

RELIGION

Jesus is the vine, we are the branches

John 15:1-17

To use the term, “profound simplicity” might seem to be uniting contradictory terms. However, as we read the teachings of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, we see the reality of this phrase. The savior of the world did not “cloud the minds” of his hearers with “great theological concepts.” He presented the pictures of the divine-human relationship in terms that all hearers could understand. The theologians and philosophers — who seemed to specialize in creating complexities — did not appreciate the word pictures that “cleared the thoughts” of the “common people.” Mark 12:37c.

The word pictures that were painted by the son of God began with the common “scenes” of that day, in a setting that was grasped by all of the 11 (Judas had already left the group — John 13:30). Vineyards were part of the landscape, and formed an important factor of that economy, thus, was

part of everyday life. When this scene became the “background” for the illustration for this “lesson,” the thoughts could be readily applied to the “spiritual life.”

The savior of the world began this “discourse” with a simple declaration. “I am the true (defines the relationship; corresponds to ‘genuine’) vine, and my father is the husbandman (the one who prunes or cultivates the vine).” John 15:1. Thus, he established the relationship that would be easily recognized by the hearers — and those who would become one of the “branches.”

Vineyards were not planted and cultivated as ornamental nor as decorative plants. The 11 knew that production was the purpose. “Every branch (flexible shoot) in me that beareth (bearing) not (relative negative) fruit (evidence of ‘life within’) he taketh away (lift; carry away); and every branch that beareth (bearing) fruit, he purgeth

Sunday School Lesson



Rev. James Temples

(cleanses) it, that it may bring forth (bear) more (much) fruit.” John 15:2. It is important for us to “see the scene” that original hearers “sketched in their minds.” They did not picture the husbandman as “never satisfied,” but as one desiring the branch to have maximum production in the “best environment” that could be developed.

In order for these men to begin to apply the principles to their lives, the master made a declaration — “Now (already; even now) ye are clean (cleansed) through (by the means of) the word (expression of thought) which I have spoken unto you.” John 15:3. The master had told them earlier, “...your names are written

in heaven.” Luke 10:20c. Yet they needed to “stay clean” by applying the words of life in their daily lives.

There is no place for “spiritual independence.” Jesus gave a divine directive — “Abide (remain; dwell) in (a relationship) me, and I in you.” John 15:4a. He, then, reminded them, “As (in the manner that) the branch cannot (has no power to) bear fruit of (indicates source) itself, except (unless) it abide in the vine; no more (so neither) can ye, except (unless) ye abide in me.” John 15:4b,c. The master, again, declared, “I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same (‘he’) bringeth forth much fruit: for (for reason that) without (apart from) me ye can (are able to) do nothing (not even one [thing]).” John 15:5.

The directive is followed by a warning. “If (conditional) a man (anyone) abide not (relative negative — allowing personal choice) in (can indicate relationship) me,

he is cast (to throw) forth (out) as (in the manner of) a branch, and is withered (dry up; parch): and men (‘they’) gather them, and cast them into (the point reached) the fire, and they are burned.” John 15:6. These stern words are not given to cause one to spiritually “run scared,” but to cause one to desire to “run close to” the master. 1 Corinthians 9:25-27; Revelation 3:11. The Old Testament warning has never been amended nor deleted. Ezekiel 18:24; 33:18.

The master gave a promise to the faithful ones. “If (conditional) ye abide in me, and my words (the actual words spoken, in contrast to ‘expression of thought’) abide in you, ye shall ask (as a supplicant, leaving the final results in the wisdom of God) what ye will (desire), and it shall be done (come to pass for) unto you.” John 15:7. Matthew 6:10.

Since the “point” of planting a vineyard is the production of fruit, Jesus declared, “Herein (in this) is

my father glorified (to lift up; honored), that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” John 15:8. This thought is in contrast to the attitude that has been allowed to weave its threads into the fabric of many lives in our society — “what about ME?” Yes, this has “spilled over” into the “spiritual thought” of many who call themselves “Christians.” This idea chokes the “life” out of any one who allows these ugly tentacles to seize them around their “spiritual throat.” Luke 8:14.

