



CHRISTIAN CRUSADERS

7401 UNIVERSITY AVE., CEDAR FALLS, IOWA 50613
(319) 277-0924

INFO@CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG
WWW.CHRISTIANCRUSADERS.ORG

The Great Hope, Part 2

John 15

"I am 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 does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'

"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.

The great hope for people that we've been talking about in this discipleship series is that they would come to know Christ and begin this journey. But it doesn't end there. It moves forward from there into growing in that relationship with Christ.

We want them to grow in Christ, to flourish in him, to find more and more life in him. We hope this because this life is just a warm-up. Really, we're just passing through. We had a ceremony in here yesterday for a lady who sat right back there last Sunday, went home, had heart troubles, and died. She didn't see that coming. We didn't see it coming. But she has stepped out of the brevity of this life into eternity and a deepening relationship with Christ, which she was doing.

It helps prepare people for the real game that's coming, not just the warm-up here. It helps people be prepared for the glory that will be revealed in us. Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth and said, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard. No mind can conceive what God has prepared for those who love him." But what great tragedy awaits those who remain separated from God for all eternity. Growing in Christ helps prepare us in relationship with him, helps prepare us for eternity.

I don't know if you've seen this graph before, but most of you probably have. It's a graph that just basically pictures, in simple form, eternity.

My grandchildren came to me this past week and they said—they call me Diesel—they said, "Diesel, where did God come from? Who created Jesus?" Those are good questions. If any of you would like to answer them, I will connect you with my grandchildren.

We don't really know. Where did God come from? He's the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. God, Jesus, and the Spirit were there at creation, but they were there before that. And when the time of creation and this phase we're in is over, they will still be there. They're the same yesterday, today, forever. They're the source of all things. God is there.

The book of Romans tells us that since the beginning of creation, in the beginning of time, God's invisible qualities, his divine nature, the fact that he is, is clearly seen through what has been created. If you can look around and think there's not a designer, someone who initiated all this, someone who perfectly laid all this out, then you're confused. It says human beings are without excuse, believing in the existence of God. To be an atheist, to claim to be an atheist, is to work to suppress this truth that screams at us through creation.

God is there. Always has been, always will be. The 3 in 1. One God, now and forevermore. Eternity past. Eternity future. God has set eternity in the hearts of men and women.

We know intrinsically there's more. There's so much more than what we see right here. Yes, there's a building here, a nice building to worship in. Yes, we have nice vehicles that we drive. Many of us have nice homes and beds where we lay our head. Not everybody in the world has that. But friends, all of this is fading away. It's temporary. We are just passing through like strangers in a strange land. This world is not our home. There's something more that God has prepared for people. That's much better than a fallen world. And a relationship with Christ helps warm a person up for what's coming.

If we add ourselves on this graph, it might look like this. One little dot in history in the context of time, certainly after creation. But there was a long time before creation, eternity outside of time. And there we sit. Seventy or eighty years if we have strength, maybe up to 120. But we're preparing for what lies ahead here, friends.

And this is why Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth and said, "Our struggles here, the challenges we face, they're light and momentary compared to what lies ahead, light and momentary compared to the glory that will be revealed to those of us that know him."

We want to help people be ready. So let us, Paul said, fix our eyes not on what is seen. See, the whole world is trying to get us to buy into a love of the things of this world. It's spending millions and billions of dollars to get you and I to connect with the physical and the temporary pleasures of this life.

But God's Word cuts through all of that. It says, "Lift your eyes to the unseen, the things we cannot see. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Turn. Paul, discipling young Timothy, said this to him. First Timothy, chapter four, verse nine: "This is a trustworthy saying." You can trust this. You can count on it. You can build your life on it. It deserves full acceptance. You should buy into this one. Lock this one in, Timothy.

Here's what he said: "Have nothing to do with godless myths, false stories in the world, old wives' silly tales about life, reincarnation, new age spirituality, demonic insights, tarot cards, Ouija boards, false ideas about life. Have nothing to do with them. Get the old, old story, Timothy, the one God has revealed to us. Buy into that story. Train yourself to be godly. Discipline yourself around what God has revealed. For physical training is of some value. But discipleship, spiritual training, has value for all things, holding promise for this life and the life to come."

The encouragement of discipleship is not just a neat idea, friends. It is a judgment based on the Scriptures to encourage each other to do what matters most. Train ourselves spiritually so that we're prepared for eternity. And then also, we can benefit from it in this life as spiritual training strengthens our capacity to weather the storms that we face in this world, to be strong in the face of the resistance in this world of evil and heartache and pain and suffering and even death.

Spiritual strength supersedes physical strength over the course of a lifetime. Physical strength fades away even if we train it and discipline it. But spiritual strength can grow and surge and grow and surge and get stronger year after year after year. It is an investment that has no end.

Train yourselves to be godly.

Jesus, encouraging his disciples with these things, said to them, John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have resistance, you'll have trouble, you'll have challenges. But take heart," he said. "I have overcome the world. I've overcome it."

