

ABIDING IN CHRIST

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Scripture: John 13 to 17

I recently saw a meme which had a picture of a lady peering into her handbag, and saying, "I wish I had a Google map to my handbag."

Today, I would like to give us a small map to an area which might be familiar to some of you. The passage that we are looking at actually transcends a larger part of scripture, and we are looking at what is known as the Farewell Discourse, or the Upper Room Discourse. It's taken from John chs 13 to 17. I will not read the whole passage, but we will have an overview of it, and come to land at a particular place when it comes to the word abide. Most of you may be familiar with most of this passage, but I'd like that familiarity to be kept away. Let's allow the Lord to speak to us.

There was a Christian song from the 90s that made it to the charts called B-I-B-L-E, or the Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth, and it's about these 5 chapters that occupy almost a quarter of the gospel of John. So, let's look at it and see what we can glean from us, what the Lord speaks to us from this.

There are many interwoven themes there, but all of them – Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, abiding, peace, prayer, and ch.13 starts off with a very beautiful object lesson, and that is the lesson of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. Remember, Judas is also there. Jesus knows that Judas is going to be the one to betray Him; yet, Jesus washes his feet too.

John is recording all of this. If you have a bible that has Jesus' words written in red, you'll find that, except for a fair part of ch.13, chs. 14, 15, 16, and 17 are pretty much all red letters. It's almost as if John is saying: Let me take myself out of the narrative. Let this all be Jesus' words. And my prayer is, even as we go through this, that I will step away from this narrative and we'll allow the Holy Spirit to work with each one of our hearts.

Let me read about 10 or 12 verses that highlight these five chapters.

13:34-35 a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. By this, all people will know that you are My disciples.

14:1 Let not your hearts be troubled.

14:6 I am the way, the truth, and the life.

14:16-17 I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, the spirit of truth.

14:27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.

15:4-5 Abide in me and I in you. Apart from me, you can do nothing.

15:9 Abide in my love.

15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

16:7 It is to your advantage that I go away, the helper will come to you.

16:33 in the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

17:3 This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

17:21 *that they may all be one... I in them, and you in me.*

Ch 13 is the love chapter.

Ch 14 – the highlight verse: Do not be troubled. I am the way, my peace is yours.

Ch 15 – abide in me, remain in my love. Love sacrificially.

Ch 16 – the spirit will come. I have overcome the world.

Ch 17 which is incidentally one long prayer. Eternal life is knowing God, believers are united in Christ.

Before we deep dive into the word abide, let's look at the first take away.

1st take away – Jesus loves us.

John's gospel is a little different from the other 3 gospels which were written very soon after Jesus died. They have an immediacy about them, marked by words like – immediately, and then.... But John kind of steps back. He has a larger picture. In fact, if you are engaged in a conversation with a non-believing friend, and you would like to introduce him to the words of Jesus and to the scripture, John is a fantastic book. In fact, we have these New Testament books at the back of the church called No Greater Love. They have chosen to place the gospel of John in the front of the book. It's interesting because of the coverage, the way he introduces the whole theme.

John is also known as the apostle of love. Love is a theme that pervades, and we see the highlight in 3:16, which reminds us about love in the gospel. Through and through, John talks about love, even in John's letters, 1 John and 2 John.

Tradition says that John, who was the only apostle who lived to an old age, when he was old and very feeble, the people of Ephesus would ask him for a word of exhortation for the people. And John would say in his feeble voice, "Love one another." This happened repeatedly.

Also, if you have read the gospel of John, you will notice that he calls himself the 'disciple whom Jesus loved.' You probably wonder, like I do, whether Jesus really loved John so much more than the others. John himself knew that you can't expect partiality from Jesus. He loves each one. So, one take away from this whole narrative is that you and I are beloved of Jesus. It's not just John whom Jesus loved, but it's you and me. Jesus showed His love for us on the cross – that's how much He loved us.

2nd take away –

Right across chapters 13 through 17, John brings about a better understanding of the relationship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to each other and to the Holy Spirit. There is one other place that the Bible captures this very well, and that is the famous passage known as the Great Commission in Matthew 28: 18–20,

"Jesus came and told his disciples, 'I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this, I am with you always even to the end of the age.'"

That's where he brings it together. Jesus talks about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and the purpose.

John 16: ²⁴ *Anyone who does not love Me does not keep My words, and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.*

²⁶ *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.*

What does that mean to us? The Holy Spirit teaches us, convicts us, and helps us to understand scripture. Again, a theme which John takes up in ch.16:13 as well as in 1 John 2. When we pray to the Father, we pray in the name of the Son and by the power of the Holy Spirit. And when we are going through trials, we have comfort. We have a comforter, the Holy Spirit, who comforts us.

So we see this coming together of the Trinity brought together to us, for us to see how the Father and the Son relate to each other, how the Son and the Holy Spirit relate to each other.

3rd Take away –

This is where we actually land on the word ‘abide’.

