

Abiding in Christ

by Gareth Evans

Abiding in Christ is essential for Christian growth, fruitfulness, and being a witness to the world.

Duration: 28:36

Scripture: Joshua 1:2-3, Psalm 80:14-19, Isaiah 5:6, Matthew 22:37-40, John 15:1-11, Romans 8:9-11, Ephesians 2:1-5

Topics: "Abiding"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a personal experience of going to meet politicians at the airport to discuss the purchase of a white ship for ministering to first-time offenders among native Indians. The speaker emphasizes the importance of abiding in Christ and hearing His voice. They share a story about taking a group to Mexico for missionary work and how they felt the heartbeat of God in their involvement. The speaker also mentions the significance of intercession and references the passage in John chapter 15 about Jesus being the true vine and the importance of abiding in Him to bear fruit.

Transcript

Good morning. Last week I walked with you and Joshua and the Children of Israel to the borders of the River Jordan. We crossed over that river into the promised land of God, and I took the theme at that time that we were entering into a new year with God, leaving the wilderness behind, the place of sand, into a place of mountains and valleys, a place of giants and conflicts, a place of overcoming, and I pray that that might be true for us, that this might be a year of overcoming.

When I got home, I put on my television, I saw that Pastor Jerry Meyer had pinched my sermon. I don't know if anybody else saw that. He must have gone on the internet and found out.

No, he took the same theme as I did. The crossing of the Jordan has got many different themes. In one of the songs we sang just now, we talked about crossing that river into the presence of God, speaking of Jordan as death.

I think there are many ways we can consider the Jordan, and certainly we are allowed to do that. Moses himself said, I'm sorry, Paul himself took the example of the Children of Israel walking through the wilderness as being a type of the Christian life, and talked about the rock that followed them being Christ, and so we're not out of place as pastors when we take that picture and use it as a metaphor for the Christian walk. I want to do the same thing again this morning.

I want to take one of the ways that can be considered. Maybe over the next few weeks, I might consider different ways about crossing the Jordan in our lives. I'm reminded of God's words first to Abraham when he called him first out of Ur of the Chaldees, and said that he wanted to bring him into a land, a land that was to be his land.

He's going to make of him a great nation in the land, and how that there in Genesis, we read how God led Moses through divers ways, finally bringing him into the land that was later known as Canaan. Remember the time when he was there with his nephew Lot, and the herdsmen of Lot had got into conflict with the herdsmen of Abraham, and they were arguing about the water holes where they could feed their sheep, and pasture their sheep. And Abraham had now finally come to a place where he could trust God.

He had not always been in that place. He can now trust God more with the destiny that God had promised him. So he says to his nephew, you choose out the best land.

You choose what you want. And Lot in all his wisdom chose the towns of the of the valleys. He chose Sodom and Gomorrah.

We know what happened to them later. Of course he chose the best. He chose all the best water and holes for his flock.

And to the natural, it seemed very foolish of Abraham to have given his young nephew this right. After all, he was the leader. He was the older man.

He could have chosen what he wanted to, but he submitted himself and allowed his nephew to choose. When Lot had chosen, God spoke to Abraham and said, Abraham, all that you can see will be yours. And remember this, for I am your shield and your exceeding great reward.

Though I'm calling you into a land, I am really your great reward. Do not look for your inheritance in the land, but look for your inheritance in me. I am going to be all that you need me to be.

That's why he declared himself later to be Jehovah Jireh, the Lord that provides. I'm going to be all that you need. In the real sense, when I think of crossing the Jordan, the fullest expression of that to me is not just entering a land, not entering into a future, but entering into God himself, entering into God himself.

You are the air I breathe. My whole existence is in you. And the fullest expression of all God's promises is as we enter into him.

Now, if I asked you as individuals whether there has been a time in your life where the Spirit of God has entered into you, I trust that all of you would be able to say yes. Because without the Spirit of God entering us, we cannot be born again and we cannot truly be children of God. Jesus breathed upon his disciples and said, have received the Spirit and they received life.

I thank God that the day when I was 17, I knelt by my bed and Jesus breathed upon me and I received life because his Spirit came to enter this darkened soul of mine. Passed from death to life, says the scriptures, from darkness to light. And if I asked you if anyone, if you have experienced that reality of knowing him come to dwell in you, you hopefully would say yes.

