

Associational Sermon.

Abiding in Christ.

THE ASSOCIATIONAL SERMON PREACHED BEFORE THE NOVA SCOTIA EASTERN BAPTIST ASSOCIATION, NORTH SYDNEY, ON MONDAY THE 11TH OF JULY, 1881.

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"If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ask what ye will and it shall be done to you."—JOHN XV. 7.

The union of Christ and believers, and the life and fruitfulness of the latter, absolutely dependent upon that union. are beautifully brought out in this parable of the vine with which my text is connected. The branches sprout from the parent stock, and the sap of life of the vine must necessarily flow into them to preserve their life and produce fruit. So also to become branches of Christ, the true vine, we must be grafted in by a process with which believers only are familiar. A process that constitutes the oneness here represented. So that our life as branches is by virtue of a vital connection with the ever-living vine Christ Jesus, and our fruitfulness depends upon the free circulation of the life-giving sap.

The severing of these offshoots from the parent stock, would stop the flow of the vital juices, and the branches would die. So, also, if it were possible to interrupt the union between the Saint and his Saviour, the source of life and fruitfulness, to the former being cut off, like the severed branch, he would wither and die. And so our Lord says: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered; and men gather them and cast them into the fire and they are burned." Then he adds, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask, or simply, "ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

The theme I would present for the consideration of the brethren of this Association is, *Constant abiding in Christ, and its relation to successful prayer.*

That these words are only applicable to true believers is a fact too self-evident to need formal statement. It would be absurd to speak of abiding where we had not entered. In that mysterious operation of the new birth by the Spirit, we are grafted into Christ, or to use Paul's words, "created anew in Christ Jesus." That is, we cast off allegiance to the old Master, and swear eternal fealty to Christ the anointed. We enter into His kingdom, His family, into His plans and purpose. We renounce self and are no longer our own. The change is a radical one, and none who have passed through it will think our Lord's words too strong, when he denominates it a new birth, or being "born again."

Christ takes for granted that his disciples whom he was addressing had experienced that change. This battle had been fought out, but he would remind them that it is only the beginning of a campaign that will end with life. The prey has been taken from the Mighty, but the Mighty will seek to recapture. All the forces of evil will combine to crush out the new life, and drag the soul from its high vantage ground. Failing that, the enemy will seek to make that life as barren and useless as possible. How significant then our Lord's injunction, "abide in me" &c. When at the first—your eyes were open to see the foe in hot pursuit, I was your asylum, your city of refuge. When sorely pressed and you cried to Me for deliverance, I stretched out my hand and drew you in. Now, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask what ye will, and it shall be done to you."

1. First, I remark: To abide in Christ, and enjoy this blessed reciprocity of fellowship, is the privilege of all the Saints. Our Lord does not hold out this glittering jewel before us to tempt or tantalize us. Its possession is more than possible. Neither did he design it to be the inheritance of the favoured few. He is no re-creator of persons. Some we know, have revolved in this spiritual wealth, and the vast masses of the Christian world have gazed upon them with wonder and admiration, but with scarcely a thought that they had entered upon an inheritance which is the birthright of every child of God.

George Müller of Bristol, with his vast

orphanges, his missionary and colportage work, has been looked upon by Christendom as a modern miracle worker, when in point of fact, he is but a plain simple minded Christian man, abiding in Christ and Christ's word abiding in him. A living illustration of the truth of my text.

The conviction grows upon me, beloved, that I could not present anything before this Association of more commanding interest. Knowing our privilege, shall we henceforth be satisfied with anything short of its full and complete realization. Let us "covet earnestly this best gift." To abide in Christ, in the sense of my text, would be an end of all doubts and perplexities as to our soul's safety.

How many who rank among Christians to day are without assured hope, who stand almost continually in doubt as to their acceptance with God. Some time ago, I entered into conversation with two old men whom I met by the wayside, and before leaving them expressed the hope that they were Christians, and on the road to heaven. One of them replied, he hoped so, but supposed none could be certain about it. I fear me, that man is a representative of a large class of Christian professors. How can men and women whose souls have been moved to a consideration of eternal things, rest in such a state of uncertainty?