The master declared, “As (in the manner that) the father hath loved me, so (also) have I loved you: continue (abide) ye in my love.” John 15:9. He told these 11 men — and us — how this fact could be accomplished. “If ye keep (guard; preserve) my commandments (precepts; charges), ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my father’s commandments, and abide in his love.” John 15:10. Yes,

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OBITUARIES

Mary Miliner Homemaker

Mary Alice Green Miliner, 82, of Bluffton died Saturday, Feb. 10, 2007, at Early Memorial Hospital.

Mrs. Miliner was born in Dale County, Ala., Dec. 22, 1924, to the late James Green and Emma Garrett Green. She was a member of Vincent United Methodist Church and spent most of her life in Bluffton.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Grady Miliner; and three sons, Charles Miliner, Larry Miliner and Grady Miliner Jr.

Survivors include one son, Harry Miliner and wife Sondra of Ozark; one daughter, Jimmie Harrell and husband Henry of Bluffton; 16 grandchildren; and 18 great-grandchildren.

Funeral services were Monday, Feb. 12, 2007, at Vincent United Methodist Church with Rev. Michael DeFore and Randy Spicer officiating. Interment followed at Bluffton Cemetery.

Pallbearers were Danny Cobb, Jimmy Simpson, Lynn Harrell, Josh Harrell, Greg Miliner and Walter Miliner.

Manry-Jordan-Hodges Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

Willie J. Hutchins

Willie J. Hutchins, 54, of Blakely died Thursday, Feb. 15, 2007, at Early Memorial Hospital.

Mr. Hutchins was born July 5, 1952, to the late Lorene Hutchins and Flossie M. Hutchins.

He was preceded in death by three brothers, Charles Hutchins, Arthur Hutchins, and Fred Hutchins; and one sister, Jacqueline Hutchins.

Survivors include his wife, Linda Hutchins; three sons, Tracy McClendon, Wallechinsky D. Hutchins

and Glenn Owens; three step-daughters, Kagwana Lee and husband Trebbie, Shatoria Wiggs and husband Antron and Nichole Freeman; five sisters, Leary Wade and husband Tommy of Cocoa, Fla., Vera Hutchins, Ossie Hutchins, Mary McDowell and Bennie Wiley and husband Ben, all of Blakely; one brother, Norman Hutchins and wife Helen of Ft. Gaines; four grandchildren, Trey D. McClendon, Dejoj T. Johnson, Trebbie Lee Jr. and Trinity Freeman.

Funeral services were Saturday, Feb. 24, 2007, at 11 a.m. at Pleasant Grove African Methodist Episcopal Church with Rev. Jefferey Hayes officiating. Interment followed at the church cemetery.

Peoples Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

Leona Carr

Leona Battle Carr, 54, of Blakely died Friday, Feb. 16, 2007, at Early Memorial Hospital.

Mrs. Carr was born Oct. 21, 1952, to the late Jerry B. Battle and Eula Mae Battle. She was a member of St. John Freewill Baptist Church in Blakely.

Survivors include her husband, Henry Lee Carr; one son, Leon Battle of Bristol, Fla.; one sister, Elizabeth Massey of St. Petersburg, Fla.; seven brothers, Eddie R. Battle, Jerry Battle and Josh Battle, all of Newark, N.J., Johnny G. Battle and Tyrone Battle and wife Effie, all of St. Petersburg, Fla., John L. Battle and wife Easter of West Palm Beach, Fla., and George Wiggins of Blakely; and four grandchildren.

Funeral services were Saturday, Feb. 24, 2007, at 2

p.m. at St. John Freewill Baptist Church with Rev. John Cheatem officiating. Interment followed at Liberty Hill Cemetery.

Peoples Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

Lou Ellen Walton Homemaker

Lou Ellen Wade Walton, 81, of Colquitt died Sunday, Feb. 18, 2007, at Southeast Alabama Medical Center.

Mrs. Walton was a member of Damascus Methodist Church.