Then if I turned the other way and said, have you come to dwell in him? I hope the answer would be yes too. But going back to last week's message, there were these children of Israel who came across the

Jordan after 40 years of wandering. They'd heard the promises of God.

They looked for this day when they would enter into the promises of God in the promised land. But two of the tribes, in fact, two and a half of the tribes came to Joshua and said, we know that this is the land that God has promised us. We know the promises of God.

We know that God has called us to this place. But as we journey, we've noticed this land here, this side of Jordan is a very good land for cattle and we are men of cattle. The tribe of Reuben, the tribe of Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh.

And they asked permission to stay this side of Jordan. They did not want to enter the promises of God. Joshua allowed them to do that on one condition that they entered the land and fought the battles of conquering the land until at least the tribes of Israel, until the nation was established in the land.

And then he said, once you've done that, we will release you to go back to your cattle. We're called to occupy the land. We're called to enter into God.

We're called to enter into Christ. We're called to abide in him. And as I thought of those words, my thoughts of this last week would turn to John, to Jesus' word written for us in John's gospel, chapter 15.

And I'd like to read this first part of the chapter to you. I suppose you know well, it's the last night Jesus is with his disciples. He's laid down certain priorities that he expects of them.

He's made wonderful promises to them. And then he teaches them this in John chapter 15, the first 11 verses. I am the true vine.

My father is the husband man. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away. Every branch that beareth fruit, he purges it, so that it may bring forth more fruit.

Now you are clean through the word that I've spoken unto you. Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can you, except you abide in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit. For without me, a man can do nothing.

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered. And men gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will and it shall be done for you.

Herein is my father glorified that you bear much fruit. So shall you be my disciples. As the father hath loved me, so have I loved you.

Continue you in my love. If you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my father's commandments and abide in his love. These things have I written unto you that my joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full.

It is not unexpected that Jesus should use the analogy of the vine to describe Christian growth and Christian discipleship. The vine was a very prominent fruit in Israel. In fact, the nation of Israel itself was likened to a vine.

And several times in the Old Testament, you will read references to Israel as a vine of God. In Isaiah chapter 5, we read there seven verses concerning the vine that Isaiah the prophet said, I will sing a song concerning his vineyard and he sings concerning Israel, but he's concerned in that portion because we find that the vine is not producing the fruit that it should be. Jeremiah speaks of the vine as becoming a degenerate plant and he's speaking about the nation of Israel.

Ezekiel speaks of Israel's rejection of God and he likens it to a vine that has not brought forth any fruit. Further on Ezekiel, he speaks about the vineyard being destroyed as the other nations come in against Israel. In Isaiah, Isaiah the prophet declares Israel to become an unfruitful, an empty vine.

Throughout the Old Testament prophets, we read much about the vine being typical of the nation of Israel, nationhood. And yet as we look at all those references, we will find that every time there is a negative effect, the vineyard is not producing the fruit which God purposed it. When the children of Israel had sent the spies first of all into the promised land 35, 38 years before the day they entered, we read that they came back and they bore with them great clusters of grapes because the vineyards of that land were so prolific producing fruit.

In Psalm 80, David writes concerning the vineyard, he says these words, you have brought a vine out of Egypt, you have cast out the heathen and planted, he's speaking of the nation of Israel coming out of Egypt through the wilderness. You prepared room before it, you caused it to take deep root, it filled the land, the hills were covered with the shadow of it and the boughs thereof were likened to godly cedars. She sent her boughs into the sea and her branches to the river.

This is the vine that has been brought out of Egypt, the nation of Israel that David talks about being established in the land by God. It spread through the land. Why then hast thou broken down her hedges so that all those who pass by the way to pluck her? The boar out of the wood doth waste it and the wild beasts of the field doth devour it.

Return we beseech thee, O God of hosts, look down from heaven and behold and visit this vine and the vineyard which thy right hand hath planted and the branch that thou made a strong for thyself. It is burned with fire, it is cut down, they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance. And so we see that the progress after this day when the children came into the promises of God, when the nation was established, when the vineyard spread rapidly through the land, finally it comes to the days of the prophet when it is nothing but a very sad story.

The psalmist goes on with the prayer. Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, upon the son of the man whom thou made a strong for thyself. So will not we go back from thee.

