

God is good. God is with us. Jesus was with God in the beginning, and worked intimately with God, creating, building, giving life. And all of that was given to us as light. No matter what kind of darkness we may experience, we have that light of Christ, given by God.

We read in Isaiah, and I want to repeat it. This One who was with God in the beginning would be raised up for us, and indeed He was. He came to earth full of the Spirit of the Lord, full of wisdom and knowledge, counsel and might, and ready to do God's work. Isaiah said He would delight in obeying God and indeed Jesus did.

He chose disciples and spent three years training them, coaching them, sending them out on trial runs, pouring His life and His lifestyle into them, preparing them for the day they would step forward following in His footsteps; the day they would be the authority of God on this earth. (SLIDE 51)

What does a coach say before the big game? What counsel does a choir director give before the concert? What does a professor remind his student teacher of when it's time to turn the class over to her? What does the mentor advise the person new to the job?

If that person is a good coach; if that person is invested in his team and in his students, if that person is very familiar with the road set before the student, then he or she will give everything from the heart that they can to help their apprentice succeed.

I've stood on the stage myself, and I know what it is to be inspired by a choir director and by a professor, and by mentors who pour their lives into making you successful at something.

Jesus, the mentor, the coach, the teacher; Jesus the rabbi would complete His world mission the next day. He had been pouring His life into the disciples for three years. The sun was going down. Tomorrow would be that catastrophic event which would shake the world, not to mention His disciples.

What would His words be?

How would He strengthen them, and us, to take up His mantle? Let's hear it. READ John 15:4-16. (SLIDE 52-57)

(SLIDE 58) You have been appointed to produce lasting fruit, He said. You are not chosen to be a pew warmer; not chosen to forever practice or be a perpetual student. So what are you to do? How are you going to live out your mission? Jesus said, "Abide." (SLIDE 59)

Abide – what does that mean? Some kind of weird way of living? Does that mean you have to go to church all the time? Get up at 5 am to pray? Does that mean you have to become some kind of religious fanatic? How does one abide?

The Greek word for "abide" (μενω) is rich with meaning. It means

- to remain in a place, to tarry, as opposed to go away;
- to stay in the house or spend the night, to dwell;

- to stay alive;
- to stand against opposition, to hold out, to stand fast, as opposed to waver or to flee.

For you Bible scholars, for those of you who know the story, what's the first thing that happens when Jesus is arrested? The going gets tough and the disciples flee. Later, when they recover from their fear they will remember these words. When things happen that make you afraid, you remember this too.

“Abide in me.” That's the secure place. There's another part of Greek we need to understand here. Jesus isn't talking about some philosophical platitude. (SLIDE 60) He says, “As you play the game, as you sing my song, as you teach my commandments, as you fulfill your call, lean on me;

“tarry in me myself;”

“dwell in me alone overnight;”

“stay in my life constantly in order to stay alive, to stand against opposition, to be able to hold out, to stand fast.”¹

Abiding means intra-personal relationship.² That means you are so close to Jesus in your worldview, in your mindset, it's like a 20-year marriage. (SLIDE 61)

The other day my husband and I were in the kitchen preparing dinner together. I saw him doing something I thought he should do another way. So I said . . .

“Why don't you . . .”

Before I could even complete my sentence he looked at me and said, “No!”

He knows me so well he knew exactly what I was going to say before the words were out of my mouth. I looked at him and he looked at me and we both laughed. That's an intra-personal relationship. We need to know Jesus so well that we have that kind of intra-personal relationship – like being ONE.

- We know Jesus so well we anticipate what He will say.
- We know Him so well we are comfortable with talking to Him every minute about all parts of our lives.
- We know Him so well we obey Him freely.
- We enjoy such closeness that when we fail we can ask for forgiveness, because we know He loves us.

Do you know Jesus that well?

¹F. Hauck, “μενω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1968). IV:574-575.

²Max Zerwick, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), 332.

IT IS POSSIBLE to have such a relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. Abide and it will come.

Abiding has another dimension.

Jesus said, "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you." Ah, there's Someone else. It begins with God.

Are you getting the picture? Jesus abides in God; we abide in Jesus. They create, build, and bring light to the world. We are a part of that fruitfulness.

- To separate ourselves from it is to be dead.
- To ignore Jesus' last words of counsel is to be cut off and to bear nothing.

But to tie yourself to Jesus results in great fruit.

Jesus tells us when we abide in Him, something else happens. Abiding opens the way to answered prayer.

When we talked about this passage in the Wednesday night "Conversation" series this summer, we noticed something. The process used in "The Conversation" is to listen for the voice of God as the passage is read. Then, people share what they heard. One person shared this about prayer:

It's not that God is some sort of order-taker, blindly doing exactly what you say just to satisfy your wants. God does more. You can be certain God always listens to and acts upon your requests as God sees is the very best for you; to help you grow in faith.

But it all is dependent upon you. Will you abide? (SLIDE 62)

Eric Liddell, who was immortalized in the movie, "Chariots of Fire," knew what it meant to abide. He was a runner. Once he missed a prayer meeting because of his running, and his sister accused him of forgetting about God. But he insisted he felt so close to God when running, so divinely inspired that not to run would dishonor God. Here's how he put it: "I believe that God made me for a purpose. But He also made me fast, and when I run, I feel His pleasure."

He was to run the 100 meter during the 1924 Paris Olympics. But he learned that the race was scheduled for Sunday. His closeness to the Lord compelled him to honor the Sabbath, even though the Prince of Wales and the British Olympic Committee both strongly urged him to forget the Sabbath and run the race. In fact, his religious convictions, which he held to even in face of national pressure to compromise made headlines all around the world.

Here's how fruit came out of it. A teammate, who was running the 400 meter race, proposed that he and Eric switch races, since the 400 was on Tuesday. Eric was not expected to win – how could he win? It wasn't what he had trained for. But as he headed to the starting blocks for the race, an American masseur slipped a piece of paper in his hand with a quotation from 1 Samuel

2:30, “Those who honor me I will honor.” Liddell ran with that piece of paper in his hand and not only won the gold but also broke the existing world record.³

How did Eric Liddell abide? Jesus Christ was first, before anything else. He lived out his passion for Jesus Christ, “feeling God’s pleasure” in the gift he was given. When he had the challenge to honor his Savior in the public area, he stood against that opposition. Jesus made him extremely fruitful, even now, 86 years later. (SLIDE 63)

It’s all about first things truly being first. Are you abiding in Christ? If not, will you begin today? God will honor you if you do.

AMEN

³http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Liddell, accessed 8/11/2010.