John would write, "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world." In him we are more than conquerors through all the challenges that life will throw at us.

The eyes of the Lord look to and fro across the earth, looking for those who are disciplining themselves towards him. Their hearts are devoted to him. Why? What's he looking for? He's looking for people whose hearts are inclined towards him, that he could strongly support them, empower them, strengthen them.

The famous verse, Isaiah 40:31: "They that wait upon the Lord," spend time with him, reach to him, connect with him, discipline themselves in spiritual disciplines, become his disciples. Those people will mount up with wings like eagles. They'll run and not grow weary. They'll walk and not faint. Though a righteous man falls seven times, he will rise again.

We want people to grow in Christ and the purification of their souls and their walks with him, so they can be prepared for all eternity. They can face the challenges of this life with more fortitude, more spiritual strength, more spiritual tenacity from the power of the living Christ. And then also so the deep purpose of our lives, their lives, can be revealed to us, and then we can live out that purpose in his supernatural strength.

This takes us to our gospel text, Jesus saying, "I'm the vine. I'm the source. I'm the one from whom all good things flow. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit."

It's why we're here, friends, to bear spiritual fruit. "This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

I have a graph on the screen, and some people in our church family are going through the book *Dust to Dust* by Jen Wilkin. And in it, she talks about what it was like before we rebelled against God and sin entered the world.

And she uses this graph to describe what it was like. Adam and Eve would give birth to children if they hadn't sinned. The body and the soul would mature and there would be no end to our life here on the earth. I don't even think we can comprehend what that would be like. But because we rebelled against God, the graph has changed a little bit. If you go to the next picture, you'll see that the soul does live on forever. But now, because of a rebellion against God, our body begins to die.

And what we're trying to do here in the time that God put us here on the earth is simply respond to his call to love each other and to do that, to disciple each other, to grow in Christ, and starting to disciple little children in our midst so they might know Christ, grow in Christ, be strengthened for the challenges they'll face in this world.

And all of us are here now. We're in one service with children in the service, so they experience what we're experiencing. And we're so thankful. I don't know if you've noticed it, but they're pretty quiet. They're pretty dialed in. And we want them to taste and see that the Lord is good.

I don't know if you can feel what it was like when you were younger, sitting in church with your parents, but I remember that so vividly. That was part of my discipleship.

And then we want to keep moving as they grow and mature and they become, you know, junior high, high school. And we want to disciple them. College, young parents, single people out in the world. We

want them to grow strong in their faith in Christ, surging in hope and being a light in the world. This is the hope of our world.

And then as they go a little farther in, and the curse of sin starts to level out the maturity of the body and they start to transform towards aging, this is where I'm at, friends. A little over the hill. I've gone over the crescendo. I'm 58 years old now. I might be right at the peak of the hill if I live to 116. Otherwise, I'm over it.

But regardless, we want those people, as the body starts to weaken, to be okay with it. To be strong in Christ, to be hopeful, carried along through the aging process.

And then as people crescendo down towards the doorway of death into eternity, we want there—and I just say this for you elderly people in here—we want your spiritual life to surge. We want your wisdom to be passed down to those that are just starting. We don't want to argue over preferences, opinions. We want to do what Christ has told us to do. Disciple each other. Build each other up. Strengthen each other in the faith. Love each other with sincere and pure hearts. Being patient with each other, forgiving one another, long-suffering together so that God is pleased and we abide with him.

And then somehow fruit starts to grow. Internally, we're more and more alive in him. And externally, he multiplies his love in more and more hearts.

Now let me ask you a question. What price are you willing to pay to be a part of this mission? What conveniences are you willing to give up to live the very purpose of life? What hinders you from selling out to the Great Commission?

Friends, this life is short. Eternity is very, very long. What we want for people is for them to flourish in God. That's why the image is trees, that people will grow rooted and strong in God. And it will be evident in how they live, the fruit of their lives.

"Blessed is the one who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his ways, his being, his presence, day and night. That person will be like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do..."

Multiply those who have ears. Let them hear.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you again for the opportunity to freely sit in a place here in this nation and seek your face. Forgive us when we take your ways, your presence, the offering of your Son, in a trivial manner.

Father, you have said in your Word, we all stumble in many things, and you know that. But your mercies and your grace is new every morning.

I pray for those of us who have been casual with you. I pray for that spirit of repentance to fall upon us, that you would humble us and draw us back to you in a spirit of love, kindness, and mercy, and then fuel us with a spiritual fire and a spiritual tenacity that can come only from you.

And then, Father, I want to pray right now for any who don't know you and haven't come to the knowledge of your Son. I pray that you would, in your kindness as well, draw them into a loving relationship with you, made available by the work of Jesus on the cross, dying for their sins and their shame as well.

Help them come to the knowledge of your Son and faith, and cleanse them from their sin, and lift their shame and help them walk in your light.

We pray all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.