

Mind Blowing Love: Image Bearers

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Preacher: Dr. Ralph Carter

- [0 : 0 0] Good job, Brian. I've missed you very, very badly over these last 17 months that Daniel has been your pastor.
- I'm so thankful he came, and I understand what a great job he's doing. But I've missed you, missed seeing you, and missed being able to come here and preach, and more than anything, just to be here for worship.
- Well, I don't know if you know what a blessing you have in your music. It just blesses my heart. I'm saying that from the depths of my heart, sincerely. I don't know anywhere I'd rather worship than right here at First Baptist Pickens.
- You do a great, great job, Brian. Thank you so very, very much. And the songs you select, and the way the congregation sings out, what a blessing you are. Well, I'll bring you up to speed real quickly.
- We haven't been doing anything. We both had knee replacements this last year, so if we struggle to get around a little bit, you'll understand that.
- [1 : 0 4] But we've been having a good time. The Lord has blessed. And, well, I could really identify with that song that you sang, because God has certainly been good. Hadn't he been good in your life? I'm glad to hear that.
- I know he has in mine. Well, the passage I want to preach this morning is found in John chapter 15. And let me just be straight with you. I never preached from John 15 until about two or three months ago.
- The church where I served before, the pastor called one day in April, and he said, I'm going to be away three Sundays in July. Would you come and supply for me? And I said, I'd be glad to. He said, I've been doing this thing through Genesis.
- And so I'd prefer if you'd preach from the New Testament, and I'd like if you'd do a series. So this morning we're going to be here about two hours, because I've got three messages in that series. No, I'm just going to preach the first of those three messages.
- But God directed my heart because of something that happened. I don't have time this morning to tell you that. But because of something that happened one morning, I thought I should preach from John chapter 15 and verse 9.
- [2 : 0 7] And I even wrote those messages back in April, May sometime, sent them to the secretaries at Rush Creek and said, here they are. And you can put them on the screens and get all that stuff ready. And then God changed my mind.
- And I thought, you know what? I ought to go back and preach the first eight verses and then verse 9. And then the third Sunday, two or three verses following that. So this morning, I'm not going to give you all three in one. I'm just going to do that first sermon.
- But it's found in John 15, verses 1 to 8. I taught John 15 in Bible studies any number of times, but I never preached John 15. And when I went back and read it, I recognized immediately how important it was if you were to understand what he's really trying to say to us in John 15.

Now, if you just picked up the Bible and read John 15, it would bless your heart. And you'd get the big idea. But it means so much more, in my opinion, when you go back and you understand the context in which you find this passage and understand why then Jesus gave them this passage.

So let's just do that. You're going to have to fasten your seatbelt, talk real fast, and try to get through this so we can get to these eight verses. But let me just tell you, we're going to go all the way back to chapter 1. No, I'm just teasing.

[3 : 17] We're going to go back, though, pretty far. We're going to go back to chapter 11. And I'm going to hurry through this, but here's the deal. In chapter 11, probably most of you already know this, the big story there is Lazarus is raised from the dead.

Can you imagine that? He's been in the grave four days. And now he's raised to life again. Jesus raised others, but typically it was moments after they died.

But Lazarus is graveyard dead. They've had his funeral. His sisters have more a little put out with Jesus that he hasn't shown up earlier. And so when Jesus gets to town, he raises him from the dead.

Can I just say revival breaks out? John 11 says that because of that miracle, he's been dead four days and now he's alive again. A whole lot of folk came to know Christ as Savior and Lord and started following him.

It also marks this one important thing. And we'll press to chapter 12. And that is this. The Pharisees, the religious bunch at that time, had already been wanting to put Jesus to death.

[4 : 29] But now they begin to plot and scheme and actively find a way to bring that to fruition. When you come to chapter 12, here's the big picture.

In chapter 12, this revival has spread so much and word is just resounding everywhere about Lazarus being raised from the dead. They now not only want to put Jesus to death, they want to put Lazarus to death.

