

Open Your Bible- Abide in Truth

Written by Bev Iber

Our subject today is "abide in truth" and since we know Truth is synonymous with Jesus Christ, we are taking a look at what it means to abide in Christ.

In the beginning of this year when we were studying Romans 8:1-17 and reviewed Paul's teaching on our Christian assurance, we examined some of what it means to be "in Christ." It's a favorite expression of the apostle. One thing we found is that sanctification begins immediately as we are "in" Christ, when we receive the righteousness He imparts to us through His work on the cross. And in our walk with Him, we begin to bear fruit. "The measure of our sanctification will depend on the measure of abiding in Him," writes Andrew Murray in his book *Abiding in Christ*. We seek to understand the practical ways we can make our walk a "holiness" walk to glory, always with the awareness that there are no shortcuts to it. "God's Word reveals to us how things really are, how we really are, and then goes on to show us how we will be through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit who prepares us for the real world of the new heaven and new earth." We will have failures along the way in how we love, how we love God and other people; but even so, Paul in Romans is anxious for us to know that our destination and inheritance is secure. Christ secured it. It cannot fail. God's character and His power are behind it.

So, what does this "walk" look like because the definition of "abide" from the Greek word "meno" seems to suggest something more fixed than the word walk? Abide in the sense that John uses the word means to remain, to live, to dwell, to tabernacle. He uses the one word many times in the same way, 34 times in his gospel and 19 times in his letters, to be exact, (although I wasn't the one to count them!). "Abide" is really Jesus's word; John is just quoting. It's a word that means to stay where you are and not wander off!

John also uses "meno" to say how God the Father "abides" in Christ, meaning His divine presence is continually operative in Jesus. That's how Jesus accomplishes all that He does. And Jesus wants His followers to know that the relationship goes further: in the same way, Jesus abides in the Father, Jesus's disciples abide in Him and He abides in them. He spells all this out in John 14:20. We, His disciples, are "in Christ" as He is in us. It's all very intimate. It's like the song we sing: "In Christ Alone" -" and the verse "For I am His and He is mine" - it's a wedding song.

And Jesus told His disciples while He was still on earth that they will know this because of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives whom He will send to dwell with them to "teach them all things" and remind them of everything He said (Jn.14:26). So, this word "abide," as our current guidebook has it, means a kind of "active stillness," and it has everything to do with the Holy Spirit. Walking suggests something active; it's the moral and spiritual manner in which we conduct our life. Remaining has more the sense of maintaining a focus as in fixing our eyes on Jesus, and keeping a position of trust and faith in God's covenant promises.

Jesus's parable of the vine in the Gospel of John is familiar to many of us and it teaches us the nature of our union with Christ which should be a union of unbroken communion. And it teaches that we must remain in the vine, in Jesus, if we are to "bear fruit," which is the primary objective. "The fruit is

not for the branch, but for those who come to carry it away," observes Andrew Murray. He writes that "believers are the revelation of Christ on earth." So, it is clear that we are to assert Christ's character, the hope He brings and His life-giving power in our walk with Him, not only for the Father's glory but also as a witness for Him to others. Well, that's what we're supposed to do, so how can we do it? Certainly not alone but in the constant companionship of the Holy Spirit.

Because the excellent vine and branch image that Jesus left us might be taken up in our study in the Spring I'd like instead to share with you this morning a way of abiding that the Lord showed me during my recent study of the Book of Revelation. It has to do with what I will call "staying in position." I find it very helpful and hope-full, especially when the road we are called to walk on seems a bit bumpy. I hope it will be that for you, too.

Please open your Bibles again to Revelation but this time to Rev.4:1-3. Hear the Word of the Lord:

"After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this. At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with Someone sitting on it. And the One who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow resembling an emerald encircled the throne."

I also want to read one verse from

Hebrews 4:16: "Let us come boldly to the throne of compassion, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

I wish there was enough time to really unpack this very vibrant and colorful description of God the Father sitting on His throne in heaven that John attempts to describe in terms of certain vivid and brilliant gemstones, but I will at least give some highlights. It is important to note that "sitting" in Scripture symbolizes a permanent abiding.

The word for "jasper" in John's day (unlike the same word we have today for a somewhat common and opaque stone) would have called forth something not only precious but also something very sparkly and as John puts it: "clear as crystal." The Hebrew word "yashpneh" means "glittering." It would be something that could be seen as emblematic of the glory of God. Diamond light and its dispersion of spectral colors all round comes closest to expressing what is essentially inexpressible, that is, God's glory on His throne.

