

**Sermon Series: “Good News for Life”**  
**“The Importance of Knowing Our Place”**  
**Pastor Norwood N. “Woody” Hingle III, Ph.D.**  
**Sunday, April 25, 2021**

Sometimes we get confused in life and forget our place, and it can cause confusion and tension. E.g., I recall when I was in elementary school we used to have a long line to wait for our food, and sometimes people in the back would get impatient and see a friend ahead of them, so they would try this smooth move—would tap the friend’s shoulder and ask if they could skip in line, and then they would in turn allow the person who let them cut in to skip in front of them. So, all seemed good, right? Well, except for those like me behind them! They needed to know their proper place, and cutting in line was not it. I recall that at times my Dad had to remind me of my proper place in my relationship to him as I was growing up. E.g., once he asked me to do some yard work on a Sunday afternoon after church, and of course I would much rather be out playing with my friends; so as he was lying in bed about to take a nap he was instructing me on all he wanted me to do, and being pretty frustrated I said to him, “Easier said than done!”, and he rose from bed and said, “What?!” as though I was giving him a disrespectful remark— which I was— so I came back with a much more respectful answer; let’s just say it was a helpful reminder of my place— he was the Dad, and I was under his authority. Sometimes we need to be reminded of our proper place in our relationship with God. Jesus helps us out in today’s passage.

READ John 15:1-11 (p. 109)

**CONTEXT:** Jesus has just given the disciples some valuable parting words. He tells them that even though He is leaving them, the Holy Spirit, the Paraklete, would teach them and remind them of all He taught them. He would leave His peace with them which the world cannot give. And they should rejoice at His leaving, for the Father is greater than He as the functionally subordinate incarnate Son who was about to be crucified.

READ vv 1,4-8. “The place of Jesus’ disciples is to know that He is the vine, the source of life, and they are the branches that depend on Him for life and bearing fruit. Cf. Psalm 80:8-19; Isaiah 5:1-7; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 4:13.” The image of a vine in relationship with God is in the Old Testament of Israel as the vine, a vine that often disappointed God; in our passage Jesus represents the true Israel as the vine, what the vine is supposed to be. It is important to note that in v 1 and v 5 when Jesus says, “I am the vine” He is emphatic about the “I”— i.e., “I Myself”! And in v 5 the “you” is also emphatic— “you [plural] are the branches”. E.g., I am reminded of the Keith Green song “He’ll Take Care of the Rest”, where he emphasizes, “He is the vine, you are the branch! He’d love to get you through it if you give Him a chance! Just keep doing your best, and pray that it’s blessed, and Jesus takes care of the rest!” So, what does it mean to be in a relationship with Jesus where He is the vine and we are the branch? There are two basic meanings here, as can be seen from the two verbs Jesus emphasizes. The first verb is “to remain”. The verb μένω (to remain, abide) occurs 10 times in verses 4-11. READ vv 7 and 10. Remaining in Jesus like a branch in the vine means to keep His commandments, to obey Him. We are reminded here of 14:15, “If you love Me, My commandments you will keep”. Notice that Jesus is here speaking to His disciples not about Him being their Savior, but rather His being their *Lord*. E.g., I recall watching a video of Keith Green this week in an

interview from 1982 shortly before he died in what looked like a Christian version of The Tonight Show, and he was explaining that even though he was a Christian singer, he was also a preacher, but he did not want to be like the preachers he'd seen— those who preach about God wants you to have a good life, be happy, get wealthy— a preacher who is kind of like a personal life coach. Rather, he wanted to be a preacher who emphasized what was not being emphasized— Jesus' Lordship, because Keith Green could see forty years ago that is what the Church needed to hear. And this is still true today. E.g., I recall a young woman who is a Christian singer who has become very popular in the Christian and secular audiences was asked whether she thought the practice of homosexuality was wrong before God, and I can imagine she had visions immediately in her brain of losing millions of dollars and popularity if she answered the biblical position, and a bit of an uncomfortable feeling if she compromised, so in her answer she compromised— she answered she had too many friends who were homosexuals, and stated eventually, "I cannot say one way or another. I am not God". Being a branch in Jesus the vine also means bearing fruit. The verb φέρω (to bear) occurs six times in vv 2-11. Bearing fruit involves the Holy Spirit making us new— as in the fruits of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. E.g., one of the big areas today for young men and older men is the area of pornography, and I know of a guy who regularly seeks accountability in that area with other Christian men. Bearing fruit also means sharing the gospel and bringing others to Christ. E.g., I was talking with a Christian young man who had not grown up in the church recently about why he despised Christianity for a while and what led him to seek out Christ, and he answered the hypocrisy among those who called themselves Christians— that they were the ones who professed Christ and then would go out and party with him and others; and what drew him to Christ was seeing Christianity sincerely lived out.

