

# (Radical Jesus) 34 Radical Abiding

by Glenn Meldrum

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*Abiding in Christ means to die to our right to self-rule and rise in dependence on Jesus, surrendering our rights, desires, ambitions, gifts, and talents.*

**Duration:** 26:08

**Scripture:** John 15:4

**Topics:** "Abiding"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker uses the analogy of a dance to explain the concept of abiding in Jesus. He describes a vision of the Heavenly Father dancing across the skies and singing a beautiful song, with Jesus joining in perfect harmony. The speaker emphasizes that while we may not be able to fully dance and sing like the Father and the Son, we are called to abide in Jesus and grow in our resemblance to him. He also shares a personal story about leaving the pastoral ministry to pursue the calling of an evangelist, highlighting the need to let go of good activities and possessions in order to fully abide in Christ.

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## Transcript

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We started a new section last week in our continuing study on the Radical Jesus, which was on radical abiding. According to the scriptures, abiding in Christ is clearly revealed as the normal Christian experience. The Lord did not create the true faith to be divided up in various levels, from the spiritual heavyweights at the top of the list, with the worldly Christians hanging around at the bottom.

What God expects from the pastor, He expects from the layman as well. Now, I'm not saying that the capacity of everyone is the same, because we know that it varies according to one's ability, such as intellect, talents, gifts, and personal history. But it is an old error that claims pastors have one standard to live by, while the rest of the church has a lower one.

That is just not biblical. At the foot of the cross, it is all level ground. The rich have to come to Jesus the same way the poor do, and the intellectuals must come to Christ the same way as the illiterate.

All true followers of Jesus have their own personal story on how they came to Christ. But the Lord has clearly told us that He is not a respecter of people, so there is no preferential treatment. The Lord commands all His people to be holy, to live a life of prayer, to love the Lord with all of their being, and to love others as they want to be loved.

We must not confuse what it means to be a follower of Jesus with the gifts and callings that are given to us according to the purposes of God. Does God have a high standard for pastors to live out? Absolutely. But you cannot prove by Scripture that those who are not called to pastoral ministry are allowed to live a lower, baser form of Christianity.

We are all called to live out the same moral and spiritual standard as the Lord calls His pastors to live. The standard of the faith is not the pastor, but Christ. The calling of every true follower of Jesus is to be like Jesus, and this goes for pastors as well as laymen.

The primary focus of last week's lesson was to look at how Jesus is the standard of what it means to abide in Christ. As He abode in the Father, so we are to abide in Him. Jesus is the one and only standard for the true faith.

Any other standard is a lie because it does not make Jesus the Archetype, which is the pattern or model from which all mankind is to be copied or based upon. To help us understand the radical nature of abiding, last week we studied water baptism and why Jesus was baptized. Water baptism is a symbolic ritual that is all about testifying to the reality of the salvation that is operating in the life of a person.

It symbolizes death and resurrection. Going under the water is about death to our old life of sin, while coming out of the water signifies resurrection into a new life. Since water baptism is about death and resurrection, we then concluded that Jesus had to die to something and be raised to something as well.

Jesus died to His right to operate in His divine right as God and rose in absolute dependence upon the Father. So abiding is all about dying to our right to self-rule and to rise in a new life of total dependence upon Jesus. We will now turn our attention to the great self-emptying of Jesus that was an integral part of His abiding in the Father.

From the days of the apostles in the early church, theology was something that evolved, and this is only reasonable when we understand the dynamics of the situation. Though the origins of the Jewish faith began in Genesis 1 with the creation of man, we could say that from Abraham the divine self-disclosure began to be revealed in a clear and concise way. There was a progressive unveiling of the person and nature of God with an unfolding revelation to the people on what it meant to walk with Him.

The Old Testament revelation culminated in Jesus. He is the pinnacle of divine revelation. The Old Testament prophetically pointed to Jesus with the startling fact that He fulfilled over 300 specific prophecies in relation to His coming as Messiah.

Add to this His teaching, who He was, His death, resurrection, and ascension, and it is understandable why it took some time for the primitive and early church to process all this revelation and put it into a systematic order. When we look at the explosion of the infant church, you find that those first disciples were scrambling to handle the great influx of people and how to disciple them as they were discipled by Jesus. Then as persecution arose, it only complicated the situation more.