Survivors include her husband, Ira Walton Jr.; two daughters, Mary Walton Ray and husband Danny of Cordele and Becky Walton Coyle and husband Michael of Indianapolis, Ind.; one brother, Paul Wade of Flowery Branch, Ga.; five sisters, Ada Lee Murkerson of Bainbridge, Jenny Clay, Minnie Mash, Carrie Major, all of Cairo, and Thelma Davis of Eatonton; seven grandchildren, Mary Beth Mulroy, Gordon Scott, Stephen Ray, Phillip Ray, John Mark Ray, Jared Walton Logan and John Coyle; six great-grandchildren, Campbell Scott, Ethan Scott, Sidney Scott, Robert Scott, Walton Mulroy and Grace Mulroy.

Funeral services were Wednesday, Feb. 21, 2007, at 2 p.m. at Damascus Methodist Church with Rev. Paul Wade, Rev. Beverly McFadden and Tony Mock officiating. Interment followed at Damascus Cemetery.

Pallbearers were Gordon Scott, Stephen Ray, Philip Ray, John Mark Ray, Richard Henley, Jamie West, Brian Hinkle and Tommy Walton.

Colquitt Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

Lena Mae Brown

Lena Mae Brown, 66, of Jakin died Monday, Feb. 19, 2007.

Mrs. Brown was born in Jakin, Sept. 27, 1940, to the late Israel and Pearlene Hilliard Jr. She was a member of Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church and worked at Donalsonville Hospital for 29 years.

She was preceded in death by one sister, Lula Jones, and one brother, John Willie Hilliard.

Survivors include three daughters, Sharon Hilliard, and Jacqueline Virgin and husband Willie G., all of Jakin, and Samatha McGee and husband Dan of Dothan; two sisters, Hazel Moore of Philadelphia and Ethel Deason of Houston, Texas; five granddaughters, Candis Brown, Latoya Brown, Laren Brown, Danielle McGee, and Mechelle McGee; three grandsons, Lloyd Brown, Dannard McGee and Darien McGee; and three great-grandsons.

Funeral services were Saturday, Feb. 24, 2007, at 3 p.m. at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church with Rev. Alvetta Butler officiating. Interment followed at Good Hope African Methodist Episcopal Church in Cedar Springs.

Pallbearers were Bryant Deason, Kenny Jones, Steve Jones, Dan McGee, Dannard McGee and Michael Moore.

Mary McDonald Seamstress

Mary Lou Sheffield McDonald, 84, of Blakely died Tuesday, Feb. 20, 2007, at her residence.

Mrs. McDonald was born in Early County Nov. 8, 1922, to the late William Alfred Sheffield and Bessie Juanita Perry Sheffield. She

was a member of First Assembly of God Church in Blakely and a seamstress at Brew-Schneider Manufacturing Company.

She was preceded in death by her husband, John Thomas McDonald.

Survivors include one daughter, Wanda M. Houston and husband Hayward of Blakely; three sons, Tommy McDonald and wife Mary of Abbeville, Wendell McDonald and wife Jeanine of Blakely and Richard “Tony” McDonald and wife Grace of Belton, Texas; 10 grandchildren, 25 great-grandchildren; and eight great-great-grandchildren.

Funeral services were Friday, Feb. 23, 2007, at 2 p.m. at First Assembly of God Church with Rev. Wayne Fussell officiating. Interment followed at Blakely Cemetery.

Pallbearers were Richard McDonald Jr., Kenny Johnson, Othar Adkinson, Robbie McDonald, Kenny Kennedy and Keith Kennedy.

Manry-Jordan-Hodges Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

Clemmie McNair

Clemmie Coleman McNair, 90, of Edison died Wednesday, Feb. 21, 2007, at Calhoun Nursing Home.

Mrs. McNair was born in Randolph County, Sept. 22, 1916, to the late Frank Berrin Coleman and Gussie Starr Coleman. She was a member of Carnegie Baptist Church and a pharmacy technician for Martin Army Hospital in Columbus.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Lester McNair Sr.