Carnelian, the second gemstone mentioned, gives a fiery-red color that seems to be added to the Father's glory light. We learn a little later in Revelation 5 that in the center of the throne with God the Father stands Jesus Christ as a Lamb "looking as if it had been slain." Shown there bloodied from His sacrifice yet very much alive, Jesus is given the scroll to open which contains the last things that take place before the final end of evil and before God inaugurates or brings down the new heaven and new earth. Red in Scripture is always the color of sacrifice or of our sin which has required it; and red is also the color of God's refining fire. So red is a fitting color to accompany God's white glory light on the throne.

So, as a mental exercise, let's just pretend that we are in an art class with Jesus as the instructor. Take out the palettes of your imaginations as if you, like John, were going to try and illustrate for God what you have learned from what He has shown you in this passage about His technicolor throne

room. First, apply to your palette the color white, as pure and bright a white and as radiant as the most brilliant diamond you've ever seen. Then add a generous splash of "poppy red" nearby. You may also reserve on your palette a dollop of deep-seawater sapphire blue because we know from another passage in Revelation and in Ezekiel (10:1) that that particular blue is also a color in God's throne room. Then take and spread out these colors of white, red and blue on the canvas of your mind, far and wide, until they fill every part of your imagination because the throne room in heaven is very, very, very big - just like the Holy City, in which God's throne is its centerpiece. After that, create a band that completely encircles God's throne - choose a wide brush colored with a soft, saturated, almost pulsating velvet green - a color reminiscent of the finest emerald. That is God's rainbow. Now hit "Save." Our triune artist God has invited us to store that vision painting in our hearts and minds for all of our lives.

But while we are holding onto the illustration, there are some things to remember: First, if we are "in Christ" then we are also in the throne room with Him. Clothed with Christ, these same colors make up our "coat of many colors." Secondly, John was "in the Spirit" in order to receive his vision painting from Jesus - of God's holiness, majesty and justice blended in with His sacrifice, love and mercy. And it's all in living color! This is the same Spirit we are invited to call upon to open the door of our awareness so that we may also experience and benefit from the same vision. Thirdly, John was called "up" - to a higher place of awareness- a spiritually-discerned, exalted place where there was nothing to cloud his vision: "Come up here," John was told. And John, for however long that moment outside of time was, left below all his earthly troubles, including those of his imprisonment on the isle of Patmos, and responded to Christ's call to come up to see and hear things almost too wonderful to take in. And Christ commanded John to write them down. For us. And Christ invites us, too, to come and see, and to share what we see with others.

But I really want to focus now on that emerald rainbow. First of all, as you know, the rainbows we see on Earth are made up of all the spectral colors of white light, whether or not we can see them all. But the rainbow that encircles God's vast and majestic throne is green. We know rainbows in Scripture are a sign of God's covenant. We first see it in Genesis after the flood as a covenant of mercy toward Noah and "all living creatures." The Shekinah "glory of the Lord" which filled the tabernacle of the Israelites and also covered the atonement cover of the ark, also called God's mercy seat, was likened to that of a rainbow by Ezekiel (1:28). John sees that same ark in heaven where the glory light shines out from the throne and the same word used for atonement cover is also the one used for Christ who is the mediator of a new covenant. We are "in Christ" and therefore we are "in" His mercy. So that's part of what God's rainbow teaches us.

But we here on Earth normally see only an arc of the rainbow which is incomplete. It is possible to see a full circle rainbow from an airplane or hot air balloon, or even from a mountaintop, but only such heights as these will yield that complete view. That's why it was important for John to be called up to just such a high place. The unusual Greek word "iris" for rainbow is used only in this passage of Revelation 4:3 and in 10:1 instead of the more common one "toxon" for "bow," meaning something arched. Perhaps this is to stress the rainbow's full circle, indicating that God's mercy "surrounds" us (Psalm 32:10) and "endures forever" (Psalm 136). "As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forever" (Psalm 125:2). The full circle of God's green rainbow indicates that all that God does is tempered with his mercy.

