly disconnected activities and tasks, some full of purpose and some not, some spiritual and some not... it all is unified when we live in union with Christ.

Responsibilities that seemed like obstacles to a godly life are in fact the very place Jesus meets us.

I'd do more things FOR Christ if it weren't for _____.

But when you do all things IN Christ...

When you parent, you do it in Christ.

When you work 9-5, you do it in Christ.

When you face turmoil or suffering, you do it in Christ.

When you celebrate wins, you do it in Christ.

And as you walk in this awareness, living connected continuously instead of compartmentalized, Christianity, the fruit is organic.

Salvation isn't about entering the gates of Heaven one day, or something we experience after we die. It's about allowing Jesus' eternal life to saturate our lives bit by bit, day by day.

Remaining in Christ.

Abiding in the vine.

As you celebrate Easter tomorrow, may you remember that when the stone was rolled away and Jesus stepped out of the grave, he stepping into a garden.

And when Mary ran into him she **“thought He was the gardener.”**

But may you see that this is not just as a simple mistake recorded in Scripture.

No, this is also a prophetic revelation.

God IS the gardener.

Jesus IS the vine. And in him, abiding in him, we have eternal life.

This is the door that was thrown open on Easter.

Eternal life is to know God, and Jesus Christ who He sent.

We can step into this relationship. Knowing Him.

May we know God as our gardener,

And Jesus Christ as the vine we abide in.

How we think about God affects our relationship with him.

May we relate to him by abiding in Him, and receive from him life.