

Sermon Transcript

August 30, 2015

Under His Wings My Soul Shall Abide

John 15:1-11

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on August 30, 2015, at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Pastor Gregg Miller. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio copy of the sermon on CD is available by request at (860) 563-8286. An audio version of this sermon may also be found on the church web-site at www.wethefc.com.

Sermon Text
John 15:1-11

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Introduction

I begin with a direct quote from a hymn. *“Under His wings, I am safely abiding; though the night deepens and tempests are wild, Still I can trust Him; I know He will keep me; He has redeemed me, and I am his child. CHORUS: Under His wings, under His wings, Who from His love can sever? Under His wings my soul shall abide, Safely abide forever.”* The song writer actually borrows the imagery of finding refuge in the outstretched and mighty wings of God from the oft-quoted Psalm 91. This psalm opens with a joyous spirit that is due to the security experienced by those who trust in God! I welcome you to turn to that passage with me (page 497 in the pew Bible).

¹He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. ²I will say to the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”³For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. ⁴He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day... ⁷A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you... ⁹Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place—the Most High, who is my refuge—¹⁰no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent. (Please keep your finger here for a couple minutes).

The grand scheme in both the song and the words of the Psalmist is abiding. “Abiding” is not nearly as familiar as it ought to be to God’s people. When I hear the word “abide” I think of staying with... Its’ meaning is “the maintenance of an unbroken connection”. In this context and in almost all of its occurrences in Scripture, it connotes a constant, active relationship between the believer and his Lord.¹ So the Psalmist and the hymn writer are both telling us that keeping close to the Lord is utterly indispensable to experiencing the sheltering, protecting and peace-producing hand of God in your mind and heart!

The picture painted by the Psalmist seems to infer that abiding in the Lord will insure you a trouble-free and pain-free existence. But it is important to understand that neither the psalm nor the song is declaring that keeping close with the Lord prevents all bad from ever coming into your life. They are saying that no matter what bad thing does enter into your life will not be able to rip you up, tear you apart or defeat you unless... you hinder him by breaking the connection.

Please go back to Psalm 91. Look at verses 14-16. “Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.” The Psalmist is focusing on such a deep devotion to the Lord; such a deep connection so that he holds fast, he knows the name of the Lord, he calls upon the name of the Lord...

By abiding with Him, by maintaining a close, constant and active relationship with the Lord the Psalmist is satisfied. He experiences love, protection and wonderful fellowship with the

Almighty and is blessed even in the midst of the fiercest of storms! That's precisely what the song writer of "Under His Wings" said in verse 3, "Under His wings, O what precious enjoyment! There will I hide till life's trials are over; sheltered, protected, no evil can harm me; resting in Jesus I'm safe evermore..." Abiding in Christ is rapturous because we are walking with, fellowship with, being led by God our Maker and Heavenly Father!

The Objective:

My intention for today's message, first, is to take up the call of Jesus to abide in him. We'll do that by looking at the Apostle John's book, chapter 15. Second, we'll take the time to discover both the negative results of a failure to abide in Christ as well as the blessing of keeping that close connection with the Lord. Abiding is, in very essence, the "interactive relationship" with God that we've been talking about relative to the vision of WEFC. Third, it is my intention to share the secret of abiding – the secret of experiencing close fellowship with Christ. It is the secret to true joy. It is the secret to inner peace, love and power. It is the secret to purpose.

The Call

First, let's look at Matthew 11:27-29 where Jesus invited, "28 *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*" (Matthew 11:27-29). This call is an invitation to relationship, to relief from our efforts, and to resting in what the gentle and lowly Christ would do for us! He draws us into trust. He invites us to yield to his ways. He offers us to experience his peace and to learn from and walk with him!

Andrew Murray, author of the book *Abide in Christ*, rightly makes the point that all who have heard and accepted the call "come to me" are also invited to: "Abide in me." The message comes from the same loving Savior. You doubtless have never regretted having come at his call. You experienced that His Word was truth... Was not his pardon full and free, his love most sweet and precious?"³ I love those rhetorical questions in the last sentence that assume the most positive AMEN from the reader! Yes, his pardon is full and free and astonishing! Yes, his love is sweet, precious and amazing beyond comprehension!