So they can say, well, you know, he may have raised him, but he's dead again. Or perhaps just to deny that he was ever raised at all. So they're seeking to put Lazarus to death.

You come to chapter 13 and now it's 24 hours before Jesus is going to die. And so they gather and they're having the Passover meal.

It's a Thursday. And Jesus breaks the bread after that Passover meal and says, this is my body which is given for you. And then he takes the cup and says, this is my blood which is given for the remission of your sins.

[5 : 36] And he's actively been talking to them now for several days about the fact he's going to die. And that now he's telling them he's going to be crucified.

And you can imagine the heart and the minds and the hearts of those disciples. Well, to top it all off, he takes an apron and puts it around his waist.

And he goes from one disciple to the next to the next until he is at last washed all of their feet. Remember that story? Remember what Peter does? It was so Peter S.

When he comes to Peter, he's going to wash his feet. And remember what Peter did? No, no, no. Not going to wash my feet. Lord, you wash all these other guys if they'll let you.

But not my feet because that's beneath you to wash my feet. Remember what Jesus says? Peter, if I don't wash your feet, you can't be a part of me. Remember what he does then?

[6 : 32] Again, so much like Peter. He says, then wash all of me. Wash me from head to foot. Jesus says, no, not necessary to do that. Only necessary to wash your feet because you are already clean.

Now, file that away. Put that in your back of your mind. Just remember that. That's John 13, verse 10. You come to the end of the meal and they're ready to go out. And Jesus looks in their faces and you can just imagine what they're thinking.

Have you ever thought about that? You've traveled with this man for three and a half years. You assume he'll do every kind of miracle, including raising the dead. And now he's telling you he's going to die.

And that he's going to die a horrific death on the cross. And they're saying, no, Peter's arguing with him. That's not going to happen. We're not going to let that happen. Lord, you can't let that happen.

God won't allow that to happen. Jesus said, no, you're wrong. That's the purpose of my coming. I'm going to die. And Jesus turns to them and this is what he says.

[7 : 32] You believe in God, don't you? Then believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. And if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go, you can count on this, I will come again. And receive you unto myself that where I am, there you may be also. Thomas turns to him and says, Lord, you haven't told us where you're going.

How can we know the way to get there? And Jesus says, Thomas, let me tell you something. I am the way and the truth and the life. And no one comes to the Father but by me. And then before you finish chapter 14, you know what he says?

He says, don't worry, guys. I'm going to go. And every time he says that, boy, it must be like somebody stabbed him with a knife. I'm going to go. But understand this.

I'll not leave you alone. Remember what he says? I'm going to send a comforter. Do you remember further what he says? This is the real zinger. You ready?

[8 : 34] It'll be better that I go that he may come. Now, have you ever put yourself in one of those disciples' shoes? You've been with Jesus three and a half years. You've seen all these miracles. He's told you everything to do.

He's led you and guided you and corrected you and made you a better person. And now he says, it'll be better if I go away. What would you be saying? No. No.

It's not going to be better. It's going to be a lot harder. We're not going to be able to make it. In fact, if they take what he says literally and believe it, that he is going to die, you know what else they're asking?

What about us? What's going to happen to us? How will we make it once you're gone? Are they going to want to put us to death too? And that's when Jesus then gives us what we find in John chapter 15 and verse 1.

Look with me to those verses. John 15 verse 1. I am the true vine and my father is the vineyard keeper.

[9 : 50] Now Jesus is a man. He's not a vine. So he's speaking metaphorically, obviously. But he's likening himself to a grapevine.

We don't know a lot about grapevines, but can I tell you something? They knew all about them. Even from the Old Testament period, they had often thought of themselves as the choice vine of God.

So when he says, I am the vine, they get it. And then he says, my father is the vineyard keeper. He is the one who owns it and takes care of it and harvests the grapes.

He's the vineyard keeper. Look at verse 2. Every branch in me that does not produce fruit, he, the vineyard keeper, God, removes.