These are just a few of the dynamics why it took some time for the church to put forth the concerted effort to clearly define the faith. One of the interesting things about the development of theology is that the early church was often forced to define who Jesus was and the doctrines of the faith because of the rise of heresies and false accusations from their persecutors. Heresies forced the church to define and clarify the truth of the person and work of Jesus.

This would not be an easy job, and as a result, you find from the writers from the early church a vacillating between focusing upon Christ's divinity and His humanity. We still have this problem today. Some people focus on Christ's divinity to the downplay or corruption of His humanity, while others concentrate on His humanity to the degrading of His divinity.

Trying to balance the fact that Jesus was 100% divine and 100% human is very difficult, and I do not think that any mortal will be able to come to a clear understanding of how that really works. Jesus is too big for our theology, and He will not cooperate with our feeble efforts to confine Him to our limited understanding and dogmas. I have said all this to bring us to the challenging truth about Christ's self-emptying.

This is something beyond what our finite minds can fully grasp, because only God can understand how He could be fully human while never ceasing to be fully divine. Yet He gave us this truth so that we could strive to understand it to the best of our ability while never forgetting that we will never fully understand it. God wants us to be in awe of Him, and whenever we think we have figured God out, we are prone to lose that awe.

Paul gives us a wonderful revelation in the truth about Christ's divinity and self-emptying in Philippians 2, verses 6-7. "...who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant and coming in the likeness of men." Many cults and world religions try to use what Paul wrote here to attack Christ's divinity. To say that He was not divine, and if He is not divine, then He cannot be the Savior.

What Paul says here actually does the exact opposite. It defends and proves His divinity and humanity. For anyone that wants to understand the truth of who Jesus is, this section of Scripture reveals the fact that He was holy God and holy man.

The phrase that is so misunderstood is that Jesus did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation. This is a difficult phrase in the Greek to translate, and this is what lies at the root of the problem. Paul is teaching us that Jesus, who is God, is equal with the Father, and that there was nothing taken away from the Godhead by His becoming human.

In other words, the nature of God was not degraded in any way, shape, or form by Jesus becoming human. This teaches us that Jesus did not cease being fully God by becoming fully human, but through the work of redemption we were given a fresh look at the infinite nature of God. During the time of Christ's sojourn on earth, He died to His right to operate in His divine rights that He inherently owned as Almighty God.

This is what the phrase emptied Himself refers to. That Jesus made Himself nothing, or made Himself of no reputation, this can also be correctly translated emptied Himself. The various ways biblical interpreters translate that Greek phrase does not change the meaning.

They are all conveying the miracle of God coming to us in human form. Let me paraphrase these two verses. Jesus, being equal with God the Father, did not insist on retaining His divine right as God.

He laid aside His right to operate in His divine rights, and so for a time became wholly dependent upon the Father. Our Lord's self-emptying speaks of His dying to His right to operate in His divine right as God. Because Jesus was fully divine, He owned as God the right to use all of His infinite power and wisdom to accomplish His will.

Yet when we look at Christ's work of redemption, we can see that for God to create, He had only to speak, and it was done. But to redeem, He had to suffer, die, and bleed. The self-emptying of the Savior was far more costly than we can comprehend.

When we see Christ's total surrender to the Father, we must not think of it as a cruel, harsh, or hard thing, but an expression of the infinite love that defined the Godhead throughout timeless eternity. It was a joy for the Son to do the Father's will, even to the point of His vicarious suffering as the Lamb of God. How could the work of the Atonement be joy for Christ? Paul tells us in Hebrews chapter 12, verse 2, Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

I believe the joy that was set before Christ was twofold. First, it was the joy of obeying the Father, of finishing the work He was sent to accomplish. Second, the joy was for all those that would surrender their lives to Christ and own Him as Lord and Savior.

The entirety of what Jesus did was for the glory of the Father, the salvation of the lost, and to be an example for the saved. We too are called to experience our self-emptying, where we die to our God-given right to rule ourselves, and come alive through the resurrection power of full dependency upon the Lord. This is what abiding in Christ is all about, and if we lay hold of this biblical teaching, then we will see just how radical it is.

Let me give an illustration that will help us grab hold a little more firmly of how Jesus abode in the Father and how we are to abide in Him. One night you find yourself in the middle of the wilderness, gazing up at the star-filled heavens. All of a sudden you have an amazing vision.

You see the Heavenly Father dancing across the skies. It's a wild, beautiful dance where He is leaping, spinning, and doing feats in this dance that would be impossible for any mortal to perform. As He dances, He is singing a wild, beautiful song that corresponds to His dance.