Murray continues in his first chapter, "...*With every motive that induced you to come to Christ does he (press) you to abide. Was it the fear of sin and its curse that first drew you? ...Was it the longing to know and enjoy the Infinite Love...? Was it the weary longing to be made free from the bondage to sin, to become pure and holy, and so to find rest, the rest of God for the soul...? In very truth, there is nothing that moved you to come that does not plead with thousand fold greater force: "Abide in Him." You did well to come; you do better to abide. Who would, after seeking the King's palace, be content to stand in the door when he is invited in to dwell in the King's presence and share with him the glory of his royal life? Oh, let us enter in and abide, and enjoy to the full all the rich supply his wondrous love has prepared for us!*"⁴

This is the call Jesus is still making today. He is calling each one of us into staying with him... of maintaining an unbroken connection, and a constant, active relationship between you and your Lord. Please hear and accept this gracious and loving call. This is the main goal of my message! “Draw near to the Lord and he will draw near to you” promises James 4:8.

The negative results of failure to abide and the positive results of abiding.

Second, let’s look at John 15. Here we learn a great deal about abiding from the One with whom we are to have such a close relationship! From whom could we learn more than the Savior who called us into eternal relationship with Him? In verse one Jesus establishes the roles in the analogy he’s about to use. That analogy will teach us the lessons we need in order to comprehend abiding. He is the Vine, his Father is the Vinedresser and in verse five we learn that his disciples are the branches that are attached to the vine.

Pruning - Jesus is the vine, the very source of life. His Father is the vinedresser who prunes because some branches bear fruit and some don’t. Those who do not bear fruit are taken away or cut off so that the vine can be more fruitful. When studying the care and pruning of grape vine, one learns that it is only when everything that is not necessary for fruit-bearing has been relentlessly cut down, that full, rich fruit may be expected.⁵ I like what Andrew Murray wrote in another book, *The True Vine*, when he observed that this is a solemn lesson. “It is not to sin alone that (the Father’s) cleansing refers to here. It refers to our own Christian activity... our natural gifts of wisdom, eloquence, influence, or zeal. And yet, they are in constant danger of being unduly developed, and then trusted in. And so, after each season of work, God has to bring us to the end of ourselves... (and) make us conscious of the helplessness and danger of all that is man... *All that is to remain of self is just enough to receive the power of the life-giving sap of the Holy Spirit.*”⁶

Have you ever met a Christian who, when thanked for his ministry, care, help or concern, smiles and quickly points upwards? He immediately wants to give the Lord the credit. Maybe he’ll say, “Praise the Lord!” Sometimes he’ll say, “Thanks be to God!” which is a way of sounding spiritual! But on the whole, I believe, it is an effort to express that gifts, service, wisdom, and Christian activity flows from the sap (or the power of) the Holy Spirit while connected to the Vine!

Jesus’ call to abide immediately follows these truths about pruning: “*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.*” Jesus’ call is connected to his words about pruning. He is saying that the only way that we will be able to be fruitful is to be in unbroken connection with vine. Again, abiding is staying with... There is a constant, active relationship between the believer and his Lord and it results in wonderful productivity and joy.

In verse 5, Jesus restates his proclamation in verse 1 that he is the vine and that we, his disciples, are the branches. “*Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*” The message of these words was unmistakable to the hearers. If

the branches are going to bear fruit, they must stay attached to the vine. Jesus knows the strong tendency we all have to try to bear fruit apart from the vine – to be productive by our own efforts. But this propensity must be rejected with an act of the will and whole heart so that, instead, we are abiding in Christ the vine. We must depend upon and stay connected with our Lord and Savior. “Our blessed Lord desires to call us away from ourselves and our own strength, and draw us to himself and his strength.”⁷ May we each accept his counsel. Be genuinely fearful of disconnection from our Lord and permit God’s Spirit to do his work!

Fruit Inspection - Verse 6 is a rather sobering warning that denotes a link between fruitlessness and a lack of true belief in Christ and connection with him. Genuine salvation yields fruit! Jesus says this in verse 8 when he states, “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.” Fruit inspection is something that has commonly been undertaken for the purpose of discerning whether someone, does in fact, have relationship with Christ or simply know about Christ. In Matthew 7:18-21, Jesus spoke of a tree and its fruit: “A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Is God’s good, eternal fruit demonstrated in your life? Is it a godly life, a virtuous life, and life of loving devotion and service to him? These are crucial questions about where you stand with God. If you and others see fruit in your life, God is likely at work in your life and residing within through your invitation by faith. It may very well be that the connection needs to be deepened. However, if there is “no fruit” then it may be that you are not a true member of God’s family. Fruit is a by-product of true belief. Godliness, virtue, devoted service for to others, and fellowship with God are all very important for a true believer.

