

TITLE: "Abiding in Christ"

TEXT: 2 Co. 2:14-16; Jn. 15:1-4; Ps. 146:9; Dan. 3:8-27

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about remaining in the faith or our abiding in Christ. Particularly the importance of our abiding in Christ or remaining in the faith during the various storms of this life that we may find ourselves going through.

If you have been a Christian for very long one thing that you will most likely have discovered is that it is not always smooth sailing. In fact, sometimes the waters of this life can get very rough as a Christian. Sometimes just the fact that we are a Christian places us in tempest tossed seas at times.

Most of us probably have no problem with remaining in the faith or abiding in Christ when everything is going good for us and around us, but what about those times when the waters around us churn up and we are tossed about upon the waves?

You know the times that I am talking about!...

The times of great loss such as the untimely death of a loved one. The times of personal or family illness. The times of financial burden and instability. Those times when your marriage may be struggling.

Those times when going through a difficulty and feeling as though your prayers for deliverance just seem to bounce off of the ceiling and go no further....

Those times when we wonder why God does not seem to respond to or care about our need....

Times that make it hard to remain in the faith.

Times that make it difficult to truly abide in Christ..

Do you realize that there can actually be a purpose for difficulty in our life as a Christian?

That it would not be for our long term benefit if all of life was a sea of glass for us?

The storms of this life can actually fulfill a great purpose that would never be fulfilled in our life if we didn't experience them.

There is a Scripture that I want to use as a springboard this morning....

2 Corinthians 2:14 - 16 (NIV) ¹⁴But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. ¹⁵For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

¹⁴But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ!

Whenever you have the preposition "in" in front of Christ it means "abide".

Paraphrase:

But thanks be to God, who will always lead us in triumphal procession as we abide in Christ!

As we abide in Christ we spread everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of God. As we abide in Christ we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

So just what does it mean to abide?

men'-o

A primary verb; to *stay* (in a given place, state, relation or expectancy):—abide, continue, dwell, endure, be present, remain, stand.

Abiding is staying in a given place, state, relation or expectancy!

Abiding in Christ is staying in place, in state, in relationship and in expectancy with Christ regardless OF LIFES CIRCUMSTANCE THAT MAY TEMPT US TO DO OTHERWISE!

Jesus has this to say about our abiding in Him...

John 15:1 - 4 (NKJV) ¹“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. ²Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

One thing that this tells us is that if we are to bear fruit as a Christian we need to abide in Christ.

Another thing that it tells us is that if we abide in Christ we will be pruned!

Pruning is not always a pleasant process. Necessary but not pleasant....

The illustration that Jesus is using is a grape vine. If the vinedresser never prunes the grape vine it will have a dramatic effect on the fruit that the vine will bear. An un-pruned grape vine will produce small fruit. If left continually un-pruned it will eventually become fruitless. A fruitless grape vine has no value and just as well be cut down and burned.

However if the vinedresser prunes the grapevine, cuts back its branches every season, it will produce bigger and better fruit with each passing season.

From the prospective of the vine I am sure that having its branches cut back is painful at the time, however, as the pain is endured and its faith put in the vinedresser to do what is best, the vine will eventually enjoy the blessings of a large harvest.

So Jesus says that God will at times need to prune us if we are to bear the fruit that He intends for us to bear.

It is often within the storms of life that God will best equip us for service.

A good example is the oak tree.

L.B. Cowman once said:

Where God wants a strong oak tree He will plant it where the storms will shake it and the rains beat down upon it! It is in its midnight battle with the elements that the oak develops its rugged fiber and becomes the king of the forest.

You can take two oak seedlings. Plant one in a hollow deep in the forest away from the wind where it is protected from the storms. And place the other out in the open where the storms beat against it---

The protected oak will probably not make it or will be dwarfed and very susceptible to disease, while the oak planted out in the elements where the winds beat against it will grow into a strong and mighty tree!

Why? Because it is the winds and storms that stress the tree as it grows and that stress causes its roots to go deeper into the ground.

So it often is with us as Christians... It is often in the trials and tribulations and difficulties of this life that send our spiritual roots down deeper into the soil of our faith as we continue to abide in Christ regardless of the circumstance that we may find ourselves in.

L.B. Cowman went on to say...

When God wants to make a person of faith, He puts him into some storm. The history of humankind has always been rough and rugged. No one is complete until he has been into the surge of the storm and has found the glorious fulfillment of the prayer: "O God, Take me, break me, make me!"

A Frenchman once painted a picture of universal genius.

In his painting stand famous orators, philosophers, and martyrs, all of whom have achieved preeminence in various aspects of life. The remarkable fact about the picture is this: every person who was preeminent for his ability was first preeminent for suffering!

In the foreground of this painting is the man who was denied the Promised Land: Moses. Beside him feeling his way is blind Homer.

Milton is portrayed there blind and brokenhearted, and then there is the form of one who towers above them all. What is his characteristic?

Nail prints in his hands and feet and his face marred more than any other!

Many times the real beauty of nature, the rainbows, don't come until after the storm....

The same is true in our lives as well.....

God wins His greatest victories through apparent defeats!