Let’s pick it up from the end of 14:31, the last few words there. Jesus has finished the last supper. He’s been speaking to the people, to His disciples, and at this point in time, Judas has already left the place. Now, it’s just the eleven disciples, and He’s telling them, “Arise, let us go from here.” The whole scene up to this place is being played out in the upper room.

The upper room is a room on the first or second floor of a house which is inside the walled city, Jerusalem. The place that they are headed to is an olive garden, and this is on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, and to get there, they need to exit the city. They need to come down the Kidron Valley, and then climb up the slopes into the Mount of Olives.

We can visualize when they are leaving. It is a dark night. Jesus is walking with His disciples, talking to them. In the stillness of the night, without ambient noise, conversations are easy, even with a large group of people like the 12 of them. This time he’s talking about a vine, a grape vine with a cluster of grapes.

15:4-8 Remain in me and I will remain in you, for a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who remain in me and I in them will produce much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted. When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great joy to my Father.

If you notice, I have not taken the part about the Father who is the gardener. We’ve dealt with that topic a few months back. However, we will home in on this word *abide*, which, in this passage, I read as remain. ‘Remain’ sounds very weak; the stronger word seems to be abide.

The Greek word for that is *menō*. Let me read out the words which are used in connection with that – remain, stay connected, dwell, or continue in close relationship.

Let’s see what happens if a branch is severed, cut away from the vine.

1. No fruit.
2. It is thrown away.
3. It withers, and if it is withered and dries up, then it has no purpose other than just to be burnt up.

But what happens when we do remain in Christ and allow Jesus’ words to remain in us? We will produce much fruit. We will bring great glory to the Father. Also, He says, ask for anything and it will be granted. The word abide, the imperative there, He is talking about staying connected, continuing to stay connected.

What I want us to be taking away from this is: Let's not be visitors. Let us remain in the vine. Let's not make a dip, a visit, but let us stay connected to that vine.

What do I mean? when I get up in the morning and read the Bible, let it not be that I just read the passage and then keep those words away, and go through the rest of the day minding my own business, and not going about the Lord's business, or not making my business all about His business. Let it not be just coming in on a Sunday, hearing the word, having a time of fellowship, and then, moving away on to the rest of the week to deal with life on my own terms. Dealing with the challenges without thinking about what God's word has for me regarding those very same challenges.

Or for that matter – trying to bear fruit. The only way a severed branch would have fruit would be if somebody took some artificial grapes and tied it to the branch. There's no other way. The moment a branch is cut away from the vine, it ceases to have life. it's dead. And apart from Christ, we are dead. Irrespective of what we feel we are achieving, irrespective of what we think we are doing, we are dead.

Last week, Pastor talked about a book called 'Practicing the Presence of God' which is a collection of letters of Brother Lawrence, who was a monk in a monastery. He was of humble origins, and his job was in the kitchen. So he, at that point in time, says that whether it is peeling a potato or picking up a piece of straw from the ground, he would do everything to the Lord.

That really is epitomizing that connected nature of our life to Christ, and this whole nature of connectedness, obedience to His word. Do I know His word enough? Am I spending time in His word adequately to know what He has for me for that situation, for that particular scenario, the particular word-related meeting that I'm going to be attending? Have I understood His word to know what the Lord wants me to take away from His word into that situation?

Let me give you a verse which talks about the origin to that abiding. Where does that relationship start? John 17:6 which is part of the prayer, Jesus says, "I have revealed you to the ones you gave me from this world. They were always yours. You gave them to me, and they have kept your word."

It talks about we, you and I, already belonging to God. This is a theme which Paul takes up further in Ephesians 1, as well as in Colossians 3. He takes that same thing further and says that we are the ones whose names are already written before the foundation of the world. The Father has given us to Jesus.

So, whose are we? We belong to Jesus. That connection starts from that place. So, until and unless we walk away, we can definitely remain connected. Again, talking about nature, the branch has the nature of the vine. Si by default, we have the nature of Jesus. What does it mean to have the nature of Jesus? By being in the vine, the branch is not likely to bear mangoes. It's not likely to bear roses. Being in a grape vine, the branch will bear grapes. Thus, when we are in Christ, the fruit that we bear is the fruit of the Spirit.

One important thing about this is that the branch does not have to struggle to either remain in the vine or to bear fruit. We just need to be connected. But why is it that we seem to be struggling to get all these fruits of the Spirit? How exactly do we then get across that? it's by getting back to the Word. It is by having the Word dictate every move of ours. Allowing the Word to speak into our lives, day by day, minute by minute, moment by moment. So, let it be a natural outcome for us to dwell in God's presence, to think about the words that He has for us.

To summarize:

1. You and I are the beloved. It's not just apostle John who is the beloved. You and I are the ones whom Jesus loves.
2. The Trinity – the Spirit continues the work started by the Father and enabled by the Son.
3. We should abide; we should not just waste it.

Amen.