

The Abiding Life and Obedience

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[0:00] Christ is enough for me. Paul puts it this way.

He says, For me to live is Christ where our own hearts might be related to this question.

And that is, if you could have heaven and all the joys of heaven that's represented, the freedom from suffering, the joys that are there, the fellowship with loved ones, the bounty that is available to you, no needs and full satisfaction of heaven, but Christ wasn't there, could you be happy?

That's an interesting question. Because if we were really to evaluate our own lives in relationship to that question, it is very similar.

And that is, do you find yourself more caught up with the gift or the giver? When God takes away the joys of all of His blessings from you so that you can delight in Him alone, does that cause you angst?

[1:42] Does it cause you sorrow? Does it cause you frustration? Or is there a settling in your heart that says, if I have Him, I have everything?

That's really what we're talking about this morning. That's what we talked about last week when we're in 1 John 5. And we're talking about those who believe that Jesus is the Christ.

What that means is that Jesus is Lord of all. That He is the one who is supremely valuable. Nothing else compares to the supremacy of God in terms of power, but also in terms of worthiness.

That's where we're going today. And that's the road that leads to the victorious and abundant life.

The abiding life can be characterized by your relationship to Jesus Christ and whether or not your relationship with Him is enough to overcome any adversity.

That it satisfies every longing. And everything else is just an extra. If and only if that is true of your life, can you really experience victory and triumph in the Christian life?

[3:15] That's what I want for myself. And that's what I want for you. I want us as a church, as people, as believers, to experience not only the abundant life that we've been talking about through this series of 1 John, but I want you to experience the fulfilling healing and eternal and abundant and joy-filled fellowshiping life.

There aren't enough adjectives to fill in the blank. It is the kind of life that God wants for you as well, but it only comes one way. So let's pray for divine help as we look into the Word of God and we seek to be informed by the Scriptures.

We seek to be convicted by the Spirit and we seek to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Let's pray. God, what we are doing in this moment is a work that only you can accomplish.

We are desperate for you in these moments. moments. We plead with you for help in these

moments. Moments to overcome our own arrogance, to think we have this all figured out.

Moments that we think we have under control and we think we're living the Christian life the way that you've called us to live. Please expose our own pride and arrogance this morning.

[4:53] create in its place brokenness. Oh God, may there be in our hearts and lives a desperation for the true abiding life that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

May we then be those who truly love, truly love you and truly love others. And may that loving lead to true obedience.

Obedience that sanctifies and purifies our lives. Obedience then that leads to certain victory in the Christian life. And certain victory that then leads to continuing and progressive faith that deepens with every day.

With new experiences of the faithfulness of our God and new experience of your ability not only to meet our deepest longings but to demonstrate that you are truly faithful.

So God, will you please help us in these moments as we look into your word, tenderize our hearts, open our minds, awaken us to the truth of your scripture and allow your Holy Spirit to have his way in us.

[6:22] Remove every distraction, remove every obstacle, every hurdle this morning so that we can rightly represent our Savior as we leave this place.

That we can represent you and call attention not to ourselves, but we can call attention to the wonder of the gospel and the wonder of the God whom we serve.

So, we plead with you to do your work in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, Friday, our family went through another subtraction.

So, our number two daughter was delivered to college and it was hard enough to say goodbye to number one daughter a week ago, but then I think really the reality kind of hit me like a two by four yesterday as I'm preparing, helping to prepare dinner and a song is playing and I know that that particular song, when it's on the radio, I hear this little singing in the background and it's the singing of Allison, she just sings all the time.

And then, to then prepare the meal and sit down at the table and to sense the subtraction at the table where there's no longer six extra spots, there's only four.

[7:58] And I love my four kids that are there, but having two that are missing, just, there's a vacancy. there's a sense of distance and there's not wholeness that there was just a few weeks ago.

Because I think through the, through 18 years of building relationship and loving on your kids, when you finally let them enter or at least move into independence in adulthood, there has to be a letting go.

There has to be a turning loose. And no one ever prepared me for this part of parenthood. It's, it's kind of a, not necessarily a brokenness of fellowship, but there is certainly not the intimacy of fellowship that there was when they're present.

Because presence helps to lead to intimacy. intimacy. Now, we've been talking about the significance of intimacy and fellowship with God.