A rainbow results from the union of sunshine and shower. A rainbow occurs because of the refraction of sunlight as it passes through raindrops which form a prism, so in order to see a rainbow, the sun must be shining somewhere. An arc of seven colors appears in the clouds as a result; and because red, green and blue/violet are regarded as the three primary colors of light, these may be seen in the rainbow: red at one end, green in the middle, and blue/violet at the other end, with the secondary color yellow sometimes appearing brighter. But here's the interesting part: the brightness and widths of the bands of color in a rainbow vary greatly, and the sequence of colors just given are not necessarily the same ones any two or more persons might see. The color order depends on a viewer's angle of perception. This is because each person sees a different set of raindrops at slightly different angles, and drops seen at different angles send different colored wavelengths to the eye. Also, the width of the color band depends upon the size of the water drops. So, each person may "experience" a rainbow quite differently depending upon the view he or she takes, influenced even by the heaviness or lightness of the "showers" one experiences.

John was placed in his viewing position by the Holy Spirit with a particular angle of perception that allowed him to see the color band as green. John had to be willing to be placed in a position that would give him that view. Andrew Murray writes in *Abide in Christ*: "The whole Christian life depends on the clear consciousness of our position in Christ."

So, what might God's green rainbow signify?

Here are a couple of suggestions:

The color green occupies more space in the spectrum visible to the human eye than most colors, and it is considered the most restful color for the human eye. God graciously made green the most pervasive color in our natural world. So the color green suggests rest and peace, even in the midst of tribulation. The Book of Revelation itself ends peacefully. The thunderstorm has passed. We are told there will be a Sabbath rest for the people of God, a time when we shall all "rest" from our labor (Rev.). "Grace and peace" are often the words of salutations throughout the New Testament.

Green is also the color most associated with regeneration. It is the color of vegetation and of life. Even ancient cultures regarded the gemstone emerald as a symbol of spring and renewal because of its color. "I am making everything new!" says the Lord in Revelation 21:5.

So, when in my mind's eye I see the emerald rainbow, I think of being surrounded by God's love and mercy. I think of the new life He is working out in me and in every believer. And that does bring me peace. Again, Andrew Murray advises "Take time to meditate and to worship, until the light that comes from the throne of God has shone into you, and you have seen your union to Christ as indeed the work of His almighty Father."

But the only way I can even see the rainbow as green is if I am willing to let the Holy Spirit lift me out of whatever worrying circumstance I find myself in at the time, and place me in that same position of faith and trust that John adopted when he was enabled to see the rainbow green.

I am very aware this takes prayerful concentration. I am not always as prayerful as I would like. And it also takes determination to call to mind all those mercies that are "new every morning," especially during a time of suffering. But if I am willing to do these things, I will see the "silver lining," so to speak, in the green rainbow of God's mercy with its proclamation of new life always pulsating around

me. If I am not so willing, then when the sun is obscured and the color red predominates, I am only able to "see red." And, really, without the Holy Spirit, I cannot even see the rainbow at all.

But Andrew Murray goes even further and writes, and I quote: "abiding in Jesus is not a work that needs each moment the mind to be engaged, or the affections to be directly and actively occupied with it. It is an entrusting of oneself to the keeping of the Eternal Love, in the faith that it will abide (in) us, and with its holy presence watch over us and ward off the evil, even when we have to be most intently occupied with other things. And so the heart has rest and peace and joy in the consciousness of being kept when it cannot keep itself."

So, we are invited to bring up this vision of God's throne in our minds at any time, no matter our circumstances, and thereby gain His peace. We must be willing to "look to the rainbow" and always perceive it green. That's one way I believe God has shown us we can abide in Christ.

I have always loved the song "Somewhere over the Rainbow" -Somewhere over the rainbow bluebirds fly." At the end of the song the question is asked, if they can fly, "why oh why can't I?" But I realize this is not our song or even a valid question because we don't need to fly over the rainbow for our dreams to come true. The new life we are promised in Christ is not a dream. God has already placed me and you right in the middle of His rainbow. Right there in the throne room of heaven - in Christ. And may we always tabernacle there.

Let us pray:

Father God, we know that your covenant emerald rainbow is not some sort of "hazy benevolence." It is born out of storm but granted to us as peace. We know you are "rich in mercy." Help us to approach your throne boldly, knowing you have already placed us there with you. Help us to remain faithful and in position to always see the love and mercy that emanates from and surrounds your throne of grace. Fill us with your Holy Spirit each and every day. We ask in Christ's name.

Amen.