All of a sudden you hear a second voice singing in perfect harmony with the Father. You look around to see where the other voice is coming from, and then you see Jesus. He is doing the same wild, beautiful dance that the Father is doing.

Every move that the Father makes, the Son is doing at the same time. There is not the slightest difference between the two because they are in perfect unity. The song of the Father is the song of the Son, and the dance of the Father is the dance of the Son.

You are overwhelmed at the wonder of the dance, and the song grips your heart. All of a sudden you feel this call, and you know it is Jesus compelling you to follow Him. You stare in mute horror, saying to yourself, I cannot dance such a wild dance, and the song is beyond my ability to sing.

But you feel deep within you the divine magnetism pulling you to follow Him so that you step out and follow. You find that you cannot perform the dance or sing the song. They are beyond your human ability.

Yet you obey the divine call to follow Jesus, and now the lessons begin. You once danced to the songs of hell and could do it well. But the dance of the Father and the Son is totally different, and beyond the ability of any man to do through his own mortal power.

It is like a little boy that tries to copy what he sees his father doing, but cannot do anything like his father. So you are following Jesus, yet unable to dance the dance of heaven and sing the song of the Lamb to any great extent. Years go by, and now you are able to perform portions of the dance to a very limited degree, and you are slowly learning the song, though it is so complicated and divine that you can barely sing it.

But you have grown. As the Son abides in the Father, so we are to abide in the Son. And as time goes on, if we live out the true faith, we will grow in our abiding and look and act like Jesus in an ever-increasing way.

There is a lesson that we can learn about Jesus being baptized in the Jordan River that will help us understand a little more clearly about the radical nature of abiding. Jesus was not baptized behind closed doors or in some secret location, but before the multitudes that came to hear John preach and be baptized by him. What is the first thing Jesus did after he was baptized? Mark 1, verses 12-13 gives us the answer.

Immediately the Spirit drove him into the wilderness, and he was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts and the angels ministered to him. Because Jesus died to his right to self-rule and became totally dependent upon the Father does not mean he would not have to deal with trials and spiritual attacks from hell. Notice that it was Satan himself that came to tempt Jesus.

He would not leave such an important job to a lesser devil. Yet we see as each temptation buffeted Jesus, he remained in total surrender to the Father. We cannot conquer temptation and demonic attacks by merely quoting Scripture.

Even Satan does that, yet the Word of God has not done him any good. Surrender and submission to God is first, and when they are in action, the Word of God is powerful in our hands. You cannot cast the devil out of a person that does not want deliverance no matter how much you quote Scripture.

If we want to abide in Christ, we must lay aside our rights, desires, ambitions, gifts, and talents in the same manner that Jesus did. We must die to everything that is of the self-light, even when those things are seemingly good in and of themselves. Figuratively speaking, we have to go to the Jordan River and drown in the river every expression of sin and rebellion that is in our life.

We cannot leave room in our hearts and minds for sin and rebellion to take root. They must be killed at all costs, because if we do not kill sin, sin will kill us. Then we must drown in the river our rights to govern ourselves.

This is a huge issue. We are control freaks. And if there is anything that we are prone to fear, it is giving up control over our lives.

We want to rule our lives even when we are self-destructing, even when we are abusing ourselves and hurting everybody in our lives. Self-rule is at the root of selfishness, because selfishness is all about

getting and doing what we want no matter the consequences or what anybody says, including God. All kinds of people that claim to be Christian live in compromise, and they often try to justify it in a host of ways.

What is at the root of their rebellion and compromise? Self-rule. If we will not go to the Jordan River and die to our self-rule, then we are destined to continue in the practice of sin and rebellion, because we will not have the grace of God at work in our lives. In our personal Jordan River, we can find a superabundance of grace to live the victorious Christian life.

But it is only obtained when we go under the water, when we die to our self-rule. We also have to drown in the Jordan our dreams, desires, talents, ambitions, and gifts. We can think because we have gifts and talents that God wants us to use them, but that is not necessarily the case.

Let me use musicians as an example. Over all my years of ministry, I have known a lot of musicians, some that were extremely talented. Many of them refused to drown in the Jordan their gift and love of music, so it became to them an idol.

Their passion for playing music, and very often the love of receiving the applause of people, takes them back into the world to live the outright life of a prodigal, or even at times to compromise their faith to such an extent that they live like the world but still think they're Christian. God is the one who created music, not man or not the devil. Yet this gift of God can easily be used and manipulated by the devil to do great evil.