We've been talking about the significance of that fellowship with Him and right out of the gate, the very first thing that the Apostle John wants this church of Ephesus to understand, is if you are really going to experience joy, you have to know Jesus.

[9:30] joy begins and ends with the source of joy. It begins with Jesus and fellowship with Jesus is possible only through relationship with Jesus.

And fellowship with Jesus involves intimacy with Jesus. So the subtraction that I felt at my dinner table, however, is not always the same subtraction that I feel in my spiritual life.

I mean, if I was to be honest with myself and you were to be honest with yourself, my guess would be that there are often days that go by without any fellowshiping with Jesus takes place.

perhaps weeks go by with really intimate fellowshiping taking place in your life with Jesus.

So how do you describe that as an abiding life? How is it that we can feel this loss of connection with family but when it comes to our relationship with God it is just so okay, well I guess just not happening.

[10:59] Somehow we have to move to the point where our intimacy with God is something that we feel and I think the problem is that our relationship with God is so mechanical our relationship with God is so routine and traditional it is not initially an abiding relationship so we don't have that intimacy to start with and so when we don't spend time with God there is really nothing to lose except for the burden that comes on us with having to perform or having to go through the motions of having to check the boxes and so we don't miss that intimacy because we never had it in the first place there's no wonder why there's no fruitfulness in our lives there's no wonder why there's no potency or power in the

Christian life there's no wonder why there's no real affection for our brothers and sisters there's no wonder why there's no victory over sin because we haven't gotten the starting point right we're really not believing the right things we say we believe the right things but the reality is it hasn't really changed us this morning I want to encourage us in this journey because just because that's not true of the past doesn't mean it can't be true of the future you can have an abiding relationship you can have intimacy you can have a victorious life that leads you to love and obedience and to deeper faith that's what John wants for the people of Ephesus and that's what we're going to continue to talk about this morning we're going to talk about the abiding life and in this time kind of kind of concentrating on obedience but still picking up on our theme from last week and really helping to fill out the steps for how to have a victorious life

God wants us to move to victory that can only happen is correct for us let me read for us the first five verses of 1st John chapter five and then we'll kind of move quickly through our first point from last week and hopefully get to the other points this week we missed them the last time if you're a guest with us this morning in the pew Bible you'll find 1st John chapter five on page 1023 here's what it says everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God and everyone who loves the father loves whoever has been born of him by this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commands for this is the love of God that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome for everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world and this is the victory that has overcome the world our faith who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the son of God last week as we as we came to this the first step in the victorious life is having the correct faith do you have the right faith we find right here at the beginning of chapter 5 everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God and last week we talked about some of the specifics of what this means to believe that Jesus is the Christ for review let me just walk through them one at a time what does it mean that Jesus is the Christ first it means that Jesus is one with the Father Jesus is one with the Father he's one in origin he's one in identity he's not just another man another prophet Jesus was God in the flesh as John says earlier in this little letter in chapter 2 verse 22 he says who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ he is denying the Father and the Son because you cannot have one without the other there is an inseparable link between Jesus and the Father now this would have been incomprehensible for a normal Jew because any good Jew who knew the law would have known in Deuteronomy chapter 6 this great Shema that was repeated on a constant basis it says the Lord our God the Lord is one it's inconceivable here is this man Jesus who I know was born in Nazareth I know who his mom and dad are

[16:31] Mary and Joseph I know that Joseph was a carpenter I grew up with this kid he was in my Sunday school class I know this person and he's claiming to be God that is just not a true statement it can't be because I know that God is one do you begin to understand the tension and the difficulty of what we've just come to accept carte blanche as no problem the Jews wrestled with this truth because Jesus helped to identify himself as God and as we understand in this immense and inexplicable truth the trinity one God three persons manifesting themselves in father son and holy spirit we have come to embrace that truth however complex and difficult that is but here is here is the consequence here is the significance of that truth is you cannot have

God without Jesus I don't care what religious background you come from you cannot embrace or have a relationship with God without Jesus Christ you cannot worship the pantheon of gods there is only one as defined by John and Jesus it is the one God represented in the father and the son and the holy ghost Jesus is one with the father the second implication is that Jesus is the fulfillment of old testament promise Christ was another word for the Messiah and all of the hopes of the Jewish nation for that which would be fulfilled for them in terms of this great blessing and promise to their nation was actually fulfilled in Jesus Christ he is the promised one he is the hope of Israel he is the promised seed of Abraham he is the promised king of David he is the! the lamb of God all that Israel had hoped for could only be found in Jesus Christ everything good everything necessary everything that you should set your hope on can only be found in Jesus but here's the problem the problem is that we actually set our hopes on so many other things we set our hopes on the world strategy for parenting we set our hopes on the world strategy for how to get our kids into

college and pay for that enormous bill we set our hopes on the business strategies that corporate America has put together we set our hopes on for you students you set your hopes on popularity and wearing the right things in order to be accepted you see satisfaction for this world is wrapped up in everything but

