

Abide – Unto the Nations

3/17/24

Acts 1:1-11

Sunday AM

A lady named Jane was taken to the hospital for an operation. Terrified of dying, she prayed, “Lord, is this it? Am I going to die?” But the Lord assured her, “No, Jane, my records show you’re going to live for another 43 years | 12 days.” Well, realizing she had so much time to live, she decided to make the most of it. So, while she was in the hospital she decided to undergo a full makeover including liposuction, a tummy tuck, a nose job, and a facelift – she even dyed her hair a new color. Well, on the day she left the hospital, tragically, she was struck by a bus crossing the street and killed. As you can imagine, she was pretty upset when she stood before the Lord. She said, “Lord! You said I had another 43 years! What happened?” The Lord said, “Jane? Is that you? I didn’t recognize you!”

As we continue our series on the **abiding** life – let me assure you that God knows *who* you are! He knows *where* you are and *what* you’re all about. He knows your *coming* and *going*. He knows what *drives* you and what *thrives* you. He knows the *good*, the *bad*, and even the *ugly* in your life – and still, more than anything else, He desires an intimate, personal relationship w/ you if you will abide in Him.

abide – to remain in and aligned under the influence of the H.S. in full surrender and dependence on God.

The WITH-God life. Dallas Willard

Meaning – the abiding life is living in a close, continual, non-transactional relationship w/ Jesus that invites you to choose to remain in and connected w/ Him by plugging into the leading of the H.S. so that each day you become more dependent on Him and less dependent on yourself in every area of your life. To help us abide – God has given us differing spiritual activities like worship, prayer, stewardship, and the Bible to help us live intimately/dependently w/ Him.

As we continue our study this AM, I want us to look at one of the natural responses to an abiding life – and that is, people who abide **ALWAYS** *talk the talk and walk the walk*. They share w/ others about Jesus! They can’t help it! They have to bear witness to what they’ve experienced and to what they love...

In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions thru the H.S. to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating w/ them, he gave this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized w/ water, but in a few days, you will be baptized w/ the H.S.” Then they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them: “It’s not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his authority. But you will receive power when the H.S. comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After he said this, he was taken up before their eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going when suddenly (2) men dressed in white stood beside them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who’s been into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go.” Acts 1:1-11

The focal in this passage is vs. 8 – *But you will receive power when the H.S. comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

I want you to notice (3) truths w/in this verse.

I Christians are **WITNESSES** to God's Story

It's vital to note that in Acts 1:8, Jesus didn't say that we *could* try to be His witnesses, or that we *should* be His witnesses, but that if we've trusted Jesus as our Savior/Lord, we **WOULD** be His witnesses.

So, the question is – **what kind of witness are you?**

Dr. Ed Young once told a story about taking his wife to the largest flea market in America in Canton, TX. While there, they stopped for lunch at a chicken place in the display area. As they were enjoying their meal, an employee was walking around passing out free samples of the chicken, but she was only giving them to the customers who'd already bought their lunch! Ed's wife remarked that if she'd only walked another 15 steps, she could've handed free samples to the 100's of hungry people walking by who hadn't eaten yet. She said, "What a waste of chicken to give the free samples to those who were already eating!"

I fear this is the problem w/ many Christians/churches today. We've forgotten that the mission is outside the (4) walls of the church more than it's inside of it. So, we keep on serving the bread of life to the same people Sunday after Sunday while the lost world goes hungry.

Folks, we're witnesses to the *Bread of Life* and to the *Living Water* who wants to satisfy the longing of every hungry/thirsty soul. When we choose to not go into our world to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel, we're like a restaurant that has plenty of food prepared but refuses to serve its hungry customers.

witness (*martyr*) gives firsthand testimony of what they have seen/experienced by furnishing evidence or proof to confirm their verbal witness.

There are (2) vital items to understand as a witness:

A Your Witness is about **HOW** You Live

witness is from the word *martyr* – which most of us equate w/ a willingness to die for what we believe, but in actuality, the word refers to having a willingness to LIVE for what you believe.

B Your Job is to **CONVEY** not **CONVERT**

Repeat – I can **TELL** everyone but can save no one

Repeat – I can **SHOW** everyone but can save no one

Repeat – I can **LOVE** everyone but can save not one

LISTEN – it's the H.S.'s job to *confront*, *convict*, *convince*, and *convert* – our job to convey God's thru our words/actions always ready to share w/ others the hope w/in us – w/ gentleness and love.

Nonetheless – God has chosen and entrusted us w/ His good news and He expects us to walk/talk our faith to influence others to desire to know/find Him.