Very often the enemy seems to triumph for a season, and God allows it. But then He comes in and upsets the work of the enemy and overthrows the apparent victory, and as the Bible says in Psalms 146:9:

Psalms 146:9but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.

Consequently, He gives us a much greater victory in the end than we would have known had He not allowed the enemy seemingly to triumph in the first place.

A wonderful example of this is in the lives of three devout young Hebrew slaves in the time of King Nebuchadnezzar..

Daniel 3:8 - 27 (NIV) ⁸At this time some astrologers came forward and denounced the Jews. ⁹They said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! ¹⁰You have issued a decree, O king, that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music must fall down and worship the image of gold, ¹¹and that whoever does not fall down and worship will be thrown into a blazing furnace.

¹²But there are some Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—who pay no attention to you, O king.

They neither serve your gods nor worship the image of gold you have set up.” ¹³Furious with rage, Nebuchadnezzar summoned Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. So these men were brought before the king, ¹⁴and Nebuchadnezzar said to them, “Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the image of gold I have set up? ¹⁵Now when you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipes and all kinds of music, if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?”

These three devout Hebrews servants of the king were just being hit with a storm of life of hurricane proportions!

Bow down before my image and worship me and my gods or be thrown into a blazing furnace to be burned to death!

Think about this for a moment? Would there be a worse way to die? Worse than being burned alive?

I don't know that there would be a more painful way to die! I shudder to think about it!

Yet, that is exactly the kind of death that these three young men were being threatened with.....

Talk about abiding with Christ! Listen to their unhesitant response to the King....

¹⁶Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. ¹⁷If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king.

¹⁸But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

Wow! Talk about remaining in the faith! Talk about abiding in Christ!!

¹⁷If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. ¹⁸But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

You would have thought that God may have ended it right here with these three men's great statement of faith....Caused Nebuchadnezzar to change his mind... But He didn't let it end there for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

¹⁹Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual ²⁰and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace. ²¹So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans and other clothes, were bound and thrown into the blazing furnace. ²²The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ²³and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace. ²⁴Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, “Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?” They replied, “Certainly, O king.” ²⁵He said, “Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods.”

²⁶Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!” So Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, ²⁷and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

This is the power of abiding in Christ!

They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.

It was their act of remaining in the faith and abiding in their relationship with God that put them in the flames in the first place, but the apparent victory of the enemy was crushed in defeat as God delivered them from the flames!

Do you understand just how complete this victory and deliverance was for these three young Hebrew men of such great faith?

The greatness of this victory is not revealed just in that their bodies were not harmed or that their hair was not singed or even that their clothes were not scorched but the greatness of their victory was in that they didn't even smell like smoke when it was all over!

EXAMPLE: Burned just a few leaves and thought I had kept out of the smoke yet still smelled like smoke when I went into the house!

They were in the midst of a fire walking around and God's ultimate victory over the flames was so complete that there was literally no smell of smoke upon them!

Nebuchadnezzar and the satraps, prefects, governors and royal advisers most probably all smelled of smoke from just standing in proximity to the fire but there was no smell of smoke upon Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego...

That is the awesome delivering power of God!

And this is the power unleashed by and on us when we remain in the faith and abide in Christ...

As dynamic of believers in God that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were before their being thrown into the fiery furnace, can you image what kind of believers in God that they became after experiencing this mighty act of Gods saving grace in their lives?

Let me pose a question...

What do you suppose would have happened if Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had responded to the king's threat differently?

When threatened with a sure fiery death in the flames what if these three young Hebrews would have reacted by saying: God why me? God why are doing this? Why are you allowing this to happen to me? This isn't fair! I don't deserve this....

If they would have approached this same situation from this perspective I believe one of two things would have happened.

#1. they would have given in to the kings' request and bowed down before the image of gold and by doing so denounced their God.

Or

#2. they would have went into the flames complaining and blaming God and would probably have become crispy critters!

Their faith wasn't in Gods deliverance, but their faith was in God! Period!

¹⁷If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it.... ¹⁸But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.”

They recognized that God was able to deliver them but their faith in God was not dependent upon that deliverance!

Their faith was in God whether He delivered them from the flames or not!

And that I think is what it means to remain in the Faith and abide in Christ!

We place our complete trust and confidence in Him regardless of, or in spite of the circumstances that may surround us!

We abide in Christ when we can look at the trials and tribulations that may be before us or surrounding us and say... I know that my God is able to save and deliver, but even if He does not I will continue to believe and serve and worship Him!

The point is: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were of strong faith before facing the trial of the fiery furnace! They were ever stronger in their faith after... The trial of the furnace deepened the roots of their faith!

And the same will happen to us as we remain in the faith and truly abide in Christ..

The trials and tribulations, the storms that we go through with a steadfast faith in God will deepen our spiritual roots and make us stronger in our faith after the storm has passed..

Maybe you are facing one of lives storms this morning.

If so then remain in the faith! Abide in Christ! And when the storm finally passes and it one day will, you will find that your spiritual roots will have rooted down even deeper in the nutritious soil of God's amazing grace and your life will produce a bountiful harvest for the kingdom of God..

The trials and tribulations, the storms that we go through with a steadfast faith in God will deepen our spiritual roots and make us stronger in our faith after the storm has passed..

This morning, are you determined to remain in the faith and abide in Christ Jesus?

