

"The Need to Be Connected"

John 15:1-11

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Back in college I had a double major in psychology and sociology. Today, that and \$1.25 will buy you a cup of coffee. But the one thing I learned, which has stayed with me over the years, is that people have a great need to be connected to others. If people are isolated, that will have an enormous affect on them emotionally, mentally and physically. In fact, studies have shown that people have died simply from being isolated from others. They did not know the touch of another human being, or the care and compassion that comes from being in a relationship, so they just gave up and died. Believe me when I say that, being connected is one of the most basic and greatest need that we have.

So, in looking at the world today, you might think how fortunate we are to live in a world where being connected has taken on a whole new meaning in terms of social media. I mean, we have our iPhones with us 24/7, and they connect us with anything and anyone in the world. We have the internet, where we can pull up any information we want with just the touch of a finger. We have Facebook, Facetime, Zoom, live streaming, Twitter, Snapchat, and a whole bunch of other things that I know nothing about, nor do I care to. Being connected has never been easier. So, with all these new lines of communication open to us, you would think that people are connected more than ever, right?

Well, that is simply not the case. In fact, research has shown that it is just the opposite. People are more isolated today than ever before. According to one study, the average American has 1/3 as many friends as they did twenty-five years ago. Another study showed that a significant amount of people today are spending less time with family and friends, attending fewer social events, and talking less to family and friends by phone.

Folks, that is very disturbing, because being connected to those close to you helps to give life a richer meaning. The truth is, we are becoming a very disconnected society. And I can tell you that this is also true in our relationship with the Lord.

Look again at what Jesus said in John's Gospel today. Beginning with verse 5, He said, "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. (John 15:5-8)

Of course, this is the most vital connection that we could have in our life. And yet it's a connection that so many are just not making. So, the question is, how do we make and keep this connection? Well, Jesus answers that in the following verses. He says, "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 Fathers commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:9-10)

So, according to Jesus, the key to staying connected has to do with keeping His commandments. Now, as we know, Jesus summed up all the commandments into just two. We know them as "The Great Commandments" 1. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." 2. "Love your neighbor as yourself".

Okay, obviously, we cannot keep these commandments perfectly. Because of this sinful nature of ours, our focus is not on loving God and loving others. Because of sin, our eyes are not on God and others at all. Instead, our eyes have really been turned inward toward "self". So, we cannot love God and others, because we are too busy loving "self".

Alright, how can we change this? How can we begin to love the way our Lord wants us to love? Well, let's turn to that passage from 1 John that we read today to help us answer this. John writes, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him." In this love, not that we have loved God, but that He has loved us and sent

His Son to be the propitiation (atoning Sacrifice) for our sins". (1 John 4:7-10)

You see, Scripture tells us that love is from God. What this world considers to be love, is really a bad knock-off of God's love, because it is so self-absorbed, so self-centered. True love is from God. So, obviously, we are not saved by our love for God, because our love is not perfect. We are saved by the love that our Lord has for us, who, out of this love, sent Jesus to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Folks, this is basic Christianity 101, which you have heard many times before. But if you go back to verse 9, there is a vital truth here that even today people struggle with. It tells us that God did all of this, so that we might live through Jesus. That means that we might live our life through all that Jesus had done for us in His saving work on the cross and His triumphant resurrection from the dead. He paid the debt in full by atoning for our sins. And what does the word "atonement" mean? (to cover) Jesus covered our sins completely! All of them! So now, this is how the Almighty God sees us, and all people who truly trust in Jesus and in His saving work; not as awful sinners, but as His children who are covered by the blood of Christ. It doesn't matter what our sin is. God doesn't care what our sin is, because He can't see our sin. It has been covered by the blood of the Lamb. So, this means that we are the Lord's now. We belong to Him. Not because of anything we have done, but because of what Jesus has done. You see, we are tied to Him now. We are connected to Him. So consequentially, we live our life through Him.

So many have struggled with this truth. You don't have to; just surrender to it. Jesus is the Vine, we are the branches. He is the source of our life, and He is the One who enables us to love, not the way that this world loves, but the way He loves. When our Lord abides in us, when He dwells in us, and we in Him, that is when this connection happens, a connection that gives us life. This is the connection that we all dearly need.

Many of you may remember the name of Joseph Stalin, that cruel dictator of the Soviet Union who was responsible for the death of millions. But do you remember his daughter, Svetlana? Svetlana Stalin shocked the world when she immigrated to the United States seeking a new life. She

explained her change of allegiance this way: She said, "I found it impossible to exist without God in one's heart." Boy, did she ever get that on right! It is impossible to exist, to have life, without the Lord in our life, without Him abiding in us. We need that connection.

Just listen again to what Jesus said, "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." (vs. 7-8)

Folks understand, there is a continuous grafting taking place here between the Lord and us. When we turn away from our sins with a repentant heart, He is always there to forgive us, to restore our relationship with Him, to graft us back on to the vine. And when that happens, that is when His life really begins to flow in us again. That's when we know His presence, His love, His forgiveness, His peace deep within us. It becomes a very real part of our life again. This is that connection which is absolutely vital to us. We need this connection if we are going to bear fruit. And what kind of fruit are we talking about? Well, how about the fruit of loving God and loving others. Or how about the fruit that Paul brings up in that Galatians passage that we read earlier, the Fruit of the Spirit. Fruits like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness, self-control.

Personally, I call this, "The Fruit of the Resurrection". You see, Jesus' resurrection is so incredibly awesome that it has literally turned this world upside down. It has shown us that our life really is in Christ, and that life is eternal. His resurrection is absolute proof that everything He said and taught and did is the truth. That has changed everything for us. So, when we are connected to the Vine, and we take hold of this truth, that's when this resurrection Fruit becomes so much a part of our life.

Folks, this is the way to really live life; not as a dried up, withered branch. There is no joy, or peace, or hope in living like that. But being connected to the Vine; truly knowing the Lord's presence abiding in us, and knowing His love and the peace that He fills us with; that is when you can't help but love God, as well as others, and that's when you bear all kinds of resurrection fruit." And so, my prayer today is that we would all have that connection with our Lord; a connection that brings us life, meaningful life,

eternal life; and a connection that enables us to bear fruit, the fruit of the resurrection, fruit that brings God all the glory. Amen.