To abide in Christ, as he would have us, is to possess an abiding, perpetual peace, a sweet assurance of our Father's constant presence and care. It is to "rest in his love," to bask in the sunshine of his smiles, to walk all day in the light of his countenance. To trust even the seemingly untoward dealings of his providence, and to confide absolutely in his word of promise.

2. This privilege of abiding in Christ with all the power it gives us with God in prayer, while it is the common inheritance of the Saints, will not be enjoyed by those who are satisfied with the ordinary standard of piety.

(1.) It is conditioned, I think, upon the spirit of self-sacrifice. Self-denial is laid down as one of the terms of discipleship. It is certainly as necessary to constant abiding in Christ. The absence of this spirit would be proof that we were abiding in self, not in Christ. Self rocks us to sleep in our indifference. Self whispers, "enjoy the world, be satisfied to stand on a level in Christian attainments, with ordinary Christians. Listen to self, beloved, and you make up your mind to barter away this Christly possession. Self must be crucified. The motions of the flesh must not be tolerated. We dare not drift with the current. Nor should we count even our life dear unto us, if we would finish our course with joy.

(2.) Would you abide in Christ, you must make up your mind never to put up your sword into its scabbard. Fight to the death must be your watchword. No quarter to the enemy. In common warfare it is cowardly to butcher the prisoners. It is allowable, nay, absolutely necessary, in this spiritual affray. If you do not they will turn again and rend you. Stand after battle and congratulate yourself on your triumph, and lo, the conquered have rallied, and the Philistines are upon you. It is a mark of good generalship to follow up one's victories, else our insidious foes may turn them into defeats. Satan would rather see you any where than abiding sweetly, absolutely in Christ. All his hellish arts will be practiced to draw you away, to discourage you.

(3.) But, further, would you abide in Christ in blessed fellowship. You must lay your accounts with ind-fatigable plodding. This may sound like legality, do and live, but do not be frightened. We are not introducing you to Moses, but to Christ. He was a worker and certainly taught his disciples that idleness was no part of his plan. He has implanted the life principle, from which the working and fruit bearing must spring. And while we work not for life, but from life, our very working reacts upon our growth and develops spiritual muscle and power.

Our Master designed not that his followers should occupy an anomalous position in the great busy, working hive of nature. In grace, as in the natural world, he has decreed, if any man work not neither shall he eat. Working for an object fixes and settles the mind on

that object. We become deeply interested in what we work for, until it becomes a part of our being. The reason why so many in our churches fail to abide in Christ, in blessed fellowship, is that they do not work for Him. The principal weak point in us who are leaders, is, that we do not provide work for our converts. All will have noticed that the newly initiated in our churches while in the glow of enthusiasm and their first love, instinctively look for something to do for their Saviour. Then if we were wise to direct and provide proper employment for them suiting it to their capacity in the various stages of their experience, the great bulk of our membership, instead of growing up drones and do-nothings, and after a little, losing nearly all interest in the cause, would develop into strong men and women in Christ Jesus. And the pruning knife so frequently called into requisition to cut away fruitless branches would seldom find employment.

(4.) But, lastly, upon this part of my theme we must not forget, that our fellowship with Christ, depends largely upon the way we use and appropriate his word. "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you." In the 4th verse he enjoins, "abide in me and I in you." My text may be regarded as a kind of explanation. I abide in you by my word dwelling in you. And further on he says, "if ye keep my commandments ye shall abide in my love." Abiding in Christ, is abiding in his love and this is done by keeping his words or commandments. Obedience to the truth, is an all important factor in fellowship with Christ. Neglect his word, treat his commands, even what we esteem as the least of them, as of little worth, and you pave the way for a speedy departure from him, and a consequent loss of fellowship. Then beloved, "let the word of Christ dwell richly in you in all wisdom." And your power with God in prayer will be increased a thousand fold. This brings me to the second part of my theme, viz.:

