

Dwelling in Christ:

The reading from **John 15:1-8**

'I am the true vine, and my father is the vinedresser. Every 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. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit as of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches, he who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit. For without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered. They gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burnt. You who abide in me, and my words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this my father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, so you will be my disciples.'

I want to talk about *abiding in the Lord* from some specific angles:

1. Abiding in Christ,
2. Abiding in the teaching,
3. Abiding in the purity of heart,
4. Abiding amidst changes and fluctuations.

1. Abiding in Christ.

What makes a difference from one person to another, is his realization and perception of how he is abiding in Christ. Sometimes we start our life in Christ, and then we focus on certain spiritual talks that will help us grow in our spiritual life. Or we get preoccupied with various ministries or the work of the kingdom of God. And, all these of course, are important things. But amid all these many preoccupations, sometimes our fellowship with Christ becomes a separate item. What is really in my heart, that I want to share with you, is how Jesus becomes the focus and the centre, of our lives every single day. And how to make Jesus the centre when I am praying, and when I am not praying, when I am ministering and when I am not ministering. We need to learn how to make Jesus always present, and never absent, not even for a single moment. He is All in all. If we properly understand the terms that Apostle John used about being in Christ and Christ in us, this simply means that as I walk in the journey of my life I will discover the meanings of these terms. I want to draw your attention to something. The teaching in our days lost something that was very

apparent in the teachings of the early church. We today memorize certain theological phrases. We say them, we repeat them, we talk about them, but we lose their essence, their hearts. In the early Church they learned how to discover in their own personal life, the meaning and the essence of each of these terms; I am in Christ, and Christ is in me. What does this mean? So that Christ may become All in all, all the time, every day. This simply means that I dwell in Christ. I don't dwell in Egypt or in England or in USA. I dwell in Christ, and Christ dwells in me. He is my home. If someone is living in his own house, in his home, he doesn't need anyone to constantly come and remind him that he is living in his home. This never happens. Because the person knows that this is his home, this his place of rest. And when he leaves, he longs to come back to his home and place of rest, and his home. The challenging question now is: can Jesus become like this for us? My home, my place of rest. And I would not need anyone to remind me that I am living in Jesus, that Jesus is in me today. Because I am in Him, and He is in me. The challenge for me was to learn how to make this a daily practical experience. And how to draw Him near, and call upon Him in every moment. Until Jesus becomes present, present in my day, present every minute.

This also has other results.

The fear that is in the human nature since the Fall, can be uprooted and taken away. Here there is something that we have confused and mixed up, and we need to pay attention to it. Fear is an essential result of the Fall, And it is hidden in our fallen nature. And because of this, sometimes we become frightened of God.

Sometimes we are not so fully aware of that. But when we have fear of the future, for example, fear of what will happen in our life or the changes that can take place and happen to us, this means that we are afraid of God and we don't trust Him fully.

When I come to times when I feel I am afraid of God, or that I don't trust him fully, this in fact means that I am not resting in God, that I am not trusting in God. This means that I am not dwelling in Him.

All the books of the Scripture are very beneficial in instructing us and teaching us, and has many benefits. As Apostle, Paul says in **2 Timothy 3:16**, *'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work'*.

But the centre of all this that will help us in instruction and correction, is to know God more and more. And the Bible tells us very clearly that we know God in the face of Jesus Christ. In **2 Corinthians 4:6**, *‘For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’*

It is the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. When a person receives a true knowledge of God, this person will never be afraid of anything at all. This person will never be disturbed or sad or have any of these negative feelings at all. At this point, the person would know the great measure, of God’s faithfulness, and that His faithfulness is not dependent on me.

We read a verse, and sometimes memorize it, but we don’t notice the full meaning of it. We all know the verse that says ‘even if we are not faithful, He remains faithful, He cannot deny Himself’. We memorize this verse off by heart. But we need the moment when our inner eyes are opened to realize this truth and perceive it.

One of the features of the spiritual teaching in our days is that there is a separation between the facts and the Person. Our mind knows that God is faithful, even if we are not faithful. But it is a truth that is separated from the Person. So I know God, but I still have fear. Sometimes I have a lot of worry about my circumstances, my work, anything in my life. I keep reminding myself that God is faithful, even if I’m not faithful, he stays faithful. And I pray it out, but the worry and anxiety keeps coming and going. The moment our inner eyes are opened and can perceive that God is faithful, all fear, anxiety and the like disappear totally.

At this moment, the person will know the difference between knowing about God and really knowing God.