Circle that word. And he prunes, circle that word, every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit.

- [10 : 59] Now he uses two similar words. We would use them almost interchangeably. How many of you know about pruning? I'm guessing everybody here, right? When you prune something, what do you do? Snip, snip, snip.
- You cut it, right? So in fact, you're removing it. But he's using these two words with different intent, even though they're very, very similar words.
- He says, I am the vine and you are the branches. And some of these branches are not producing at all. And so God is going to remove them.
- There he's talking about lopping them off and them not coming back. And then he says, and those that are producing fruit, he's going to prune them.
- So guess what? That's all the branches. Some are going to be removed permanently because they're not useful. But all of them are going to be cut.
- [12 : 02] They're going to be trimmed back. And those of you that know anything about vines know that when you do that, whether it's a grape vine or a tomato vine, you know that when you do that, it's going to produce more, right?
- It's going to make it healthier. And that's what Jesus is saying here in verse 2. It's not a punitive action, the pruning. It's a helpful action. It's making it more productive.
- Verse 3. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Now what do you make of that? Can I just tell you something?
- It's funny when we read the scripture, isn't it? Have you ever been reading something and you get it? Okay, I read this first. I get it. I read the next one. I get it. I read the next one. I don't get it. Well, I'll just skip it and go on the next one. You ever done that?
- Well, I guess I know what he's talking about. But when I was studying this back in April, I'm clicking along and I read verse 1. I get that. I read verse 2. I get that. I read verse 3. I'm like, what?
- [13 : 02] Who's anything about being clean? You're talking about the vine and the branches and producing fruit and those that don't, he's going to lop off and remove.
- And those that do, he's going to prune back so they'll produce more. But what is this about being clean? Remember, I told you to file something away earlier when we were doing that background.
- And we said in John chapter 13 and verse 10, remember what Peter said? Lord, wash all of me. And Jesus says, no need to do that, Peter. You're already clean.
- And then, I didn't tell you this earlier, but I'm going to tell you now. I left it out on purpose. John parenthetically in John 10, 13, he inserts this. He says, but not all of you.
- And he references Judas Iscariot. So, you know what he's talking about here? Those that he lops off are people who are pretenders.
- [14 : 02] They are people who are professors. But they are not genuine believers. And these other disciples, excluding Judas Iscariot, they are sincere in their walk with God.
- And they are clean because they are right with the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why they're able to produce fruit. Even though he's going to prune them back. Look, if you will, to verse 4.
- And verse 4 is the key to this passage. Remain in me and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine.
- So, neither can you unless you remain in me. And look up and listen. If you don't hear anything else, get this point. This is the whole reason Jesus gives them this.
- Because he knows they're wondering, what are we going to do when you're gone? How are we going to make it? This spiritual revolution we've started, how is it going to go on?

[15 : 09] He says, you only got one shot in the world. And that is to recognize that I am the vine. I'm your source of life. And my father is the one who owns it all. And he's the one who manages it.

And you are branches. You're an extension of myself. And as long as you stay connected and rooted and grounded in me, you're going to be just fine.

You're going to not just survive. You're going to thrive. You're going to produce more and more and more fruit. Even like we've already begun to produce. But know this, apart from me, you can do absolutely nothing.

I started, I didn't tell my wife this because I knew I'd get a whooping. But I started to pull up one of her tomato plants and actually bring it this morning and put it on this date. It's got about eight or so little tomatoes on it.

They don't get bigger or anything. Like Miss Angela, she used to give us those big tomatoes, you know. But it's got about eight little teeny tiny tomatoes on it. Have you ever lopped off one of those and said, I'll see if it's going to grow bigger without being connected to the vine?

[16 : 25] It isn't going to happen. You go back and what's going to happen? It's going to be dead in just a day or two, right? It's already dead. It's dead the minute you cut it off. But it's going to take time for the evidence to show that it has died.

