

Abide – Abiding in Christ

2/4/24

Hebrews 12:1-3

Sunday AM

Have you ever had to break hard news to anyone? If you have, then you know that it's quite challenging – and often, the shock of the news overwhelms the person so much that they miss the news or misinterpret what you've shared to mean something else.

Well, I have some difficult news to share w/ you today – it's not to scare you but to encourage you. So, before I begin, I want everyone to take a moment to compose themselves... (pause) Are you ready?

Ok. Here it comes – What most of us have been led to believe is necessary to be a *Christian* isn't totally accurate! (repeat) Are you still w/ me? LME – it's not that it's all wrong, but just likely it's incomplete.

Most of us have been taught that to be *saved*, all we have to do is accept that we're a sinner, say a prayer telling God we're sorry – and we're in! While that's part of it, that's not the full picture. Jesus gave His life for more than a faith nod but also for our willingness to follow Him – and these (2) ideas are inseparable.

This is critical to realize b/c following Jesus is a call to more than acknowledging His work on the cross and living as you want thinking you are okay w/ God – it is a call to walk in His footsteps to know Him, to be like Him and to do as He did – as His apprentice.

Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:21 – *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*

Only WHO? Only the one who does the Father's will. Meaning – there's more to this thing called the Christian life than just acknowledging the existence of Jesus. There's a determination to actually (1) be w/ Jesus; (2) become like Jesus; and (3) live as He lived.

Thus, if you're one of those people who've been taught to pray the “sinners” prayer w/out turning your life over to Jesus by obeying His commands and following His example – I'm sorry, but you were likely misled!

DYK that the term *Christian* is used only 3x in the N.T. while the term *disciple* or *apprentice* was used 269x. And yet, according to recent surveys – **63%** of Americans self-identify as Christian, while only **4%** would say that they're actually living to follow Jesus.

The primary reason is b/c for far too long, the church has been peddling a Gospel of *convenience* w/out *commitment* as too much teaching today has preferred *easy believe-ism* over *surrendered followship*.

We've become so evangelistically-minded to get people into heaven, we've short-sheeted them into thinking that b/c they've acknowledged Jesus that a true salvation transaction has occurred.

BUT Jesus didn't step out of heaven into flesh to convert people to a religion – He laid down His life to raise up people to become disciples in His Kingdom – that is, people who'd trust AND obey.

Unfortunately, since the end of WW2 – *the Gospel has been preached in such a way that people could become Christians w/out becoming an apprentice of Jesus.*

SEE – For Jesus, true salvation is less about getting you into heaven and more about getting heaven into you. It's less about a faith transaction and more about life transformation. It's not just about Him becoming like us, it's about us becoming like Him. It's more than accepting the merits of His death, it's about receiving and experiencing the power of His resurrection.

Christianity is more than a theory about the universe, more than teachings written down on paper; it is a path along which we journey – in the deepest and richest sense – the way of life. Bishop Kallistos Ware

This brings me to John 14 in what was likely Jesus' final teaching to His disciples as they walked towards Gethsemane where He promised to all who'd ever follow Him – *I will ask the Father, and He will give you another advocate to help you and be w/ you...*

another advocate means *another one like me*. As He is departing, Jesus promised His disciples to send a helper He called the *paraclete* or *alongsider* (the H.S.)

As this lesson spilled over to John 15, Jesus shared the secret to connecting w/ the *paraclete* – it was to plug into this thing He called the *abiding life*.

WHY is this important? B/c it's **IMPOSSIBLE** to live the Christian life w/out abiding in the H.S. Yet, most of us have been taught to live the Christian life unplugged in our good flesh instead of plugged into and under the leading of the H.S. – which is a problem.

To **abide** (*meno*) is to live plugged into/empowered by H.S. It means to *remain in, connect w/* or *align under*.

Meaning – the abiding life in Christianity refers to a close, continual relationship w/ Jesus that involves staying connected to Him thru worship, prayer, Scripture, and living out the teachings of Jesus.

The WITH-God life. Dallas Willard

When Jesus said, 'Abide in me' He meant, cling to me. Stick fast to me. Live your life in close, intimate communion w/ me. Cast your whole weight on me. Never let go of your hold on me for a moment. JC Ryle

Don't Miss – the question isn't if you're abiding or not but instead – *what are you abiding in?* B/c we all are abiding in something or someone – and whatever you're abiding in will determine the fruit of your life. It will determine what you value and seek after.

SO – if you're abiding in *social media*, then it'll form who you are and how you view the world around you. If you're abiding in *materialism*, then it'll form your priorities, pursuits, and sense of purpose. If you're abiding in *hedonism*, then there's no limit to how far you will go for one more taste of pleasure.

YET if you've chosen to believe in Jesus and plug into the H.S., then you've decided to walk in His footsteps to become like Him to live as He lived.

Truth – all of us are abiding in something or someone to meet our physical, emotional, and spiritual needs – and whatever it is can be identified by the fruit being born in our *ambitions, appetites, attitudes, and actions*.

In John 15, Jesus gave us a metaphor of a grapevine. It was to explain the realities of the abiding life – as no branch can bear fruit unless it is connected to the root. *Meaning if your life is producing oranges, then you're not an apple tree. If your life is not producing the character of Jesus, then you're not a true disciple!*

When I think of abiding, I think of a lamp illuminating the darkness. For it to work, the lamp has to have a working lightbulb, plugged into a reliable power source, and turned on. The same is true for the abiding life. Every day, we have to choose to live submitted to God and plugged into His power – otherwise, our Christian life will not work and we'll have to settle for a religion instead of for an abiding relationship.

SEE – there's a huge difference b/w living an abiding life and living a religious life. Religion is a good, moral life lived in **MY** ability while the abiding life is a surrendered life lived thru **GOD's** ability.