1. The relation this privilege of abiding in Christ sustains to successful prayer. And 1. The relation is vital and absolute. There can be no true prayer without it. But you say there can be no fellowship with Christ without prayer. I grant it, these are blessings so related that they act and react upon one another. They grow and develop or sicken and die together, like the late Siamese twins. The life inbreathed by the Spirit of God, turns the soul Godward in prayer, and so long as our spirits retain that heavenly bias, we cannot help praying. In Christ prayer is natural and easy, but grieves him to depart, by omission of duty or commission of sin, even temporarily, and prayer becomes a task and a drudgery, to which one must be whipped, like a slave to his task. A wanderer from Jesus while contented in his wanderings does not pray. There can be no real prayer without a sense of need, and confidence in Christ's willingness and ability to supply that need, which the contented backslider does not possess. It is worse than useless to attempt to substitute prayer for piety. Some act as if they thought they could live as they list and then make it all up with God by a formal, meaningless repetition of a string of words, the body meanwhile assuming a pious attitude. The devil never made man believe a more mischievous lie. Thousands I fear, will go down to hell, with what they mistake for prayer on their lips. They will be repulsed from the gates of heaven, while this sentence of prayer is trembling on their tongues. "Lord, Lord open unto us." But instead of it securing the anticipated admission, it will only bring back the startling response, "I never knew you, depart from me ye cursed." We fear that many who formed the habit of saying prayers in infancy and have kept it up daily till their hair has become silvered with age have never known what true prayer is and will be sadly disappointed at last to find that they have never prayed, because they did not abide in Christ, and his word found no lodgment in them. These constitute the very soul of prayer. O ye who go from your knees to your vices. Know this that you add to your other grievous sins the insult of mocking God to his face.

2. If ye abide in Christ then you can approach God with holy boldness. What is it that affrights us from the mercy seat? Is it the consciousness of our nearness of approach to God? You know it is not. It is the conviction that we have become offenders by slighting Jesus Christ, and living in disobedience to his plain commands. 'Tis this that slays our confidence and rears a wall as high as heaven between our souls and God. But how changed our relations appear when the soul is in happy fellowship with Jesus, when we abide in him and his word abides in us. Why the very expressions imply a childlike confidence and trust. To abide in him, is to get into John's place, to lean on his bosom and feel the tender throbbings of that heart of love. To have his words abide in us is to feast upon them, it is more than simply to give our assent to the truths of the Bible, it is to make them our meat and drink. It is not a casual or careless reading of a portion of Christ's word every day, but it implies, that we so digest it by meditation and thought, that it becomes a part of us, as the nutriment taken into the physical system, by assimilation becomes a constituent part of the body. It is then that we can obey the injunction of the Apostle to the Hebrews and "come boldly to a throne of grace." The child who rests with entire confidence upon his Father's word, who is careful, not from slavish fear, but filial trust, to obey every command of his parent, such a child can come with the utmost assurance to his father to make his reasonable request. So the child of God who abides in Christ and in whom the Master's word abides, need not stand afar off trembling to approach, but may confidently "draw near in full assurance of faith."

3. If you enjoy this blessed fellowship, then, there can be no danger in the liberty which Christ gives, "Ask what ye will and it shall be done to you."

The intermittent in fellowship and the weak in faith have stumbled at these words, and have looked about to find some limitations. They seem to think our Lord could not have intended us to take it just as it reads. Friends, I apprehend no danger. Christ here gives no license for presumptuous requests. He first sets before us a condition of soul, an attitude of spirit to which we may all attain viz.: A sweet abiding in himself, a complete resting on his word, then the way is all clear for the fullest and widest liberty in prayer. Christ may well say, "Ask what ye will" &c. for then his will is ours and his word and Spirit fully control and guide our asking. And though our fallible wisdom may make mistakes, yet evermore desiring that his will may be done, we get our request.

4. So then, abiding in Christ, we dare make our petitions large. 'Tis then we begin to realize the riches of his grace the infinite fulness of blessing in Christ Jesus. The words of one of our poets are clothed with new meaning. "Thou art coming to a King Large petitions with thee bring. For his grace and power are such, None can ever ask too much."

We carry our vessel to the full fountain, not for a few drops, but to fill it. We go with empty sacks to our Joseph's storehouse, not to be scantily supplied with stale corn, but to be crowded to the mouth with the "finest of the wheat."

We need wisdom, our ignorance and stupidity lead us into all sorts of blunders, and if we had nothing else to guide us, would totally spoil our whole religious life. How blessed to hear Jesus say, "Ask what ye will." And then the Spirit through the Apostle James calls special attention to this, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally."