God but satisfaction for those who are believers must be found in Christ alone he is our only hope and only then will Jesus be Christ for you only then will Jesus be Christ if he is your only hope so God has to rip away from us those things that we place our confidence in so that he can make himself supreme it is a gift and a blessing to us not something that should lead us to frustration and bitterness it is a grace of God to make himself supreme for you to prove himself to be the Christ for you your only hope third Jesus is the only way of salvation as John says here in this verse everyone who believes that

Jesus is the Christ has been born of God no other way no exception Jesus is the only means of new birth you must look to Jesus forgiveness is found in him cleansing is found in him righteousness is found in him deliverance is found in him help from day to day is found in Jesus salvation not only for the future but salvation for today can be found alone in Jesus not in all the other things you put your hope and confidence in it can only be found in Christ and if he will be the Christ for you you will plead with him to help you understand that he is the only means of deliverance the only means of salvation the fourth implication is that Jesus as Christ means that he is Lord of all is he

[22:00] Lord of your life today meaning is he the one to whom you submit all of your purposes all of your future plans all of your current priorities are they aligned underneath the lordship and headship of Jesus Christ Jesus wants to be supreme for you he wants to be the lord of all and only when you confess Jesus as Christ will you come to the place where you make him the lord of all the supreme authority over every area of life but that leads us to our next point this morning and that is a correct faith leads to Christ exalting love correct faith leads to Christ exalting love we see that here at the end of verse one it says everyone who believes that Jesus Christ has been born of

God and everyone who loves the father loves whoever has been born of him let me read that one more time everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God and everyone who loves the father loves whoever has been born of him now this really should take us by surprise because what John does he drops in a brand new word in the second phrase to almost make a direct correlation to faith he begins this with faith everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ and then he talks about another everyone the same everyone now loves the connection is that those who truly believe will truly love that is not only the natural byproduct that is the necessary byproduct of anyone who is a true believer in

Christ because true faith leads to true action and here the true action the action that best expresses and conveys the worthiness of Christ and an affection for Christ and a confidence in Christ is love itself this passage and the passage preceding it is dripping with love no other place in scripture has this heavy concentration of this little word love even the love chapter in first Corinthians chapter 13 has nine instances of love in 13 verses so one instance of the word love in about every verse that is communicated well in first John chapter four seven to twenty one if I did my math right you got fifteen verses and you have love twenty seven times yowzers that's a lot of love almost two times for every single verse you think

John is a little interested in this idea of love you better believe it because he wants you to recognize that you cannot know God unless you love God and you love the people that God loves love he has described this love throughout chapter three throughout chapter four we're not going to regurgitate that for you this morning but it is a Christ exalting self sacrificing others focused laying down your life kind of love it is a love that goes to the end that is the kind of love that Christ demonstrated a love to the cross a love to the end a love with no limits that's the love that God calls us to interestingly the gospel of John mentions love 57 times in 21 chapters this little letter of five chapters has 46 occasions of love in just five chapters in terms of concentration of love this little letter is far superior than all the other

New Testaments books as it relates to love interestingly the the long third place so it goes first John and then the gospel of John and wouldn't you know the little letter to of Ephesians is third place in

terms of talking about love helps me should help us come to grips with the seriousness of love because if God had to communicate to the church of Ephesus the significance of love to them in this letter and then in Paul's letter and then in Revelation you have left your first love we better get this message if we're going to really be the kinds of Christians that God has called us to be we have got to learn to love that is what's often missing in our true relationship with God we have left our first love and we have forgotten the significance of this Ephesus had all of the duties down they had all of the ordinances down they had all of the doctrine in place but they did not have the kind of love that

[27:44] God had called them! So let's talk a little bit about this kind of love what does this love really look like?

