

Abide – Talking the Talk

2/28/21

Matthew 4:19 | 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Sunday AM

Even if you aren't a sports fan, you'll appreciate the story about the college football team whose starting QB had just been injured. The #2 QB was out sick – so the coach had to put the 3rd string freshman QB, who was also the backup punter. To make matters worse, they were backed up on their own 3-yard line. Hoping to get out of danger, the coach told his QB to hand the ball off to the big, senior FB (Kowaski) to get them some breathing room – and then on the 3rd play, punt the ball away. The young QB did as he was told. But on the 1st play, the FB found a hole off tackle and ran for 50 yards. Then as instructed, the young QB ran the same play again; and again, a hole opened for another 45 yards. The fans went crazy as the team went 95 yards in (2) plays – but in all the excitement, the coach forgot to send in a new play. So as the team lined up, as scripted, the young QB took the snap, stepped back, and to everyone's amazement, punted the ball thru the uprights into the stands. As his stunned team came off the field, the coach angrily grabbed the QB, "What in the world were you thinking kicking the ball?" The QB replied, "I was thinking, 'This is crazy! My coach doesn't have a clue about football.'"

As ridiculous as this story is, there's a good lesson – unlike the coach, God doesn't get lost in the game of life – and his plan for winning the hearts of men to Himself requires our abiding/engaged participation.

We're in a series on how to live the **abiding** life. To be sure, **abiding** is more than having Jesus as Savior. To abide is to live connected w/ God under the influence of the H.S. in full surrender/dependence on God.

In **John 15**, we find a familiar story where Jesus and the disciples had just left the upper room following the Last Supper. They'd begun the ½ mile walk down Mt. Zion toward the Kidron Valley to Gethsemane where Jesus would be arrested and begin his torturous trek to the cross. As they meandered thru the vineyards outside the Temple walls, Jesus likely stopped at one of the trellises to offer this final, essential teaching.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean b/c of the word I have spoken to you. Abide in me, as I also abide in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that's thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

abide – to remain; it's to live in alignment under God's authority grafted into intimacy thru the H.S.

Abiding in Christ is the essential relationship of the Christian life – w/out it, we can do nothing to please God! Abiding is all about cultivating/enjoying the most important relationship in your life. It's not measured by how much you know about your Bible, how good you are, or how long you spend each day in prayer. In abiding, it's about seeking, longing for, thirsting after, and waiting on the Lord so you might taste/see that He is good and present in your life. To abide is to live surrendered in intimacy w/ God.

Thru-out our study, we've been learning the various tools/disciplines God has given us to help us to draw near to Him. What's important to remember, is these avenues are NOT religious boxes to check, but relational dance steps to enjoy intimacy w/ God. Gifts like daily solitude, worship, prayer, Scripture, Biblical stewardship, and a local church family are essential to walking in step w/ God. Today, I want us to look at the result/overflow of the abiding life – sharing our faith.

Some people call this *evangelism/ witnessing*, but I'm not a big fan of such language. I think it sends a wrong message and fosters a flesh focus. This isn't to say we don't have a charge to be salt/light or give an account of the hope that's w/in us – we do! By all means we must walk/talk our faith; but it must come from an abiding intimacy and not from an activity of flesh.

I Salvation **BEGINS** and **ENDS** w/ Jesus

I have some good news. Just as the rising/setting of the sun has nothing to do w/ you, neither does the salvation of another soul – **this is God's job**. See – Jesus is the *only* way, *only* truth, and *only* life – and not you! We're the object of God's love – the one's He came to rescue/redeem. Listen to **Luke 19:10**:

For the Son of man is come to seek and save the lost.

Who has been lost? All of us! Ever since the Fall, God has been in relentless pursuit to rescue the creation to redeem it to Himself. This is why God sent Jesus into the world – to save it. When we by faith respond to the wooing of the H.S., we can be rescued/redeemed.

For God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption thru His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:13-14

What does this mean? It means, salvation from start to finish is the work of God. We can do nothing to be saved, nor can we do anything to save another person. Our only part is to either to receive or reject this truth.

Explain – it is the job of the H.S. to ***confront, convict, convince, and convert*** – and unless this occurs, no one can be saved. It is all a gift of God to rescue us from the power, pain, penalty of sin. **We're messengers!**

This doesn't mean God doesn't have a role for us to play in the ministry of the G.C. – He does! But it's a role played out under the guidance of the H.S. which requires that we're plugged in and following Him.

II The Key to GC. is an **ABIDING** Life

When we abide, God fills our soul to overflowing. It is in this overflow that our witness is seen/heard. It's when our **walk talks** that our **talk walks**. It reminds me of the old saying – *Share Jesus always, and when necessary, use words*. IOW – walk intimately w/ Jesus and you'll share w/ others about His hope w/in you.