Survivors include two daughters, Annette Gibney of Columbus and Jannette Wright of Montgomery; two sons, Lester McNair Jr. and wife Donna of Edison and Joe McNair and wife Ellen

of Montgomery; seven grandchildren, Paige Warrick and husband Harold, Shannon Stafford and husband Don, all of Columbus, Leslie Sibilia and husband Stephen of Oceanport, N.J., Lee McNair and wife Tonya of Edison, Cole McNair of Edison, Megan Peak and husband Dillion of Birmingham and Michael McNair of Montgomery; six great-grandchildren; and one great-great-grandchild.

Graveside services were Friday, Feb. 23, 2007, at 11:30 a.m. at Bluffton Cemetery with Rev. David Crowdis officiating.

Manry-Jordan-Hodges was in charge of arrangements.

Cecil E. Strickland Driver

Cecil Eugene Strickland, 74, of Blakely died Friday, Feb. 23, 2007, at Bainbridge Health Care.

Mr. Strickland was born in Early County, Sept. 16, 1932, to the late Tullis Lee Kelly and Audrey Palmer Strickland Kelly. He was of the Baptist faith and a retired commercial truck driver. He also served in the Korean conflict with the U.S. Army.

Survivors include four daughters, Evelyn Strickland of Blakely, Pamela Hoskins of Donalsonville, Debra Hoskins of Cotopaxi, Colo., and Janet Harold of Blakely; five sons, Michael Strickland of Perry, Fla., David Strickland of Albany, Randy Strickland and Cecil Strickland, all of Blakely; 34 grandchildren; and 25 great-grandchildren.

Memorial services were Tuesday, Feb. 27, 2007, at 2 p.m. at Abundant Life Church with Dr. Jerry A. Patterson officiating.

Manry-Jordan-Hodges Funeral Home was in charge of arrangements.

CHURCH NEWS

Ebenezer A.M.E.

Ebenezer African Methodist Episcopal Church will celebrate Men and Women Day March 4 at 3 p.m.

The theme is “Bridging the Past with the Future, and Church Growth.” Everyone is invited to attend.

New Mount Nebo M.B.

New Mount Nebo Missionary Baptist Church will have their usher anniversary Sunday, March 4 at 2 p.m. Minister Bessie Martin will be the speaker. Everyone is invited to attend.

St. Mary’s

St. Mary’s Church will celebrate their annual choir night Sunday March 3, at 6 p.m. Everyone is invited to attend.

Mount Olive M.B.

Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church will have its annual youth revival March 6-8 at 7:30 p.m. Dr. H.L. Moore will be the speaker. Everyone is invited to attend.

Union A.M.E.

Union African Methodist Episcopal Church will honor Rev. John H. Davis Sunday, March 4 at 3 p.m. Sue Ford and the Holy Five of Dothan will be featured at the celebration. Everyone is invited to attend.

True Love M.B.

True Love Missionary Baptist Church will have a yard sale Saturday, March 3 at 8 a.m. located at 5714 Freeman Road.

Fort Gaines U.M.

Fort Gaines United Methodist Church will host

revival services March 11 and 12. There will be a covered dish supper at 6 p.m. Sunday and Monday with the service beginning at 7 p.m. On Monday at 11 a.m., there will be a service with lunch immediately following.

The speaker will be the Rev. Mike Ricker of Wynnton Road UMC in Columbus, and the musician is Angie Carr of Cordele.

Shiloh Outreach

Shiloh Outreach in Edison will host Paul Baskin Tuesday, March 6 and Thursday March 8 at 7:30 p.m. He will also be speaking at The Gate Worship Center in Arlington Wednesday, March 7 at 7 p.m. Everyone is invited to attend.

If Tears Could Build a Stairway

*If tears could build a stairway,
and memories a lane,
I would walk right up to heaven
and bring you back again.*

*No farewell words were spoken,
No time to say goodbye.
You were gone before I knew it,
and only God knows why.*

*My heart still aches with sadness
and secret tears still flow.
What it meant to love you —
No one can ever know.*

*But now I know you want me
to mourn for you no more;
To remember all the happy times,
life still has much in store*

*Since you'll never be forgotten,
I pledge to you today —
A hollowed place within my heart
is where you'll always stay.*



Bessie Mae Williams

You left me three months and two weeks ago and it's been the hardest days of my life. I love you and miss you.

Melinda Williams, Emma Williams & grandchildren