How can they call on Him to save them unless they believe in Him? And how can they believe in Him if they've never heard about Him? And how can they hear about Him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go/tell them w/out being sent? That is why the Scriptures say, "How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!" Romans 10:14-15

So, if you're a follower of Jesus, you're His witness – and as His witness, you're to offer to others firsthand testimony of what you've seen/experienced to help them taste/see that the Lord is good!

2nd question – just where am I to be His witness?

II This Witness is unto the **NATIONS**

in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth...

I believe this phrase implies starting where you are and intentionally moving out unto the nations to share w/ others the love of God found in Jesus. So, whether we go across the street, across the nation, or around the world – we are a witness to the love/truth of Jesus.

Problem – it’s so easy to settle into our comfort zone right and forget that Jesus called us to go to the ends of the earth to tell every tribe/nation about His love – yet it’s a part of His prophetic, missionary plan.

Jesus said, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be shared thru-out the entire world (*oikoumené*) as a testimony to all nations (*ethnos*)...” Matthew 24:14

world – refers to the geographical world – that is, unto every person in every nation on earth.

nations (*ethnos*) – refers to every ethnic people group

For instance, in China, there’s one nation, but they recognize 56 different ethnic groups – while around the world, some 9,800 unique ethnic groups exist who speak over 6,000 languages/dialects.

Point – If you’re a follower of Jesus, God has *called, entrusted, and empowered* you to be His witness to every nation, tribe, and ethnic group thru-out the world beginning right where you *live, work, and play*. Thus, every person our lives intersect w/ is a chance to share Christ – ALWAYS in deed, and OFTEN w/ words.

It’s crazy to think about – but this is God’s way of G.C.

There’s never been a more essential assignment given to a less qualified group of people than the G.C. Yet thankfully, God doesn’t call the qualified – but thru the H.S., He qualifies the called. *unknown*

III The **POWER** of this Witness Comes from God

Before Jesus sent His disciples into the world, He sent the H.S. to them (and to us) to empower them/us – meaning we’re not supposed to go alone in this missional endeavor but empowered by God.

This means He goes **BEFORE** us to pave the way – He walks **BESIDE** us to guide us in truth – and He goes **BEHIND** us to do what on the H.S. can do – we just have to be willing to go to live/speak our faith as the H.S. leads and empowers us.

Scary reality – if God were to take the H.S. out of the world, much of what we’re doing in our lives and churches today in Jesus’ name would go right on and nobody would know the difference... b/c too many of us have only learned how to live the Christian life in our ability (good flesh) instead of in God’s ability.

I don’t say this to **shame** us but to **alert** us – b/c it can happen to even the best of us b/c it’s easy to do.

Example – most of us would consider Billy Graham to be one of the great Christians of the modern era. DYK that once while doing a revival in England he met w/ the Welsh evangelist Stephen Olford and confessed that he knew there was something different about His preaching than Olford’s preaching. After spending (2) days w/ Olford, Billy realized that Olford had a power from God he didn’t have – and that he had been preaching out of his conviction for God and his personal charisma. Asking Olford to teach him, Billy would say that Olford’s

guidance was the changing moment of His ministry and Christian life – b/c he finally understood what it meant to surrender fully to God and walk in the Spirit in the abiding life. Billy called this the turning point of his life.

While it is possible to be a Christian and not abide, it is impossible to live the Christian life w/out abiding – and the power of our witness doesn't come from us but from God and His redeeming grace.

I heard a pastor explain the abiding life this way. He wrote – My grandfather ran a waterwheel beside a creek in east TN. W/ it, he ground corn into cornmeal. Instead of trying to ground the corn by hand, he let the water hit the wheel that turned a mechanism to ground the corn. Instead of using his power to turn the wheel, he let the power of the flowing water do the work.

This is the intention of the abiding life. Instead of trying to live the Christian life in our limited, good flesh ability, we're to allow the continual flow of the H.S. in us to power us to do the work.

How does a person get this power? Graham said:

- 1 – Confess and turn from your sin to Christ.
- 2 – Open and Yield every area of your life to Jesus.
- 3 – Pray and ask God for His fullness.
- 4 – Trust Him daily as you live God's Word.

In **Acts 1:8** – we learn that we're *called*, *entrusted*, and *empowered* by the H.S. to share His good news w/ the people our lives intersect w/ each/every day. We're not called to **confront** them, **convince** them, **convict** them, or **convert** them – but we're called to **convey** the message thru our words/actions. But it begins w/ each of us abiding in Him so the H.S. can move in power.

Listen – there are over 200 mil. non-churched people in America today making the U.S. the 4th largest unreached nation in the world. Don't assume your friends/neighbors have heard or believed. Go and tell!