We see this thru-out the N.T. as several passages speak about the necessity of abiding. In Acts 1:8, we read – *You will receive power once the H.S. has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost.*

In the G.C., Jesus said that all authority had been given to Him to make accessible to us so that we might *go into all the world to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and H.S. and teaching them to obey* – but then notice the final few words – *and lo, I will be w/ you always* – which refers to the necessity of abiding in Him.

In **Galatians 5**, Paul encouraged them to walk in the Spirit and not according to the desires of the flesh.

In **Colossians 1**, Paul offers an encouraging prayer to the Colossians to allow the H.S. to fill them in such a way that they might walk worthy of the Lord to put a smile on God's face.

To the **Philippians**, he wrote – *Rejoice in the Lord always. I'll say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Don't be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer/petition, w/ thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ. Finally, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be w/ you.*

Each of these passages (and so many more) share a common theme – ***the only way the abiding life can be experienced is thru in the H.S. in you living thru you.***

Today, I want to give you (4) essentials to abiding.

Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run w/ perseverance the race marked out for us. Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:1-3

This passage reminds me of what is required to follow Jesus and to live plugged into the abiding life so that Jesus can live in me, w/ me, and thru me.

I **REMEMBER** the Saints Before You

Since we're surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...

For me – this is a call to actively be in God's Word to not only learn about Jesus but to learn from others how to walk w/ God in an abiding life.

cloud of witnesses – is a reference to the men/women previously mentioned in **Hebrews 11** who serve as *testifiers* who've gone before us to set the example of how to walk w/ God.

So, when we open our Bibles and read about these ordinary, yet great men/women of faith, their testimonies serve as divine mentors to help us learn from them, both what to do and what not to do when it comes to walking w/ and serving God.

To illustrate this look at **Hebrews 11:4**, where the writer speaks of Abel and says, "*Thru faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.*" He speaks to help us to know the reality of God in our own lives – and we learn from Abel that God always deserves our first and best and never our least and leftovers.

But it's not just them, but also other people in the faith who've walked the walk and talked the talk. People whose lives have intersected w/ours in some way, who know how to abide and can show us the way.

II **ABANDON** the Distractions Around You

let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles and let us run w/ perseverance the race marked out for us...

This is the call to REMOVE anything in our lives that might trip us up or weigh us down inhibiting our ability to abide in and walk w/ God.

The context refers to a runner removing anything that might slow them down or trip them up. In the ancient world, runners would either remove their cloaks completely or cinch them to their belts to free their legs from anything that might impede their ability to run.

What are the hindrances that entangle us? Anything, good or bad, that so consumes us that it inhibits our ability to walk w/ God under the leading of the H.S.

So, to abide, *we have to live alert to the schemes of the demonic, the desires of the flesh, and the ways of the world that are trying to stuff us into its mold.*

Therefore, w/ minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus is revealed at His coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, b/c I am holy." 1 Peter 1:13-16

The idea here is that b/c in salvation God has set you apart from sin unto Himself by grace thru faith, and as a result, you now have the **responsibility**, thru the H.S. to set yourself apart from sin to God.

III **CONCENTRATE** on Jesus Alone

Fixing our eyes on Jesus...

It means *to keep our eye on the ball, on the prize, on the objective* – so that you're never distracted by anything else but keep your eyes on your focal point. The idea is to put on **blinderns** so that you only see Jesus. Paul spoke of this idea in Colossians 3:1-3.

Since you have been raised w/ Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden w/ Christ in God. Colossians 3:1-3

set (*zeteo*) to keep on seeking – and refers to becoming one’s very lifestyle and priority. It’s the same word found in **Matthew 6:33** where Jesus called us *to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness*.

To set our hearts and minds on things above is to hold tightly to what is eternal, and loosely to what is temporal and earthly. unknown

We do this by focusing on the life/teachings of Jesus.

SEE – while we need the entire counsel of God’s Word, we always need to keep Jesus in full view b/c as His disciples, were apprentices of His life and G.C.

A Focus on His **PERSON**

He’s the author/finisher of our faith – God in the flesh and our Savior. The one who initiates/completes us.

B Focus on His **PASSION**

We’re to keep the cross/empty tomb in full view b/c on the cross, Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves so that by His wounds we can find healing.

C Focus on His **POSITION**

Hebrews tells us that Jesus now sits at the right-hand interceding for us even now.

IV **ENDURE** Opposition w/ Joy

Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, that you will not grow weary/lose heart.

When the going gets tough, the faithful remember Jesus. When spiritual fatigue sets in and when the temptation appears overwhelming... When others have fallen to the wayside and you’re ready to throw in the towel – the encouragement is to count the cost by remembering **how far Jesus went for you.**

WTM – let me close w/ a statement Jesus made to the (12) at Caesarea Philippi in Luke 9.

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Luke 9:23-25

Notice the invitation is to **anyone** (whoever). So, no matter if you’re rich/poor, good/sinful, male/female, or red, yellow, black or white – His invitation is for anyone/everyone – but notice what’s required – your complete surrender to become His apprentice.

Comer writes – Imagine you’re a H.S. dropout who always wanted to be a college professor – and b/c you dropped out, you’ve found yourself working in a dead-end job waiting tables. One day a famous college prof walks into your store and strikes up a conversation w/ you. B/c he instantly takes a liking to you, he offers you the chance of a lifetime. He says, “If you come w/ me right now, I’ll give you a full-ride scholarship and teach you everything I know b/c I believe one day you can do what I do?” **What would you do?**

This is what Jesus did for us. He invited us to become His apprentices to be w/ Him, to become like Him, and to live as He lived. So, to believe anything less is to have accepted a flawed Gospel!