I want us to just key in on two areas and there could be so many others but I think in my own heart these are the two that are most significant for me at least in the immediate context and I just want to lead us through these two thoughts there are so many other things we could talk about but first of all I want us to understand that any obedience that is not driven by love is insufficient any obedience that is not motivated and driven by love is insufficient because you see obedience is coming that's the next step we're going to look at that next but before we get there we need to understand what precedes obedience often times we get the cart before the horse we're all about the duty we're all about the regulations we can do the standards but we don't often have the love we can do what is expected of us we'll do it as long as people are watching but when it really comes down to it our heart isn't in it and we really don't like it to begin with but any obedience that is not driven by love is insufficient he says as much in chapter 4 verse 18 notice where it says there is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear for fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not been perfected in love what is that talking about there's no fear in love well what that's referring to is there is not in obedience a fear of future judgment you don't follow the motions you don't do the checklist because you're afraid of future accountability that's not what true obedience is all about it's not about the future fear it should be motivated and driven by love you see that's what makes Christianity different from the other deities you see when all the other deities and all the other people who served those deities danced around and cut themselves as we think about in the little situation with the prophets of Baal back in the Old Testament they were doing this to try to gain some measure of favor and acceptability before their deities but those who are true believers understand that God is always watching God is always concerned and they don't have to perform for him because true righteousness only comes through Jesus they have nothing to put on the table Jesus has put it all on the table all we have to do is pick it up and embrace the righteousness that he has already fulfilled for us so what is obedience about well obedience is about demonstrating affection for him obedience is about about moving into a place where where your heart is so filled up with with a satisfaction in Jesus that that the overflow of that is a desire to please him not because you're afraid of the consequences but because you just want to enjoy him more that's the difference is obedience about enjoyment is obedience about delight or is obedience about regulation and duty and fear that God is just going to squash you as soon as you step out of line that is not the kind of obedience that God desires he wants the kind of obedience that is that is moving closer into relationship because you want to be more like him and you want to represent him more into the world you want when people to see your life to get this sense of the wonder of the gospel when they look at your life wow you serve an amazing

God just look at what he's doing for you obedience that is not driven by love is insufficient second is any worship that is not driven by love is inadequate any worship that is not driven by love is inadequate I go back to our study in Isaiah the prophet says to the people right at the beginning of his prophetic vision these are the words of God coming through the prophet Isaiah what to me is the multitude of your sacrifices I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts I do not delight in the blood of bulls and lambs or goats rather wash yourselves make yourselves clean remove the evil of your deeds before my eyes cease to do evil learn to do good seek justice correct oppression bring justice to the fatherless plead the widow's cause come now let us reason together says the

Lord though your sins are like scarlet they shall be white as snow though they are red like crimson they shall become like wool there is a hatred of God for duty bound worship but there is a desire a deep longing in God for repentance on your part for relationship for brokenness and for cleansing which then makes worship acceptable because it's coming through the heart of one who truly loves

God not somebody who loves themselves because really that's the reason why we go through these boxes and we'll get there in this next point but really if we were to evaluate the reasons why we often do the right things it has nothing to do with glorifying

[34:40] God and has everything to do about getting what I want if I do the right things God will give me blessings which identifies where your true God is it's not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ you have become your own God and your desires have become more important you are delighting in the gift more than the giver how easy it is for us to do that right we must be people who love and when we love it leads to consistent obedience that's what we find in verses 2 and 3 consistent obedience by this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commands for this is the love of

God that we keep his commandments! And his commandments are not burdensome! verse 1 helped to make a connection between true faith and true love and now John is making a connection between true love that leads to true obedience how does that happen?

How does true obedience show up in your life? Well I want to commend to you this book it's called The Pressures Off by Larry Crabb and I'm just going to give you a summary of some of the things that Larry Crabb talks about and I think it describes the human struggle I think it helps to describe where we are as people who have learned to do the right things with the hope that we get the right results here's how Larry describes it talks about two paths he talks about the old way which is the way of the law and the new way which is the way of Christ here's what he says either you have decided that what you want most out of life is within your reach and you're doing whatever you believe it takes to get it or you've realized that what you want most is beyond your reach and you're trusting