Further, verse 8 teaches that we are to bear much fruit! As a true believer we will not have just a little bit of change in our lives and just a little bit of fruit. God’s intention is that there will be much fruit. We are to be so vigorous in our love for our Lord to the extent that much fruit comes forth from that intimate relationship. This is the main point of the verse. But it serves also as a promise that when we are abiding in Christ, he will make us a prosperous and productive branch yielding much fruit for his Father’s glory!

The Father’s Love - The abiding relationship is about love! Look at verse 9, “*As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love. These things have I spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*” The abiding relationship is about God’s love which will result in our love for God. It is about communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is about an intense, infinite and divine love! It is to love that Jesus calls us. In this love there is great joy; the joy every human heart yearns to experience! Jesus says there is a correlation between this love and obedience to the Father’s commandments and abiding. Jesus says there is a correlation between having this love and having God’s Word influencing your life so that your prayers will be answered (verse 7). Jesus says there is a correlation between this love and how much fruit

you'll bear and how much honor and glory will go to God (verse 8). See what wonderful and joyful things come forth from abiding in Christ!

The Secret of Abiding...

Thirdly, now, is that promised secret – the secret of abiding in Christ. This is extremely significant. Let's return to our earlier thoughts about Jesus' call into relationship. He called the weary and heavy laden and promised his rest – an eternal rest. He provided that rest by giving himself to us upon the cross of Calvary. Salvation is Christ's work and he calls us to surrender our wills to his and accept his divine work of redemption. From beginning to end, and everything in between, salvation is the work of Christ! So it is with abiding in Christ; it, too, is his work from start to finish! He calls us to surrender our wills to his. Just as he does in salvation, Jesus invites our acceptance of his work in our abiding. He calls us to accept the work of His Spirit to draw us ever nearer, to grow us up, and to teach us, gift us, strengthen us and enable us. It is by his grace that we are in Christ and we receive his salvation; it by his grace that we abide in him and discover God's life and power flowing through our lives.

Please permit me one more quote? He is speaking of the invitation we focused upon earlier from Matthew 11:28 *"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* Murray begins: "Rest for the soul: such was the first promise with which the Savior sought to win the heavy-laden sinner. Simple though it appears, the promise is indeed as large and comprehensive as can be found. Rest for soul – does it not imply deliverance from fear, the supply of every need, the fulfillment of every desire? And now nothing less than this is the prize with which the wandering one-who is mourning that the rest has not been as abiding or as full as he or she had hoped-to come back and abide in Him. There is but one reason why the rest has either not been found, or if found, has been disturbed or lost again: you did not *abide with*, you did not *abide in Him*."

"... First the Savior says, 'Come to me and I will give you rest'; and then he says, 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.' Do not these words... disclose what you have perhaps in vain sought to know, how it is that the rest you at times enjoy is so often lost? It must have been this: you had not understood how entire surrender to Jesus is the secret of perfect rest. Giving up one's whole life to Him, for Him alone to rule and order it; taking up His yoke and submitting to be led and taught, to learn of him; abiding in him, to be and do only what He wills – these are the conditions of discipleship without which there can be no thought of maintaining the rest that was bestowed on first coming to Christ... It is because so many a believers fail to lay hold of this truth that the rest so speedily passes away... They did not know that when he said, "Abide in me," he only asked the surrender to himself; his almighty love would hold them fast, and keep and bless them."

Abiding in Christ is all about surrendering to the work of the Spirit of God. When you and I cultivate the habit of resting in him, of denying the flesh and of seeking nourishment for our souls in the Word of God the more we see good fruit in our lives. The more that we allow his

Spirit freedom to lead and empower us, and the more obedient we are to his commands, the more he brings forth good fruit in our lives. It is when we are occupied with and surrendered to Christ that God's Spirit is most strongly flowing through our lives. Nothing is better and nothing is greater than having an unbroken connection with the God who made us and gave himself up for us!! "Under His wings, under His wings, Who from His love can sever? Under His wings my soul shall abide, Safely abide forever."⁹

Bibliography

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- ³Ibid. p. 11
- ⁴Ibid. p. 13
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- ⁶Ibid., p. 25,26
- ⁷Ibid., p. 35
- ⁸Andrew Murray, Abide in Christ, p. 17, 18
- ⁹Ira D. Sankey and William O. Cushing, Worship and Service Hymnal "Under His Wings" (Carol Stream, IL. Hope Publishing Company, 1982) #292