

**John 15:18-16:4**  
**(Psalm 30; 1 Peter 4:12-19)**  
**“On Account of My Name”**

## **Introduction**

Let's set the scene: We find ourselves deep in John's gospel. Chapters 13-17 are a kind of holy-of-holies, recording Jesus' final teaching of his disciples just before his arrest and crucifixion. After his final meal with them, Jesus warns his disciples that one of them will betray him, and that all will abandon him. He tells them that he is leaving them and going where they cannot yet follow. They are frightened and confused and into their fright and confusion, Jesus speaks words of comfort and assurance, words designed to bring them peace and joy. Yet his words are difficult to understand until they are fulfilled. And so the disciples will remain frightened until the resurrection, and confused until these words are fulfilled at Pentecost.

In chapter 14, Jesus speaks of his unity with the Father, the God of Israel: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father ... I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (14:9&10). Then he tells them that it is good for them that he is returning to the Father so that he can come to them in a new way, as the Spirit who will be *in* his disciples, uniting them to him and to the Father (14:17&23). *Here is the heart of our salvation, a heart too often overlooked or misunderstood: When Christ saves us he unites us to himself, even as he is united to his Father. The living God draws our lives into his, and puts his life into us.*

Jesus presses this home in chapter 15 with the familiar biblical picture of the vine and the branches: "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.... 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 I have loved you. Abide in my love" (15:5f). In other words, just as we are utterly dependent upon the Lord to be and to do anything of ultimate value, so too the Lord has graciously made his work – his great mission in human history – dependent upon us. It is as we bear fruit, not in our strength but in his, that a world starving for the life of God is fed. We are the bearers of God's life to the world, and if we bear no fruit, we dare not call ourselves his disciples.

Now, in our text, Jesus warns us that our unity with him will draw a mixed response: If we abide in Christ, the world will respond to us just as it would respond to him. This is a note that needs to be sounded in a world that proclaims the prosperity gospel, the lie that Jesus died, destroyed the power of death, poured out his Spirit on his people uniting us to him and to the Father, all in order that we might live the American dream. The verses before us stand over against all such teaching, and call us to *both* the joy and the sorrow, the pleasure and the pain of our union with Christ. And only those who are united with Christ in his death and his resurrection have any right to the hope of glory.

## Body

- 1. This means that if we abide in Christ, some will reject us, even hate and persecute us, not because we are failing to be like Christ, but precisely because we are becoming like him (15:20a).**
- 2. This also means that others will be drawn to us, will listen to us and receive our words, not because we are bright, attractive people who have mastered some evangelistic technique, but precisely because they are being drawn to Christ in us (15:20b).**
- 3. Thus, as we abide in Christ, we may face whatever comes with joy and confidence, because whether people love us or hate us, receive our message or reject it out-of-hand, it is not really about us at all, but about Christ (16:1).**

## Conclusion

Two final observations: First, a key reason that so many Christians begin their life in Christ full of joy and hope, and then somewhere down the road lose their zeal and begin to doubt that they will ever – at least this side of eternity – realize in their daily life the tremendous promises that Jesus makes to his followers is because at one point they heard him say, “Follow me,” and began to follow, but have not yet heard him say, “Abide in me,” or have not yet understood what that means. Jesus makes clear in the verses we studied last week that apart from him, we can do nothing: we cannot follow him, cannot obey him, cannot delight in him or carry out his ministry to the world. *The secret of life in Christ is learning to abide in him.*

Secondly, a key reason that many people reject the gospel is that they have not yet met a band of disciples who are abiding in Christ, filled with the life of his Spirit, overflowing with his compassion and self-sacrificing love. When we are full of Christ, then people will not find us easy to dismiss cordially. They will either reject us, because they find self-sacrificing love foolish and offensive, or they will be drawn to us, because they have been longing for this all their life. *The secret to bearing fruit is abiding in Christ.*

So, are you abiding in Christ? Do you really want to abide in Christ? Do you intend to abide in him? You say, “I’m too weak. I can’t sustain it.” It is precisely because of our weakness that he calls us to abide in him, to live out of his strength rather than our own, and to let his life pour through us for the salvation of the world. He calls to us now: “Abide in me ... for apart from me you can do nothing” (15:4&5).

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