And the only hope you've got is being connected to Christ. Now what do I mean by being connected? I mean being embedded in him.

Remember a few years ago when America was involved in the Gulf Wars, we were first in Iraq and later in Afghanistan. The media coined a phrase. And isn't it interesting how one person can begin to use a word and then everybody's using it?

One of the TV sources said, we're embedding reporters with the troops on the front. And the idea was, man, how can you get a better picture of what's happening in the war to report to the American people than to have guys who are actually living with the troops?

They didn't carry weapons. They didn't fight the war. But listen, they were in harm's way. I mean, they heard bombs exploding, experienced bullets whistling over their head.

[17 : 31] They wore armor. They slept in the same bunkers in the tents with our GIs. They were embedded with those troops. And that's what Jesus means when he says, abide in me, remain in me, stay in me.

The different translations use those words. It means to be embedded in Christ. It's not that Christ is an aspect of our life, a part of our life.

Listen, he is the essence of our life. Do you get that? You see the difference? I see a lot of people who, they come to Christ, they make a decision, they're baptized, and they hang on to the church until they die.

But you never see any real growth in their life. They don't ever seem to produce fruit. And we'll talk about that in a few minutes. But they just kind of hang on to the vine, so to speak.

And Jesus says, if you want to produce fruit, you must be embedded in me. Can I tell you a little story that will maybe make this clear to you what I mean by this thing of embedding, abiding?

[18 : 41] You're going to think I've lost my mind. I've lost my place in my notes, but I haven't. How many of you have ever nearly drowned? Anybody in this room ever nearly drowned? Right? One back here, I see another.

I'm being sincere with you when I tell you this. I nearly drowned about seven years ago. I had a little lake house. My wife, my daughter, my son, their families, we were all down at the lake Saturday afternoon.

We're playing out off the end of the dock about six, eight foot of water, not deep at all. Don't have on a life jacket or anything. And we're just playing around there. And somebody throws something down in the lake.

And the water's real murky. And I go down to get it, retrieve it. And when I'm down there on the bottom looking for it, I suddenly realize I can't find it. And I'm running out of air.

And it's so dark and murky, I can't figure out what's up and what's down. And I'm just thrashing around, moving, trying to get to the top. And then I realize after about 45 seconds more, I can't make it back up.

[19 : 47] And I'm holding my breath and holding my breath and holding my breath until finally I suck in water. And I just immediately think I'm dead. I'm going to drown right here.

And I'm thinking about my family even. How horrible it's going to be for them. Somebody's going to have to find me and get me out there. And I just kind of float to the bottom.

And when I get to the bottom, my feet touch. And I push off just enough that my son then sees my hand. And he grabs me and pulls me to safety. I'm telling you, I didn't talk about that until six years and nine months later.

In fact, it was three months ago at Brushy Creek when I preached this very sermon. First time I ever told anybody. And the reason is because it was like reliving that to think about talking about it.

I didn't talk to my wife about it. I didn't talk to my children about it. But I was just petrified. I mean, there was a horror within me, a terror within me. I can't explain. And since that time, I've seen folks with inhalers who have asthma, bronchial conditions.

[20 : 55] And I've noticed with them, boy, when they get to where they can't breathe, and they can't locate that inhaler, or it's not as full as it needs to be, there's a panic that sets in with them.

Have you ever noticed that? Horrible thing to suffocate. Horrible thing to drown. I think that's what the psalmist is talking about, that kind of spirit.

In Psalm 42, 1, you know that passage? Here's what it says. As the deer pants for the water brook, even so my soul longs for you.

A man who's about to drown, a person who's about to asphyxiate, can I tell you something? They would give their last dime for one breath of air. And that's what it is to abide in Christ.

It's not that he's an aspect of your life. He's a part of your life. He's an addendum to your life. It's that you wouldn't know what to do without him.

[22 : 04] It's that without Jesus, you wouldn't know how to get through this day. He's not just a part of your life. He is your life. He's the essence of your life.