Quicken us, we will call upon thy name. Turn us again, O Lord God of hosts, cause thy face to shine and we shall be saved. The nation is in disarray.

The vine that God has planted to bring forth fruit is not producing fruit. All the nations are tearing it down, the walls are down, the branches of the vineyard are fruitless. And the cry of David's heart is, O God, touch the man of thy right hand.

Who is he speaking of? Make him strong, turn us again that we might know thee. It is in that context that Jesus says these words that's written in John, I am the true vine. He's speaking of course to the Jews who would recognize fully what he is speaking about when he talks about the vineyard.

The vine was so important to the Jew that the Maccabean coins that have been discovered bear upon them the marks of vines. The doors of the temple had a great gold cast on it of a vine. One of the greatest honors you could have if you lived in Jerusalem or were a wealthy man was that you could pay money to have another grape placed on that vine of gold upon the door of the tabernacle.

That was how important the vine and the vineyard was. Something very significant about the vine, it is a fruit that requires very clean soil to grow. You have to keep weeding it.

The weeds can affect the taste of the vine, the taste of the wines from the grapes. And so the ground is really treated very well. It is dug, it is fertilized, it is really cleansed before any vines are planted.

In the days of Jesus, many of the fields of Israel were covered with vines. As you know, grapes grow greatly in the Mediterranean countries. They used to plant them in the ground, they put stakes in the ground, fork stakes about 12 feet apart and they used to draw the grape trellis from one to the vines from one to another and they were very rapidly spread over a large area.

They grow very quickly. I don't know if any of you grow any grapes. I do not grow grapes.

I only got my information by doing some research, but I discovered that the first three years of a vine being planted, it is curled back every year very, very much like roses. Some of you grow roses, you have to prune them right back down so they're just short again because they grow so rapidly. That's what a vine is like.

It has to be pruned greatly if it's going to produce any healthy fruit. The first three years of its existence, you have to really prune it back. If there's two branches of vine, the vine is either going to produce fruit or no fruit.

You don't get a branch that produces partial fruit, a little bit of fruit. They either produce none or a lot because the wood is so soft, the sap flows very quickly through it. If there's no sap, no fruit.

If there's sap, much fruit. But the wood is so soft, it's not any use for anything else. It's totally useless.

You can't make things out of the vinewood. The only thing it's good for if it is fruitless is to be cut down and burned. There is no use to the wood of a vine, and yet it is the vine that Jesus uses as an example of Christian discipleship.

He says these words to us, Abide in me as I abide in the Father, so that you might produce fruit. Two and a half of the tribes did not want to abide in the promises of God, did not want to abide in their inheritance. They want to come back where the place was a place fit for cattle.

I ask you this morning, are you abiding in Christ? I didn't ask you, are you in him? I didn't ask, have you been born again? I asked, are you abiding in Christ? As I look through this chapter, just very briefly, I see some of the results of abiding in Christ. Verse two, if I abide in Christ, I must be prepared to be pruned. There's a theology out nowadays that says that Christian life is one of hallelujah, victory all the way.

I tell every great man and woman of God that I've ever read anything about went through a great deal of pruning before they ever became fruitful for God. The expression I use commonly, you've heard me say it many times, is I love to dwell on the mountaintop with God, but I've discovered that every mountaintop requires a valley before you get there. If you're abiding in Christ, as he called you to, if he called you to be

fruitful and you're abiding in him, be sure of this, there's going to be pruning in your life.

There's going to come things in your life that God has to cut away, and God has to do it maybe by, maybe the first song we sang, every blessing you pour out I turn back to you in praise. Even when the valleys and the things get tough, I've forgotten the words, but the second verse is all about negative things that might happen in your life. Does God allow negative things? You bet he does.

If through them he can prune you. How you respond to this test in times is a part of the evidence of your pruning. One of the first things about being in Christ is that you're going to be pruned.

The second thing I find in verse 5 is this, if I'm abiding in him, I will bring forth much fruit. I'll be fruitful. The vine is planted with but one purpose and that is to be fruitful.

The nation of Israel was planted in Canaan in order to be fruitful. They might be fruitful to bring glory unto God, and they failed. And you and I have been called as children of God, we've been called out from darkness into light, we've been called to abide in Christ for the purpose of being fruitful.