W/out a doubt, there's a great misunderstanding of what it means to be a witness of the Gospel. We've been taught our job is to win the world thru our personal witness, but that'd be a misteaching of truth in our zealous attempt to see the world come to know God. As previously discussed, it's the H.S. job to ***confront, convict, convince, and convert*** – our **only** job is to ***convey*** the message when God calls upon us to give an account of the hope w/in us.

I don't know about you, but this truth takes a huge burden off of me. I don't have to learn some gospel tactic to give an account – I just need to learn to abide.

In fact, Jesus was absolutely clear that unless our witness flows from an abiding life, it is useless – and potentially damaging. **Let me explain...**

Most of us are aware that after the resurrection, Jesus gathered His disciples together on a mountain top for one final chat. It was there He gave His followers what has become known as the G.C.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the H.S. teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. Behold, I am w/ you always, even to the end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20

If we were to only read v. 19, we might get the idea the G.C. falls solely on the shoulders of Christians – but this would be wrong. To appreciate our calling, we need to begin in **v. 18** – Jesus said, “*All authority in heaven/earth has been given to me. Therefore...*”

B/c the **authority**, responsibility, and power of the Gospel falls on Jesus alone, it doesn’t begin w/ us – it begins w/ Him. It’s b/c of His power/authority which He has made accessible to us thru the abiding life that we become His witnesses. Or consider Acts 1:8:

You will receive power when the H.S. has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and unto the world. Acts 1:8

Notice that we become His witnesses only after the H.S. has come upon us. Or consider **Matthew 4:19**:

Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.

The focus isn’t on fishers of men as some would have you believe; the emphasis is on **FOLLOWING**. If we follow, then we **will** become a fisher of men b/c to follow is to abide and to abide is to follow.

But to engage in G.C. in our power, independent of the H.S., is a dangerous thing. You could make the case that the most dangerous threat to the gospel is people trying to share the grace of God from their unholy, ambitious flesh – b/c in doing so, we convince people to respond to our message instead of to the H.S.

Several yrs ago I was on a mission trip to Alaska. On our team was a man determined to present the Gospel to every man/woman in Alaska. The problem was, he shared over/over w/out any sense of the guiding hand of the H.S. He was all gas and no brake. And the result was he was steamrolling people in the name of Jesus. You could literally see how he turned people off to God b/c of his good, fleshly ambition to share Jesus.

Talk about a terrifying thought – we can do more damage than good b/c of our zealous ambition to see someone come to Christ. I know this sounds bizarre, but salvation is not and will never be the work of man – it must be only be the work of the H.S. So, as we live, to be a helpful witness, we must live under the guiding influence of the H.S. to allow Him to lead us in all spiritual discussions so that He can do what only He can do – confront, convict, convince, and convert.

This is a problem among evangelical denominations today? Instead of focusing on helping people abide, we appear to think that some new marketing strategy w/ a catchy slogan is going to win the world. Listen, the biggest reason the lost world rejects Christ is not the message (it’s good!) – it’s the hypocritical lives of the messengers. We don’t need another strategy; we need God’s people living abiding lives. We don’t need more evangelist, we only need more genuine, abandoned fellowship. Consider what happened in Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled w/ awe at the many wonders/signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together w/ glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

As the church began to gather, the people began to engage together in the abiding life. As they walked w/ God together/individually – notice what happened... God used their witness to win others to faith in God. *And the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved.*

Who Added? The Lord. Why? B/c salvation is solely the work of God thru the H.S. in us living thru us. The early church focused on knowing God and abiding under the influence of the H.S. as they shared life.

What does this teach us? It teaches us that the power of our witness is in living a transformed life more than it is speaking zealously of something we do not know.

IOW – The best witness is a personal witness. To **know** someone is far different than **knowing about** someone. While you might be able to tell someone about my wife, Meg, I can tell you who she really is. Why? B/c I don't just know about her – I know her. And I know her b/c we share an abiding life together.

When we live in abiding intimacy w/ God, we will begin to know God unlike ever before. The result is that we gain the ability to speak of someone we love and who loves us. We can speak to what we know and not just about what we know about. This is abiding!

Elton Trueblood – Evangelism occurs when Christians are so ignited by their contact w/ Christ (abiding), they set others on fire. It's easy to see when something is aflame, it ignites other material. Any fire that doesn't spread eventually will go out. A church or Christian w/out evangelism is a contradiction in terms; just as fire that doesn't burn is a contradiction.

Maybe the better way to express this is the little girl talking to her mother after church on Sunday. As they were driving home, girl began asking her mom some questions about the AM service. "Mommy, the pastor said God is bigger than we are. He said, God is so big that He could hold the whole world in His hands. Is that true? The mom assured her daughter the pastor was correct. The daughter then asked, "But Mommy, he also said God comes to live inside of us when we believe in Jesus as our Savior. Is that true too? Again, the mom assured the girl the pastor's words were true. Then, w/ a puzzled look on her face, the girl asked, "If God is bigger than we are – and He lives in us, wouldn't He show thru us too?"

ABSOLUTELY! The power and credibility of our witness overflows out of our abiding intimacy w/ God.