Christ Jesus is not only the "wisdom of God," but he is declared to be "our wisdom." O beloved, if we get into this "Secret place of the Most High," and hide ourselves in this centre pavilion on the tented field, over which the Imperial flag of the Universe ever floats, we would not have to bewail incessantly our mistakes. We suffer in calculably as individuals and denominationally, for lack of that which our Master has pledged himself to supply for the asking, if we abide in him and trust his word.

But we rely on our own fallible wisdom and go blundering on, piercing our souls with many sorrows and what is a thousand times more to be deplored, wounding Jesus in the house of his friends and blocking the progress of his cause. But it is not merely the blessing of Divine wisdom that we secure to ourselves through this intimate fellowship with Christ Jesus, but we thus receive every blessing. Time would fail us to specify our needs, but in him there is an abundant supply. All the faith and

patience that enables us sweetly to bide God's time. The love that thinketh no evil, that suffereth long and is kind, the sweetness of temper that burns not to resent an injury, the power to overcome temptations from without and within, above all, the gift of the Holy Spirit including in himself all gifts, blessings on our families our persons, our occupations, our churches, our denomination, with all the important interests included in it, Nay "exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think."

5. Lastly, If ye abide in him, then prayer will be continuous. You will always be in the spirit of prayer, and the exercise will never become tasteless, shallow and insipid. Communion with Jesus will be the grandest, sweetest most enrapturing employment in life.

Fellowship with the wife of your bosom, the father that begat you or the mother on whose breast you hung in infancy, cannot be half so delightful. May such fellowship be ours beloved, and to Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, be the praise, forever. AMEN.

MISSIONARY INTELLIGENCE.

The London Missionary Herald has a good picture of Soodeen, one of their oldest native preachers in India. He has spent no less than forty-two years in connection with the mission at Monghyr, so that he has grown grey in the Lord's work there. He has travelled far and wide to preach the Gospel over a large portion of India. He still goes forth to the country around, and to the large *melas* which take place in the cold season. Not being able any longer to walk on foot as he used to do, he has now a pony on which he visits the villages around to preach the Gospel. He was first led to the Lord by means of the late beloved Nain-Sookh, of Monghyr, so truly celebrated for his loving labour for the Saviour.

The *Eldorado* steamship left London on Wednesday, September 19th. She carried to India the largest number of missionaries of the Society ever before conveyed by one ship. Six young brethren—viz., Messrs. Kerry, Potter, Jewson, Ellison, H. Thomas, and L. Tucker, M. A.—go out for the first time; with the Revs. C. Jordan and E. C. B. Hallam, with their wives and an infant, are about to return to the posts they have so long and so honourably filled. Miss Boarne, Miss Neave and Miss Hallam go out in connection with the Zenana Mission, and will enter on this department of Mission service in connection with our stations at Benares, Delhi, and elsewhere. Mrs. Hobbs rejoins her husband, who was formerly a member of our missionary staff in Bengal, but it is now otherwise supported, and Miss McKenna returns from school to her father's home in Sewry. Mr. Waldo will leave the ship at Colombo, where her esteemed husband is labouring in the cause of the Gospel. There are also on board four or five other friends, who, although not of the missionary party, are allied with them in the work of Christ.

CHINA'S MISSIONS.—The Fifteenth Anniversary of the China Inland Mission was recently held in the Young Men's Christian Association, Exeter Hall, London.

THE ORIGIN AND WORK OF THE MISSION.

About twenty years ago a missionary, broken down in health after several years of labour in China, returned home for needed rest and change. The spiritual destitution of the people of China was a burden on his heart, and before leaving he wrote to a friend in England:—

"Do you know of any earnest, devoted young men desirous of serving the Lord in China, who, not wishing for more than their expenses, would be willing to come out and labour here? Oh, for four or five such helpers! In answer to prayer the means would be found."

While on his way home it was his prayer that his return to England might be overruled for good to China, and made instrumental in raising up at least five helpers to labour in Ning-po and the province of Cheh-kiang.

The first of the five thus asked of God arrived in China in 1862, and before the end of April, 1865, four others followed. The desire grew stronger to send out more labourers. The more he pondered the spiritual destitution of China, the more heavily the burden of its need pressed upon him; and this cannot be wondered at, when it is remembered that in all China, with its four hundred millions of people, there were, at that time (the beginning of 1865) only ninety-seven missionaries, or but one missionary to about four millions of the people. These mission-