Now what is fruit? Well, I think the Bible itself is clear on what fruit is. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, faith, temperance, self-control, against such there is no law. These are fruits of the Spirit.

They will grow in the man or woman who is like a tree planted by a river of water, as someone says, that brings forth fruit in the season. I've told you the story, you and I cannot produce fruit by our own effort, just as the apple tree cannot produce fruit by its own effort. I told you the story, so I'm not going to repeat it, about an apple tree in my garden producing apples by its own effort.

To produce fruit in your life, brothers and sisters, what we need to do is simply abide in Christ. He is the source of the fruit, he is the sap that flows through the fruit, he calls us to abide in him. There is a mystical element to this, what's it mean to abide in Christ? There is definitely a mystical element in the sense of experiencing him and knowing him, but there is also that simple contact, just to spend time with him each day, just to spend quiet moments in prayer and in meditation in the Word, is abiding in a sense.

One man said words like this, a morning time with the Lord is antiseptic for the day, just to spend a little time in the morning, daily devotions, is an antiseptic for the day. In a real sense, that is part of abiding, but how much more glorious it is to have a life that is committed to dwell in him, to seek his heart and to know him. If we would be fruitful, it is important.

Verse 5 also says this, that without him I can do nothing. Abiding in Christ means anointing for service. Some of you are ministerers in this church in different capacities, some of you have ministries outside this church, many of you I know long that your life will have an impact on this world, upon your society, upon your sons and daughters, upon the people you work with, you want to be a testimony.

If you are not abiding in him, you can do nothing. The greatest testimony you and I can have in this world is to abide in Christ, because as we abide in him, then we are able to be the witnesses we want to be in this world, because without him we can do nothing. We can try in our own cleverness, our own wisdom, our own programs to do things for God, you as a church can do so in your own cleverness and programs to do things for God, but unless you abide in him, there will be no results, there will be no fruit.

It is important to become a people who abide. Verse 7, if you abide in me, my words abide in you. Abiding in Christ means a commitment to his word, it means obedience to his word, it means the walk of faith, which is obedience to the word of God spoken to our hearts by the Spirit of God.

Abide in Christ. Furthermore, in verse 7, if you ask whatever you will, it shall be done for you. Well that's a strange verse, isn't it? How many times have you prayed and apparently God doesn't answer your prayer, it is not done for you.

But you see, I think abiding in Christ means something more than simply asking prayers, it means abiding in him and hearing his heartbeat. I was a pastor for a number of years, I preached on missions, we had missions conferences in our church and we honored missionaries. Then in 1988, I took a party from my church to Mexico on an outreach.

We worked in an orphanage and I well remember the day in that orphanage when Francisco, my friend, is taking photographs of the children and they have numbers on ME45 to be sent to Compassion so that you and I in Canada and America and Europe can sponsor a child. And as Francisco is taking the photographs, my Mexican friend Cindy, one of my Canadian girls in the team, is sitting on a gutter edge in the orphanage and she's got her arms around two little children. And because her arms are occupied, Cindy's tears are falling unrestricted onto her chin and onto the floor.

And Francisco turned to her and he said these words, little realizing the impact they would have upon me. He said, Cindy, our hearts break every day. Your heart is breaking because you see the plight of these children in Mexico and you're crying today, but our hearts break every day.

And I felt the heartbeat of God as I heard him speak to my spirit and he said, yes, my heart breaks every day. I was changed that day from one who preached about missions to one who became passionately involved in missions because I'd heard the heartbeat of God. Tell a little story about that group.

You like stories, I know, so I'll tell you a little story. In that group I took to Mexico, I had them for six months. I was teaching them in my church every Wednesday and after church Sunday they paid to be in it.

It was a school, a missionary school from different churches. There were about 14 of them. My wife Anne made up 14.

One Wednesday evening I went into the group and I said to them the theme tonight, my teaching tonight is on prayer and intercession. And that's a very objective question. I said, how many of you believe that God can speak to us? Oh yes.

How many of you ever experienced God speaking to you? And you always get the comment, you know, well I was looking for a car park in space and I prayed and asked God and I turned around the corner and God said there's one there. Well, I take those kind of comments honestly with a pinch of salt, I'll be honest with you. But have you ever heard God speak to you? So I said, well tonight we're going to give God opportunity to speak to us.