How does the evil one get control over these gifts? Because people will not drown their right to use their gifts and talents in the Jordan. They want to use them no matter what. We even have to die to what is good in us and around us.

It all really comes down to this, that we have to die to anything that keeps us from abiding in Jesus as he abode in the Father. We have to drown in the Jordan anything that keeps us from loving Jesus with all of our being. We also have to drown in the Jordan everything that feeds the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, all of which keep us from abiding in Christ.

If this sounds radical to you, then you have not understood the word of God. Every true follower of Jesus called to this level of abiding in Christ, even if it does seem radical by the world standards and that of the Laodicean church. Some Christians struggle with abiding in Christ because it involves the death of legitimate and good activities, pursuits, and even possessions.

Let me share with you a personal story to help illustrate what I'm talking about. At the end of 1996, the Lord called Jessica and I to leave the pastoral ministry and pursue the calling of an evangelist. My wife and I purchased an empty commercial building that had only three outside walls, a roof, and a floor, and we had it moved onto a piece of property we bought in Florida.

Our plan was to turn it into a house, which would then be the home base for our ministry. Whenever we were back home from a ministry trip, I worked tirelessly trying to transform that shell of a building into a home for us. When I wasn't preaching, I was doing electrical, plumbing, heating, and drywall work, and all the rest of the stuff.

The house ended up being a very cute little two-bedroom home with a big front porch that went all the way across the front of the house. A couple of weeks before we got our occupancy permit for the house, my wife and I both sensed the Lord was telling us that we would never live in it, and we never did. We then

broke the frame to the minivan we were using to pull the 16-foot tag-along travel trailer we were living in while out preaching.

We had also booked so many meetings around the country that it would not be practical to keep the house. So we had to get rid of our little home and buy a truck and fifth wheel so we could live on the road ministering to churches all over the country. We had to die to our dream of a home, and there are times we get weary of the constant travel and would like a home.

But we know God's call on our lives and must drown in the Jordan those things that would keep us from fulfilling the work He has called us to do. For us to go after anything that would take us away from the will of God for our lives would be sin, and would not allow us to abide in Christ because we can only abide in Christ when we are walking in His will. If we truly want to abide in Christ, then we must be willing to give up anything that He would ask.

Here's a very interesting idea about abiding. Abiding in Christ is only available to the weak. People that think themselves strong will never abide in Christ because they will never see their need.

Self-rule and self-sufficiency keep people from abiding in Christ because they are the foundations that the idol self is built upon. To abide in Christ we must first see the painful reality that we are naturally and spiritually weak, and this is a truth we are often unwilling to understand unless we are forced. Those that begin to see their weakness and neediness are given the opportunity to see that all they really need must come through Christ.

Jesus said it this way in John chapter 15 verse 4. Jesus is clearly teaching that for us to abide in Him we must get our entire sustenance from Him, that the nourishment we need for body, soul, and spirit comes through Christ. Just look at the illustration Jesus is giving. First, He's using the Old Testament terminology.

The Lord referred to Himself as the vine, and that Israel was a wild vine grafted into Himself, the good vine. By using this illustration, Jesus was once again asserting His divinity by claiming that He was the vine that the people needed to be grafted into to have abundant life, both temporal and eternal. It is a sheer fact that a branch cannot live apart from the vine.

Life only comes through Jesus, and to have His life flow through us, we must be fully attached to Him. It is impossible for a branch to be attached to two different vines at once, and this reality forces us to make a decision. Will we abide in Christ, or will we abide in the world? It must be one or the other, for it cannot be both.

And whatever vine you and I are grafted into will determine what kind of sustenance we will receive. The spiritual food that Jesus offers can only give life, while the fruit of this world is poisoned by hell, and it can only give death. The other image presented in this illustration is that the purpose of the branch is to serve the vine by bearing fruit.

Now there is an interesting thought. Jesus does not graft us into Himself so that we can continue to live self-absorbed lives that are really all about personal fulfillment and selfish desires. Jesus does not give spiritual welfare because there is no unemployment in the kingdom of God.

Everyone that enters the kingdom of God is grafted into Jesus the vine, and it is expected of every branch to produce fruit, and there are no exceptions to this rule. Jesus labors in His vineyard so it can produce the most fruit, and this even includes the painful pruning process that is necessary so that we can bear much

fruit. The obvious condition to abiding in the vine is to be nothing but a branch surrendered to the life of the vine.