And that's what Jesus said. If you want to produce fruit, then I've got to be the essence of your life. You've got to embed your life in me.

Look at verse 5. I am the vine, you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit because you can do nothing without me.

I know some of you are thinking, preacher, you just preached that verse. No, I was on verse 4. This is verse 5. In verse 5, though it's repetitive, it's a different verse.

They say essentially the same thing. But have you noticed something now? In verse 5, if you haven't been counting, and you probably haven't, there's no reason for you to. But from verse 1 to 5, if you go back and count, you know what you'll find?

[23 : 10] Five times he has talked about producing fruit. Three times negatively not producing fruit. And two times producing fruit. So you know what that begs the question?

What is this fruit? What is this fruit that he's wanting us to produce? That he's going to prune us so we'll produce more? What is the fruit?

Now look up and listen and make sure you get this. When I was a boy, I'd hear preachers and people in the church say this kind of statement.

I can't be a judge, but I am called to be a fruit inspector. You remember hearing that? Yeah. You used to hear it all the time. You don't hear it much anymore.

But you used to hear it all the time. And what they meant by that was this. I am looking at somebody's life and it either favorably shows me fruit or unfavorably shows me there is no fruit.

[24 : 12] But when they started talking about those things to look for to see if somebody was genuinely a Christian and they were growing in Christ, here's the kind of things they talked about. They read their Bible.

They pray. They attend church. They attend church. They used to say back then, every time the doors are open. They give their money.

They participate in the activities of the church. And maybe even they lead the loss to Christ. They witness for Christ. Maybe they lead some people to Jesus.

And that was the real fruit. If you have led somebody to faith in Christ. Can I tell you what I believe? I don't think any of that's the fruit that Jesus is talking about right here.

In fact, I'm going to go out on a limb and some of you will think I'm a heretic. But let me just tell you, I know it's not. And the reason I know it's not, and this is going to shock you, is because a lost person can do any of those things I just mentioned.

[25 : 16] They can read their Bibles and they can go through the activity of praying and they can attend church. Be as faithful as a clock. They can hold an office in the church. They can even witness.

And listen to this. They can even lead the lost to Christ. Through the years, I hope you recognize, there have been thousands of charlatans who preach for money.

But the gospel they preach is the same gospel. And when people hear the gospel, many have responded, even the guys who are false preachers. And that's why Jesus says in Matthew chapter 5 and verse 21, In the last days, they'll come to me and they'll say to me, Lord, Lord, in thy name, listen to this, we have prophesied.

You know what that is? That's to preach. And we have done miracles and we have cast out demons. I want to ask if anybody here has ever cast out a demon, but I haven't. I have never performed a miracle.

These are people who are lost, Jesus is saying, and yet he says, That they don't know him. And they're doing great things seemingly.

[26 : 34] So what is this fruit? Here's what the fruit is. The fruit is that which only the Spirit of God can produce in us.

It is not what I do for God, how I perform feats I accomplish. It is what God through the Holy Spirit does through me as I am embedded in him and trusting in him and walking in him and giving him control of my life.

So some of you are probably thinking, well, you must be talking about the fruit of the Spirit. In Galatians 5 and verse 22, listen to this. What is this a picture of? After I get through giving you this picture, tell me what it's a picture of.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control. It's a picture of Jesus, isn't it?

You read a few pages in the gospel and you come away. Man, what he's just described here are the qualities, the attributes of Jesus himself. Let me tell you something. Jesus is that.