Now you have to understand, you know me well enough now, I'm a school teacher. I tend to do little demonstrations to teach biblical principles. Not expecting, I confess to you sometimes, that this demonstration will turn into something very significant.

So I said, let's give God opportunity to speak to us tonight. 14 of us around the table. I said I'm going to read you a psalm and I read a psalm and I said I want you to be absolutely quiet for 15 minutes.

That's what I learned in my first church and God, the church just grew rapidly when we began to wait upon God. You know, we in the West are so busy talking to God, we very seldom give God time to talk to us. And I said I want absolute silence for you to meditate upon this psalm.

So we did, absolute silence, 15 minutes. Then I asked him to sit up. I'm doing the school master bit.

And I said, Larry, during the 15 minutes did God say anything to you? What passed through your mind? Well, I don't know what passed through God, I was thinking of the federal government. Denzel, what passed through your mind? I don't know, at the time I started thinking about the provincial government. We need to pray for them.

Then somebody said First Nations. Well, I should have said when I started this that I'm only interested in what you came in here with, if God has said something. For example, I said, as I closed my eyes, I was just thinking of prayer, and I saw a ship on the sea outside Victoria.

Federal government, provincial government, 14 people, First Nations. Came back to my wife and Ann said, well, like you, I'm surprised you said that. When I closed my eyes, I saw a black sea, I saw a white ship.

Now my wife isn't given to charismatic visions. My wife's a very quiet, private person, but this is what she got. So I said to the group, I said, I don't know if God has spoken to us, but if he has, if he has, it's something to do with federal government, provincial government, native First Nations, and a white ship.

At the side of the room were an elderly couple from Duncan, Robin and Ann Jones. Robin's a sea captain, now with the Lord, from Presbyterian Church in Duncan. They come to visit me that evening, and at seven o'clock I had to excuse myself because I had to go to the church with this class.

They said, can we come with you? I said, you can, but I said, you realize that people pay to be in this school, so you can sit there, but I can't really allow you to participate in the class. So they were sitting on the side of the room. So Ann Jones stood up and said, Gareth, please forgive me for interrupting, but I really think Robin needs to say something.

Now this is a godly couple, and I appreciate them, good solid Presbyterian people, and Robin said, you have no idea why I'm here tonight. I said, no. He said, well at midnight tonight, Dr. Ney and I will be going to meet two provincial politicians at the airport, where we will be receiving two federal politicians flying in tonight to discuss the purchase of a white ship to minister to first-time offenders among Native Indians.

I saw 14 miles drop, and we prayed that ministry to be in. That's an example of something that God did. I wish I could give you lots more examples like that, but I really think the ways that people need to learn what it is to abide in Christ, to hear his voice.

We had strength that day because of 14 of us. There was security in 14 people. It's always dangerous when somebody comes to me and says, the Lord told me this.

I never use this kind of language. I'm always apprehensive when somebody comes to me, oh, the Lord told me. But I really think as a people of God, we should spend some time seeking his face because he

longs to make his heart known to us.

And apparently, part of the fruit of abiding in Christ, says verse 17, is that when we ask things according to his will, it will be done because we've already heard his heartbeat concerning. Abiding in him means intimacy with the Father. Not only intimacy with the Father, but glory for the Father, verse 8. This is how we bring glory to God, by abiding in him.

He works through our lives to bring glory to himself. Let your light so shine before men, says the scriptures, that they might see your good works, might see your fruit, and they might glorify your Father. Verses 9 to 11, as the Father has loved me, I love you, continue my love.

Abiding in Christ produces love. These things I have written to you, verse 11, that my joy might be in you, that your joy may be full. These are some of the blessings of abiding in Christ.

But the greatest blessing probably of all is this, that abiding in him means that we become the same nature as him. The wild vine that's grafted into the true vine begins to produce fruit, not because it's competent of itself, but because the true vine begins to flow through. And I pray that we might be a people who not only enter the promised land of God at this beginning of a new year, but a people who will enter in order to abide.

Leaving behind the place of cattle, leaving behind the wilderness, but entering into a new relationship with God, a relationship of intimacy with God, that he might flow through us. He, the true vine, might flow through us, that might make us fruitful people, that the city of Nanaimo will begin to see this city, this church, is a fruitful vine producing fruit that brings glory to God. Amen.

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