

Sermon Series: Where the Lover Meets the Road
“Where Do We Abide?”
Sunday, August 14, 2022
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One of the hardest parts of being in the hurricane season is determining where do we abide? E.g., I recall last year we had an evacuation because of Hurricane Ida, and our family went to Houston, Texas and stayed at a hotel for about two weeks while we waited for electric power to return. For a while there we were wondering, where are we to abide, live? E.g., and of course it is easy to think about Hurricane Katrina evacuation back in 2005; we evacuated to family in Houston, and then something really unusual happened. Hurricane Rita came and was going to hit Houston! So, to add insult to injury, we had to evacuate our evacuation site and we fled to Monroe. It was Elena and I, and our three children, and our Beta fish in a fish bowl! Again, we had the feeling, where do we abide? Where do we live? I did not get back to New Orleans to live until November, and the family did not get here until Christmas Eve. You can also think of similar experiences— whether hurricane evacuations or losing a beloved person in your life or a health problem— and wondering where are we going to call home? At times we have experiences in life where we feel displaced, shaken, insecure, not knowing where our true home is. In our passage today, we have a helpful reminder of where Christians truly abide.

READ 1 John 4:13-16 (p. 241)

CONTEXT: John has just told them about true love— love that God has shown by initiating love with us by sending His Son to be the sacrifice for our sins. And for those who know Him, we are to love one another in like fashion.

READ v 13. “John builds on the theme of abiding from v 12, just as he did with ‘truth’ in 3:18-19 and ‘Spirit’ in 3:24-4:1. The point is that God does this act in an extraordinary way: through the Holy Spirit, and thus implies eternity, family, and power. Cf. 3:24.” John has a pattern where he switches from topic to topic, and it can be hard sometimes to understand the transitions. But he seems to be inspired by words that bring thoughts on subjects he wants to address. He does that here. The verb remain in v 12 is emphasized here, where in vv 13-16, in four verses, the verb “to remain, abide, dwell, live” (μένω) occurs five times, and it is clearly implied twice more (vv 13,15). John essentially answers the question, how do I know God dwells in me? The answer he gives is: through the Holy Spirit. There are many ways the Holy Spirit confirms in us that God is dwelling in us, such as the three I mentioned here. God, who is eternal, lives in us through the Holy Spirit, and thus the hope and affirmation that we are eternal beings infuses our beings. This is important because we need such affirmation. E.g., I was reminded of that this week when I heard that Olivia Newton-John died, and in an interview with her a few years ago she was asked how she could have such a happy demeanor when she had to deal with cancer again (she was originally diagnosed with breast cancer in 1992), and she said because the alternative was basically a road that led nowhere good. I don’t know where she was spiritually, but for Christians we have a hope and confidence for eternity and the resurrection which comes from the Holy Spirit. I have seen this in Christians as they face the end of their lives. Because of this hope and confidence in eternity we see persons risking their lives for others in past history— like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Corrie

ten Boom. We also experience in the Body of Christ a family love, because we are brothers and sisters in Christ. E.g., this week a dear friend of mine died, Johnny Cascio, who was a brother in Christ; he was someone who made me feel like he would do anything for me if I was in need— like once he came over to the parsonage to go up in the attic to help me find out why I heard animals up there. Randy is like that here. We see evidence of the Holy Spirit living in us here, don't we? Also, we know God abides in us through the Holy Spirit through power to live like God's character. We recall Galatians 5:22-23, where the fruits of the Holy Spirit are such things as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control. E.g., I recall a friend telling me that when he came to Christ one of the first things God did was to help him change his language; prior to coming to Christ his language could be pretty profane he told me— and the power of God's work in his life was evident to me, because I could not imagine him using such language. That is God's role in abiding in us. But there is another aspect of abiding— our role of abiding in God.

READ 14-16a. "There are two parts of our abiding, both of which focus on the believer's loyalty. First, we confess the correct Christology, i.e., who Jesus is. Cf. 4:2-3." During this sermon series, "When the Lover Meets the Road" we have mentioned that John's church has had a division over who Jesus is. The church was ok with Jesus as the divine Son of God, but the division came over Jesus coming to earth actually in the flesh. READ 4:2-3. In v 14 the word "we" for "we have observed and bear witness" is emphasized, and also in v 16a; cf. 1:1-4. E.g., I recall a sports writer for a Boston newspaper said every time he saw Larry Bird play a game Bird did something that was amazing, noteworthy. Like I recall seeing a video of Bird shooting the ball directly behind the basketball goal and making it! That's how the early church talked about Jesus, especially those who knew Him! We have other christological issues in Christianity today, such as

salvation by grace through faith in Jesus' death on the cross in our place, such as the Virginal Conception, and such as the bodily resurrection. E.g., I recall when I was replacing a minister at a church and I was talking to the minister who was about to depart, I started talking to him about Christian beliefs. I asked him if he believed in the resurrection, he said he did not, but rather believed in a symbolic resurrection. I recall months later after I started to serve that church charge I found out that this pastor was more of a buddy than a pastor—he would come over to their houses and take naps. It is true that our beliefs influence our behavior. I have found it to be pretty much a rule that when someone claims to me that their thinking and experiences carry more authority with them over the Bible, that it there I behold either a false, pseudo-Christian or a very troubled believer who will be damaged in life through the lack of the Bible in their lives. Through our beliefs we abide in God.

READ v 16b. “Second, our lives are reflections of the profound fact of the Creator’s character: God is love! Cf. 4:8.” We abide in God through obedience. We recall that “God is love” was also said in v 8. And this does not mean that everything people say is love is God—reversing this phrase— but rather God’s character is profoundly loving. God is also light— 1 John 1:5. God is also holy, as in Leviticus 19:1-2. Perhaps it can be said God’s love is like light in the midst ofr darkness, and His love is holy. E.g., I recall when I was in high school I went to a Christian youth summer camp for a week and there was a time where we could ask anonymous questions about dating, and I recall a question came up of when it was appropriate to kiss a girl, and the answer was on the fifth date. What was going on here? The questioner wanted his or her love to be holy and honoring to God, and to safeguard his or her dating relationships. And we have seen in the end of chapter 3 that love is action— if a brother or sister is in need and we can help the person, how is God’s love in us if we do nothing? E.g., I

recall a woman Elena and I knew in Scotland who would have international students to her house for lunch nearly every Sunday, and it was a wonderful time of fellowship.

“Where do we abide?” Where do we live? In and out of hurricane season, regardless of what hardship we face, this is a very important question. If we abide in God’s love— where we ground our belief system in the Bible and act on it in obedience, and we obey His love for us through the Holy Spirit— we will be secure in our lives. Even hurricanes will not be able to defeat us. We will be like a house built on the rock, and that rock is the Lord of love.