God for the satisfaction that you seek you want him and nothing less not even his blessings! will do if you're walking the first path that's the path of the law that's the old way your life is filled with pressure inside where no one sees your soul is weary you see no way to step off the treadmill or life is going well and you are satisfied but you sense something is wrong something is missing the pressure is still there but if you're walking the second path you have hope your soul may be weary your interior world may be filled with struggles no one sees but you have hope at times you rest something is alive in you the desire of your heart is not smothered you can taste freedom and the taste brings joy the old way promises a better life filled with good things that make you happy most people who live the old way of life the version of it goes something like this if I want happy kids if I want kids that turn out successful if I want kids that don't abandon the faith then

I follow the right steps in the scripture to train up my children in the way they should go and when they're old they will not depart from it and I cling to that process so that the pressure is on because if I don't perform it's possible that my kids are going to go off the rails and if they do go off the rails then I must not have had the right starting point I must not have done things the right way so I kind of need to figure this out I kind of need to find a better way and then if I find that better way then I will get the result I'm looking for or if you want a happy marriage I follow the process laid out in Ephesians chapter 5 and that will give me the kind of wife or the kind of husband I'm looking for I follow the checklist A plus B equals C and so I get to the destination and I'm a happy person that's the old way of life that is where the pressure is on the new way of my opportunity for

[40:16] Christ to make himself more significant in my life and grow my faith so that I love him and know him more that's the difference you see it's kind of like when we go on a trip kind of go on vacation what does that little prayer before that trip sound like oh God please help us to be safe oh God please help daddy not to get a ticket please help us not to get in an accident help us to get there quickly we don't want any traffic we want things that go well we want this trip to be a blessing to us and what we miss is the true blessing perhaps because maybe through the accident God will press you in to deeper faith in him so maybe what we need to be praying instead is oh God please make us know you more through this trip may these miles and these hours lead us to loving you more that's the new way and the pressure is off because we forget to the end of the trip in the old way we say flat tire ticket hours of traffic

God must hate me we get to the destination in the new way we say oh God I don't understand maybe I do you're trying to teach me to keep the law okay I get it thanks for helping me and you say I don't understand the traffic but I recognize the impatience in my heart that actually is keeping me from intimacy with you please forgive me and oh God help me love you even in the midst of challenges that I face that's the new way are you walking the new way are you still stuck in the old way of living you see the new way is driven by love for Christ the new way has as its orientation a desire to know him more and represent him more whereas the old way only cares about self and listen here here's the danger you may actually get what you want but it's not what you need you get the blessing but you don't get

Christ you understand the significance of this issue oh God help us to love you and trust you the way we should trust you leading to intimate love of you leading to right obedience of you and leading to consistent victory victory over sin that's where we're heading to next certain victory verse five verse four everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world can I read that again everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world what is it that overcomes the world what does he how does he conclude this he says that what overcomes the world is our faith what gives you victory in those quiet moments where you wrestle with lust what gives you victory is knowing that God will give you everything that you need that he will meet your needs according to his riches and glory in Christ

Jesus and that includes that satisfaction is Christ enough do you have the right faith and when there is conflict in relationship and your heart's desire is to get even and to make life difficult for that person who's making life difficult for you what helps you to overcome is confidence in God to do a work in that person's heart and in the meantime to help you have persevering strength to show the fragrance of Christ in spite of it all faith where does faith lead you today I want to encourage you to come back tonight because we're going to see how this shows up in the life of an

Old Testament prophet so if you think if you think that you struggle with this take heart because so does a person in the Bible a person who helped to write the Bible okay I love that thank you God for giving me examples of people who blow it too why can we do this how do we trust this testimony is true where if you read from verse 6 to verse 12 God has put proofs and evidences in your way so you don't have to just believe the substance of his doctrine you can see it in the life of his son we don't have time to really talk about that this week but we're going to talk about that more next week when we get into communion we're going to fill out and finish off 1st John chapter 5 and we're going to discuss the significance of this testimony that Christ has given to us as a remembrance the blood of Christ the water of Christ his baptism his purity his perfection but as we close our time today

[46:49] I want to just plead with you this morning that if the Holy Spirit has just pinpointed things in your life that need correction the joy is we don't have to stay the way we are and the joy is that there is this open invitation from an almighty pure righteous holy God saying come on to me and I will give you everything that you need it can be found in me righteousness and cleansing and forgiveness and freedom from all of these pressures you feel just come to me I just want to plead with you don't leave today without doing business with God whether you're a believer or an unbeliever the invitation is open whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God anyone who walks through that gate can have entrance into his kingdom hallelujah let's pray