- [27 : 46] But it's not an all-inclusive list. He is that and more because Jesus is also forgiving. He doesn't mention forgiveness. And Jesus is just. And Jesus is righteous.
- And Jesus is holy. So you know what this fruit is? This fruit is this. It is that God produces in us an image of himself so that when people look at us, they see Jesus.
- They see God. What he's saying is this. If you will remain in me and abide in me and be embedded in me, you will begin to look like me.
- You'll begin to look like the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Look at verse 6. If anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers.
- Talking about Judas. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. Verse 7. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you.
- [28 : 54] Now so often when we read that verse, we think of prayer. And I think it includes that, but I think it means even more than that. You know what I think it means?
- Boy, this is exciting to think about. That if we would surrender our lives completely and fully to him and stop trusting in ourselves and trust in him and obey every word he tells us to obey.
- And boy, he told them to obey a lot of things, didn't he? He told them how to love and how to live and he modeled it for me. He demonstrated. If you will live in me and trust in me and do what I've told you to do.
- The sky is the limit. That's what that verse is saying. The sky is the... There will be nothing that God is not able to do with you. Because you're so great?
- No. Because God is so great. Look at verse 8 and I close. My Father is glorified by this, that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.
- [30 : 04] My Father is glorified by this, that you produce much fruit. You know what? I have a feeling that a lot of believers today in our churches, the notion they have of God.
- I don't want to offend anybody here, but I'm just trying to be straight with you. That God, and they wouldn't say this out loud, but it's what they think internally. It comes up even in their spirit when they pray.
- They have the notion that God exists for them to be their servant. That when I'm sick, he makes me well.
- When I'm without a job, he gives me a job. So long as I'll pay homage to him and come to church every now and then and do some good things. Try to live fairly clean and close to him. That he's supposed to protect me.
- And when he doesn't, they get mad about it. And you see, when you get mad at God because God doesn't perform the way you want him to. That's a clear indication. You think he exists for you and rather than you exist for him.
- [31 : 07] Do you see that? And he says in verse 8, My father is glorified by this, that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples.
- So how is God glorified? By demonstrating all you can accomplish? No. By demonstrating what he can accomplish through you.
- I tell you this to my shame. And it really, it just breaks my heart to tell you this. But I wouldn't be honest with you if I didn't tell you.
- When I was a young guy, I surrendered to preach when I was 14. Got a lot of opportunities even in high school to go preach. And by the time I was in college, I was preaching every Sunday somewhere. Doing revivals and things like that.
- And I liked to preach. And have always liked communicating. And I studied those preachers. Some of the guys I thought were some of the really great ones.

[32 : 11] And I think, boy, man, if you could preach like that. You know what my dream was at one point? I loved Christ and wanted to honor him. But at one time, I can remember thinking, I hope one day I'll be one of the greatest preachers in this country.

I just want to be one of the best preachers in the country. I'll work that to be one of the best preachers in the country. Can I tell you something? Now approaching 72, that doesn't mean a hill of beans to me.

Not one thing to me. But I'll tell you what I would love before I die.

I'd love it if somebody would just one day recognize whether he said it to me or not. I don't have to know it. But just that somebody would think, you know what? You're becoming a lot like the one you preached about all those years.

Has anybody ever looked at you and they thought, this guy teaches me Sunday school every week, but he's looking more and more like the one he talks about on Sunday.

[33 : 28] He looks more and more like the one we sing about on Sunday. When I meet him and engage him and talk with him on the job, he's like that guy I read about in the script, that Jesus fella.

Are you content just to live your life just hanging on and being there from time to time, hanging out with Jesus in the crowd? Or do you want to be an image bearer of God?

Because I'm going to tell you something. To do that, you're going to have to make a decision. Do I really want to embed my life in him? Don't be serious about this walk with Christ.

I hope that's what you want. We're going to have a hymn of invitation today. And if you'd like to make a decision like that, that I want to be an image bearer of Christ, I want to abide in him, really abide, I'm going to ask you to just get up out of your seat and come.

You don't need to talk to me. You can if you'd like. I'll be glad to pray with you. What you're really to do is just talk with God and say, God, I've just been a hanger-owner. In the beginning of today, I want to listen to your voice.

[34 : 42] I want to obey your voice. I want to surrender my life to you completely and fully. Whatever the Lord would have you do, you come as we stand and as we sing.