All rights and ambitions outside of what comes through the vine must be drowned in our Jordan River. There is no other way to produce good fruit other than through abiding in the vine, and any effort to produce fruit apart from the vine will mean that the fruit will be rejected because it will be wild, corrupt, and bad. Not only does a life that is abiding in Christ glorify God, but it also ensures that we will receive the precious gift of eternal life.

Abiding is not just a New Testament truth, it is also found in the Old Testament. David wrote in Psalms 15.1, Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary, who may live on your holy hill? The word dwell in this verse means to abide or sojourn. Think of the practical application of what David is saying.

The sanctuary he is talking about holds the most holy place, where the presence of God was among His people. The implication this has for the Gospel era rests in the idea that Christ dwells within His people as they abide in Him. And this is far different than the situation under the Mosaic law, where only the high priest could enter the most holy place once a year.

We have free access to the most holy place of fellowship with Jesus because His blood gives complete cleansing. If you keep reading the rest of Psalms 15, you will find that David clearly addresses the conditions that are attached to dwelling in God's holy presence. They include that we must love righteousness and hate evil, that we must exhibit love towards others through our words and honor those who fear the Lord.

It is a gross error when people think that they can live as they choose and still be right with God, because such ideas in all their various forms are thoroughly contrary to Scripture. Probably the most beautiful facet of abiding in Christ is the intimate fellowship that we are privileged to experience with Jesus. This is the ultimate reason the Lord created us, to enjoy Him forevermore.

Psalms 91 gives us a wonderful promise in relation to what I just said. He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. The very idea of abiding or dwelling in Christ speaks of nearness to Him.

David is saying that if we want to dwell under the protection and blessings of God, then we must first dwell in the secret place with Him. What is the secret place? It is the place of deep intimate prayer, where fellowship with God is real and the knowledge of God's love becomes extremely personal. This is where true followers of Jesus should love to be, sitting at the feet of Jesus like Mary did in the story of Mary and Martha.

The story of Mary and Martha begins with Martha making dinner for Jesus and Mary sitting at Jesus' feet listening to His teaching and loving His presence. Martha grew angry at Mary for not helping with the meal and complained to Jesus over it. Jesus responded in Luke 10, verses 41 and 42, Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.

Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her. In this story, Mary is the picture of a saint who has learned how to abide in Christ by sitting at the Savior's feet. Mary sat at Jesus' feet because she loved being with Him, while Martha loved being busy more than Jesus.

Martha is the picture of a Christian that has not learned how to abide in the secret place with Jesus, so she has not received the great benefits of dwelling near Him. There are so many Christians that live unfulfilled lives, not because Jesus cannot satisfy their soul, but because they do not want to dwell in the secret place with Jesus. They are busy with life and have not drowned their rights in the baptismal waters of the Jordan River.

Self is still ruling their lives because they have not relinquished the rule of their lives to Jesus. This happens for a host of different reasons. In the end, they prove to be meaningless in a chasing after the wind, to quote King Solomon.

Jesus said in John 15, too, that He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit. This is a very sobering dimension of abiding in Christ that we do not like hearing, but desperately need to hear. Jesus has the right as Almighty God, Creator and Redeemer, to demand that all those grafted into the vine bear fruit, and if they do not, they are severed from the vine.

What does it mean to be severed from the vine? That you are cut off from Jesus, who is the vine. That you are removed from the divine supply of life. That you are separated from the salvation you once enjoyed and now are destined for damnation.

To abide in Christ is not an option, but a mandatory part of the true faith. And as we can see, it is very costly not to abide in Christ. To abide in Christ literally means that we give up everything for Christ, but it also means that we find everything in Christ.

This fact is clearly established by the Savior's teaching in Luke chapter 14, 33. Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. To give up everything includes the giving up of all of our rights, just as Jesus gave up his to the Father.

Abiding in Christ is proved through our entire dependence upon the Savior. If we become overwhelmed with the radical nature of abiding, and think that it is just too costly to live such a life, then we need to remember the prize that comes out of abiding in Christ. Jesus talked about the prize of abiding in John 15, 9. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Now abide in my love. Dwelling in his love is the prize of life. It is the greatest prize of our entire existence.

And it is what heaven is all about. Abiding in Christ is radical because Jesus is radical. How could it be otherwise?

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