And the key to this is Jesus, when I dwell in Him, and He dwells in me. What is the reason for Incarnation? Theologically we say Jesus was incarnated to fulfil salvation. This may be correct, partially, but actually, Jesus was incarnated because God allowed Himself to be seen and known personally to us. That is why God was incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ. So that we can see Him and know Him personally in the Person of Jesus. This is the true moment when everything in a person’s life will change. This is the moment when a person realizes that he dwells in Jesus, and Jesus dwells in him. And this is the moment when I totally realize that His faithfulness does not depend on my faithfulness.

Recently when I was doing a certain study, I discovered the meaning of the word mercy used in the Bible. And this was really amazing for me. I used to think that mercy meant God's compassion, kindness, tenderness; and of course this meaning is implied in the word mercy. But the actual meaning in the root of the word, is that God has a covenant with us and He is committed to us. Of course, this is very important in the practical life.

Now, we want to speak about our dwelling in Jesus and its relation to time: past, present and future

My Past was even in His Care!

Even before I had faith in Christ, He had His eye on me and He was looking after me. But in fact sometimes we lose this truth without noticing. I may say, my past had a lot of wrong things, because it was my life in sin before knowing Christ, and that I need healing of this period. I want it to be erased and wiped away. This is actually, because I don't see Him. The minute I see Him I start to realize that He was taking care of me since I was in the womb. His eye were on me, and He was controlling everything. Though He does not like sin, He knows that He will be able to transform and change these effects of sin and bring out goodness and grace out of them. This is redemption. He cannot be defeated by anything, and nothing is hard or difficult for Him. However, 'I need to learn how to see the past and to re-read it through redemption'. And when I do this, when I start to see the past with the eye of redemption, then I will be able to say 'I don't want to lose the past or to have it erased or wiped away, because there is richness and mystery in it; it is part of who I am. It is part of my story in Him. What was marred by sin, can be redeemed and restored one more time. And then the past will be a source of new inspiration, of wisdom, of spiritual experience, that will be handed to others. Before that, the past was something difficult for me, something that I wanted to forget and wipe it away. This is because I knew the truths but I do not know the Person. Jesus is the Lord of my past, present and my future. He is the Lord of my days. How great it is to put every day in His hands saying 'You are the Lord of my day'.

He is the Lord of my past, and also of my present.

And so is my present!

We talked about the past, what about the present. For the present I need to understand this mystery related to the Person, otherwise I lose a lot. It is written about Jesus that he has given us an

example so that we can follow in his footsteps. We usually understand this by thinking how He lived in the flesh. But His footsteps are actually about His death and resurrection. In the stories about Jesus in the Gospels, we read that even when He was young, His eyes were fixed on the cross. Because this was His calling. He knew that the cross was not the end goal, but it was the entrance to resurrection. If I want to live my present in its fullness, in Jesus Christ, this means I need to accept to live my present in the same way: a daily journey of death and resurrection, death and resurrection, death and resurrection. And hence, all my days will be transformed. They will become redeemed days. They cannot be transformed without death and resurrection.

This gives me energy to press on all the time. In **Philippians 3:13-14**, Apostle Paul says, *‘I do not cast myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.’* Pressing forward, the power to press forward, is derived from the power of death and resurrection. And when I am dwelling in Him, and He is dwelling in me, it is He who is guiding me in this walk.

Jesus is the Lord of my past, Jesus is the Lord of my present, and he is also the Lord of my future.

Also the Lord of my future!

In **Romans 8:38**, Apostle Paul says, *‘For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’* Sometimes we don’t pay attention to certain expressions in these verses. We can understand it if Apostle Paul says he is not afraid of death, nor powers, nor principalities, but for him to say that he is persuaded not to be worried about things to come, how can he say this? He is assured about the future. He is not only not frightened, but he has assurance that this future is under control. This is because he dwells in God, and Christ dwells in him. And because Jesus is the Lord of his days, of his future, how can he be frightened when Jesus is the Lord of his future. Yes I can rest and feel assured in Christ, and fear nothing. He is the Lord of my days.

2. Abiding in the teaching.

Let us read some verses. **2 Timothy 2:2**, *‘and the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men.’*

And let's look at another reference in **Philippians 4:9**,

'The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these too, and the God of peace will be in you.'

And in **2 Thessalonians 2:15**,

'Therefore brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught. Whether by word or by our epistle'.

As we have seen in these references, the kind of teaching that leads the person to abide and stand firm is what is heard, what is handed down and what is seen.