READ vv 2-3. “The Father, as the vinegrower, will discern the state of the branches, either for removal or pruning. Cf. Ezekiel 15:1-8.” In Ezekiel 15 God states that a vine by itself is good for nothing— you cannot make anything out of its wood, and it does not serve well as a peg on which to hang something! That is what Israel as an unfruitful vine is to God. And that is what an unfaithful disciple is to Jesus— such a branch, such a “disciple” will be removed by the Father come judgement day. What is interesting, and somewhat unexpected, is that Jesus says the Father will take those faithful disciples and prune them. Jesus says His words to them, His teaching. Have you ever been pruned? E.g., I recall reading about a woman on the mission field who told God that she could go but not to places where there were lizards and rural areas like that, and God called her to go to a nation in Africa where there were such lizards, and the Lord taught her to die to herself and live to Him, and God helped her overcome her fear. E.g., I recall a few months before I was to get married in 1989, I was interviewed for ordination in The UMC and I was asked if I would perform an infant baptism, and I said I could not, and the decision was made to postpone my ordination for a year; I was troubled, especially since it meant I would have to stay in a job in a small office where I worked with some people who were very gossipy; so I had to trust the Lord and be thankful for the job I did have; about a week later, by God’s grace, I received a phone call where I was told I could serve two churches if I wanted to during the next year while I worked through the issue of infant baptism; the Lord taught me a lot through this situation, and He pruned me to be thankful for a job that was not to my liking, and thus I felt I could be thankful for a job like a pastor, even when things got difficult. Where is God pruning you to die to yourself and experience His new life and power in you?

READ vv 9-11. The two keys to knowing our place in a relationship with Jesus is love and obedience, which are essentially two sides of the same coin and

which lead to that elusive missing piece for which everyone longs: His joy! Cf. 1 John 4:19; 5:3-5.” What is important to remember in these verses is that the joy in us that will be complete that Jesus wishes is not *our* joy, but *His* joy. I.e., joy on His terms, not ours. Have you ever been asked to have joy on someone else’s terms? E.g., I recall when I was in college I was a General Business major, and I was taking a Business Law course, and my Dad being a lawyer (and a CPA) loved this idea of me taking this class, and he sat down with me and showed me his Black’s Law Dictionary, and he was so enthused about it and wanted me to be a lawyer, and unfortunately I was a bit bored with the whole idea. My joy and his joy were different. He was wise enough not to try to force his joy onto me. God is a Father like that to us— He will not force His joy onto us. But to be Jesus’ follower, we do have to take on His joy— His joy becomes our joy. And when we do take on His joy, our joy is truly fulfilled— whether we realize it today, or years ahead in the future. READ 1 John 5:3-5. E.g., I recall a Christian woman once told me that when she was single she had given her dating life to Christ so she would only marry a Christian, and she started spending some time with a guy who was really excited about her and wanted to pursue a dating relationship with her, and she said clearly to him that she could not, because she only dated Christians— and he said to her, “I am a Christian! I want to follow Jesus!” So they started dating, and got married, and served Christ together— like going on short-term medical missionary trips. Jesus’ joy and will in dating became her joy and will. E.g., I recall hearing about a Christian woman who was married to a non-Christian, but her joy and will was Jesus’, that this man would come to Christ one day, and she continued to pray for him to come to Christ— she did not compromise on this desire by ignoring his not knowing Jesus-- and on his deathbed he came to Christ.

“Do we know our place?” Are we branches fit into the vine of Jesus?