

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: ABIDE IN ME

Scripture: John 15:1-7

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you.

And now, little children, abide in him, that when he shall appear, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

Only the simplest, lowest form of life can exist alone in single cells. The one-celled amoeba is a very simple organism. It has no organ -- just a nucleus surrounded by a jelly-like substance. When the amoeba wants to move from one place to another, he has no legs to move him; the jelly seems to ooze from one place to another. When the amoeba wants to eat, he has no stomach; the jelly merely surrounds a tiny morsel of food and absorbs it. An amoeba can perform only the simplest of functions, because it is limited to the kinds of expression or implementation which can be gotten out of one simple cell.

As life becomes higher, and capable of performing more complex functions, more and more cells are associated together, forming innumerable organs and members, all of which unite under one governing spirit or personality to perform an almost endless variety of functions. Some of these functions performed by the human body still defy the ingenuity of the most clever scientists, who can neither understand nor reproduce them outside the body. But we repeat -- such complexity and diversity can be achieved and enjoyed only as an almost limitless quantity of cells are associated together, sharing the life and the labor of the body.

In his writings, Paul makes frequent use of the analogy of the "body of Christ,"

in which the highest of all forms of life -- the life of Christ -- is to be found. In the body of Christ, which is his church, each member needs every other member. All must exist in a proper structural and functional relationship to each other. No single cell, no single organ or member of this body of Christ can say to another, "I have no need of thee," for each cell can live and enjoy the continuing life of the body only as it maintains its functional relationship with the total body. The life of the body cannot be enjoyed or participated in outside the body. And in order that the life of the body might be significant and satisfying and complete, every organ and member must participate and function in that life.

To illustrate the mutual dependence of the Christian on him, and his dependence on us, Jesus used a similar but perhaps a simpler analogy -- the vine and the branches. In his farewell address to the disciples after the last supper Jesus said, "I am the true vine; ye are the branches." A close and indispensable relationship exists between the vine and the branches, just as it does between the body and its several organs and members. Each branch draws its life from the vine. Mere attachment is not enough. In order that this life might be transmitted, there must be a vital, functional connection with the vine -- not simply a mechan-

ical, artificial, or superficial connection.

Similarly, each branch has certain functions to perform which are essential to the life of the vine. The vine needs the branches just as much as the branches need the vine. The vine brings the nourishing sap from the roots to the branches, but it is the leaves which spread out the sap in their mysterious laboratories of green chlorophyll where the action of the sun transmutes or digests the sap into food which the vine can assimilate. Then the sap is returned to the vine where it is re-distributed to nourish the main trunk of the vine, the roots, and all the other parts. This is a demonstration of cooperative, sacrificial love and mutual interchange of service.

Through love, Christ supplies life and a constant stream of life-giving spiritual nourishment to those who have undergone those ordinances of spiritual regeneration which bring about the new birth and a functional attachment to the vine. Motivated by that same love, we take of this love, this life, this nourishment. We process it, and by our own distinctive talents, functions, and gifts make it available to others in the fellowship of the vine, and then impart it to those other branches which have need. No part of the vine can afford to impede this flow. The life of Christ cannot be maintained in us unless we share Christ's sacrificial love -- unless each part of the vine is willing to spend and be spent in the service of every other part of the vine -- to receive from every other part according to need -- to give to every other part according to ability and function. Unless each part of the vine remains an integral and functioning part of the whole vine, maintaining this interchange and constant flow of life, death is inevitable.

No one part of the vine can hoard the resources of the vine in selfishness; but if each part willingly joins in the cooperative task of nourishing the whole vine, the entire and total resources of the vine are available to nourish, to heal, to protect each individual branch and twig and leaf. That is the basis for Jesus' promise that if we abide in him, and his words abide in us, we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us. If we abide in the vine, do our share for the total welfare of the vine, and let our needs be known to the vine, we may ask what we will, and the total re-

sources of the vine and all its life and strength are available to us in time of need.

The purpose of the vine is to bear fruit -- not leaves. Sometimes we ask God for those things which will make us more attractive, or life more easy and luxurious, without taking into consideration the total needs of other parts of the vine. Sometimes, in order to prevent too much of the nourishment of the vine from going to leaves, it is necessary to prune away the surplus twigs and suckers and leaves, leaving only what seems to be an ugly stump. This seems like a cruel and ruthless process, but any vine-dresser knows that unless it be done, there will be very little fruit. So God often finds it necessary to purge us, through sorrow, bereavement, humiliation, disappointment, frustration, or tragic illness -- not that he enjoys seeing us suffer, but that we might be constrained to use the strength of the vine to bring forth much fruit.

Man is constantly faced with the inherent temptation to believe that he is self-sufficient -- that he can go it alone -- that his own life, strength, wisdom, and skill are sufficient. The one-celled amoeba lives a certain quality of life, and lives it alone. But if you want a higher life of the kingdom, you can find it only in Christ -- in the complex but higher relationship of the vine. "Without me ye can do nothing." "In him we live and move and have our being! Even our physical life came originally from him. Some day that physical life must end; the body must be laid down in death. If we want life to continue after death, there is only one hope -- Jesus, and the power of his resurrection. That power is found only in the vine which transmits his life continually to those who are functionally a part of him. We ourselves are dead, inert, helpless to save ourselves from death. If we want his eternal life to dwell in us and flow through us, we must surrender our dead selves to him as the dead soil surrenders itself to the life of the vine. We must grow into him. We must become a part of him. We must let the higher life of his kingdom take over the dead, inert mass of our lower kingdom, and transmute it into the living materials of a higher kingdom. Only thus can we really be alive.

"Abide in me, and I in you If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