It is very clear that Apostle Paul is not separating these elements. So for him the teaching is something that is said and heard and seen. He said it more than once: 'imitate me as I imitate Christ'. And when any of these elements are missing from the teaching, the teaching becomes less effective. Why? Because losing any of these elements, gives opportunity for other thoughts to enter and mix up with the teaching. These thoughts can come from the normal thinking of the person. Or they come from the devil who has the ability to appear as an angel of light and mix up the correct thoughts with the wrong thoughts. And we often come to a point where we are confused, we cannot separate things. This is because many of the teachings we see today are of separated elements. But when all these elements come together, the teaching is secure, and safe. And if any wrong or strange thought comes, it can easily be rejected, it cannot find any place in the person. We are at a time when we need to keep very well what we have been taught, seen, and been handed down. This is because, on one hand, it was very costly. Also because it has become our responsibility to hand these teachings down to others, and for it to remain pure, genuine, original. As we have heard in the words of Paul talking to Timothy telling him, 'what you have heard from me, commit to others who are faithful who can teach others'.

3. Abiding in the purity of heart.

This is a very important thing. Because it is all linked together. How can I see God, without this purity of heart? 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God'. The purity of heart is required for us to discern the evil thoughts and refuse them instantaneously. If I am not vigilant on this, and watchful, the evil thoughts can dwell in my mind, and come to my heart, and dim all my life. The purity of heart requires me to learn how to forgive, truly forgive, and to forgive always. Because sometimes we do the forgiveness as an action without realizing that something

has penetrated my heart and is hidden in my heart. Then at a certain time, this can come up and appear, and I will see as if I haven't forgiven that person. And the forgiveness means that I need to come again and again, before the Lord, and do this act of forgiveness until I am totally purified from this situation that required my forgiveness.

Also the purity of heart requires me to have a wide open heart and receive tender mercies and compassion. In Matthew 18 we read, in the last part of the chapter, about the parable Jesus used to teach about forgiveness. We all know this parable where Jesus spoke about the servant whose master left for him his debt and forgave him, but then this person started to request from his colleague the small debt he owed him. And when his colleague brought this story to his master, we see what he said in verses 32-33, 'You wicked servant, I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?'

At certain times in my life this verse has frightened me. We all know that God forgave us a lot and carried away our debt. And showed us mercy. He has done all these things for us while we hold on each other's words, and we don't want to forgive this small debt. This is very serious because we read after that how he was delivered to the torturers. These are the evil spirits, which will afflict him, and condemnation will be put on him.

Why does this happen? It's because the heart is hardened; it needs to become soft, tender and widened. We need to pay great attention to this hardness of heart that may be hidden inside us and deal with it and handle it appropriately to receive these tender, compassionate mercies.

Remember the verses from **Colossians 3:12-15**, *'therefore as the elect of God, Holy and Beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another. If anyone had a complaint against one another, even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body, and be thankful.'*

4. Abiding amid changes.

We live in a very changeable world as you all know. And these changes will definitely reflect on each one of us. And we cannot avoid them. There will be very peaceful days, and other difficult days. We have needs and these needs are sometimes satisfied, and sometimes they remain unsatisfied, causing inner groaning and pain. And as the days go by, the person starts to have fear, anxiety, depression, despair, frustration. And this shakes our abiding in Christ, it makes us lose it

practically speaking. Remember what I have said: 'I dwell in Christ'. So how can these outer things affect me? How can they reach me?

Because the fine line here is that I don't await my needs to be satisfied by anyone else but by Christ, whom I dwell in and He dwells in me.

I am not awaiting that my frustration would be changed or transformed because things change, but I am in Christ.

I am not awaiting my relationships - where sometimes there is misunderstanding, whether on my part, or other's part - I don't await them to be changed or corrected based on the other person, but I am in Christ.

Even my wrong actions and deeds that I have done in the past, that may have difficult results, He is capable to transform them because He is outside time. And this is how I understand the Epistle to the Hebrews. Or in other words, this is His role as a High Priest. So when He intercedes on my part as a High Priest, this intercession changes everything, past, present, future.

He changes everything, in order to serve His purpose in me, and to keep me always in peace, in security, in living hope.

Let us read this part in the Epistle to the **Hebrews 12:26-28**, 'Whose voice then shook the Earth, but now He has promised, saying, *'Yet once more, I shake not only the Earth, but also the Heavens'*. Now this, *"Yet this once more"*, indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we can serve God acceptably with reverence and Godly fear'.

Standing firm and abiding amid all changes is a sign and a reflection of our abiding in Christ. Let everything be shaken and changed. I have received an unshaken kingdom. I don't live in this shaken circle. I live in a different sphere, an unshaken sphere. About which it was written, we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken.

Abiding in Christ, abiding in the teaching, abiding in the purity of heart, abiding amid changes and shaken things. Glory be to God amen.