

Sermon 40, Cosmic Salvation, Corporate Abiding, 1 John 4:13-14

Proposition: Because Jesus is saving the world, the Spirit and the Apostles testify to our abiding in God, and His in us.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the title “Savior of the World” appears only two times in the Bible: Here, and in John 4, when the Samaritans testify that they have realized that Jesus is the Savior of the World. (The title appears a third time in the Egyptian name given to Joseph, Zaphenath-Peneath, which also means “Savior of the World.”) When Adam lost his original righteousness, he lost the world — but Jesus is bringing it back. That’s the cosmic salvation side of our text. But the other side of our text deals with corporate abiding. Because God is saving the world through Jesus, we need to nourish and maintain His presence among us. We are the future of this world. God is going to be all in all here, and He is already all in all to us. We are the beachhead of the new creation. So the cosmic salvation Jesus is bringing is already being acted out in us as we live as a “we,” a cohesive, loving group of people who abide in God and He in us. Because Jesus is saving the world, the Spirit and the Apostles testify to our abiding in God, and His in us.

I. What We Know: Mutual Abiding, v. 13a

We know, John says, that we abide in God and that God abides in us. We’ve talked about this many times, as it’s come up over and over in this letter. Again, let me repeat that John is reminding you of your identity and your “embeddedness” within the body of Christ. You are loved; you are united to Christ and thus “in God” in a mystical, comprehensive, and glorious way. Your life is hid with Christ in God. You are part of the divine, not in the sense of losing your identity and becoming the same thing as He is, but in the sense of confirming your identity and becoming one of His closest friends, a wife, a daughter, a son, and kinsman.

You are in God like this because you have been united to Christ in belief and baptism. Because you're in Him, you love Him and each other, and that's how you remain in Him. That's also how He remains in you. Imagine finding out that Jesus is in you but that it makes no difference. You are still just as weak, sinful, frail, and miserable as you were before. You're not getting noticeably better; in fact, you're not getting better at all. Would you be glad that Jesus is abiding in you? Of course not. The abiding implies action. He works to transform you from the inside. In that sense, we could say that He abides by loving. You need to abide by loving too. This is the mutual abiding. This is being in Him while He is in you.

You can know this. You don't have to guess about it. You don't have to wonder about it. You can have a true, justified belief about it.

II. How We Live It: By Being a “We”

How do we live out this abiding that we know? By focusing on our group identity as the body of Christ. This is preeminently a corporate abiding. Let me just reread the passage to you, transformed into an individualist passage:

Beloved, let me love others, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward me, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that I might live through Him. In this is love, not that I loved God, but that He loved me and sent His Son to be the propitiation for my sins. Beloved, if God so loved me, I also ought to love others. No one has seen God at any time. If I love others, God abides in me, and His love has been perfected in me. By this I know that I abide in Him, and He in me, because He has given me of His Spirit. And I have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And I have known and believed the love that God has for me. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

How does that strike you? Is something lost in the transformation? You bet it is. Yes, everything in this passage is true, and at times I need to apply it individually. But the fact of the matter is that I and every other human being on this planet apply things individually much better when they are mine in common with others. We learn so much from other people, depend so much on their work, delight so much in their company. We live out this abiding by sticking together because Christ is in us, far more than He is in me. So if you want Jesus to abide in you, come to church and fellowship with your brothers and sisters. It is we together who are the locus of the abiding, we together who love one another because the Spirit is among us.

If Christ abides in you, you will want to find little Christs (“Christians”) and pour your love on them. That's how the love of God reaches perfection in you. Don't read 1 John and hear “me me me.” Read it and hear “we we we.” And then live that out by actually being a “we” with

your brothers and sisters. That includes your brothers and sisters of color, of every tribe and tongue.

My older daughter is a twin. She can hardly speak of herself in the singular. Everything is “we.” She and her twin brother are powerfully aware of their group identity. They embrace it. You don’t need to go that far, so far that the word “I” pretty much drops out of your vocabulary. But you need to have a giant chunk of your life taken up with “we” if you want to know this mutual abiding.

III. How We Know It

Well, aside from our lifestyle of being with one another, how else do we know that He abides in us and we in Him?

A. By the Spirit, v. 13b

John tells us that the first way we know is by the Spirit. We have talked about this before, but brothers and sisters, what is the role of the Spirit in our knowledge that He abides in us? To this point, we have focused on the fruit. That’s part of it. But there are three aspects of the Spirit’s presence that work together to remind us that we are in Christ and He in us.

1. His Presence

The first of these is the Spirit’s presence. Just by being there, He is the best gift you could ever have. I mean, think about it: If your parents are going to come visit you, what are you more excited about: The gifts they’re bringing along, or the fact that they’re going to be there visiting you? If you care more about their stuff than about them, you’re missing out. The thrill of stuff doesn’t last. Just recall the last two or three things you were so excited about purchasing. How often do you use them now? Even if you use them every day, is the same thrill still there? Only people are rich enough to see every day. I guarantee you that if you could keep all the buildings and pieces of stuff in your life, but lose the people, you’d be far more depressed than if you lost all your stuff but kept your people.

The Spirit is with us. His very presence is the down payment on glory. The Father didn’t spare His Son, but gave Him. He didn’t hang onto His Spirit, but gave Him. And if He’s given you His Son and His Spirit, can He withhold Himself? Of course not!

2. His Testimony

But the Spirit not only assures you of your mutual abiding by His presence; He also tells you directly, bearing witness with your Spirit that you are a child of God. This epistle especially emphasizes the Spirit’s witness: “It is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth.” The Spirit is the one who tells us that it’s all true, that Jesus really is the Son of God, that He really did die on the cross for us, and that He is definitely coming again with glory to judge the living and the dead. That is the Spirit’s testimony. It’s written in this book, and it’s whispered in your heart. By it you know that God abides in you, and you in God.

3. His Fruit

But wait! How do you know that what you think is the Spirit isn’t actually your own fantasy? By the fruits He grows. In some ways, of course, these fruits are the most important or at least the

most visible aspect of what the Spirit does for us. When we have Him, we will grow in love, joy, peace, gentleness, and the rest. Are you more loving, joyful, and peaceful than you were? Are you filled with the Spirit in an obvious way? Then you can know that you abide in God, and He in you.

B. By the Apostles, v. 14a

But the Spirit's testimony is not the only way we can know that the mutual abiding is real and really happening. We also know it through the apostles' testimony.

1. They Saw

First of all, the apostles saw the Son on earth. They walked with Him, talked with Him, witnessed what He was doing. They saw His presence and His identity as Savior of the world as one sent from the Father.

2. They Testified

And then they testified to it. They wrote down His words and actions, preserving them for us. They preached Jesus all around the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond.

IV. Why We Know It: Because Jesus is Saving the World for His Father, v. 14b

What was the precise content of that testimony? Well, just as the Samaritans heard that Jesus was Savior of the World, so the disciples saw it. How can you take a look at an ordinary man and see Him as the cosmic savior? That's what the disciples did. I'm sure they would tell us that He was no ordinary man, and that it was plain to see.

Brothers and sisters, Jesus is savior of the world. The disciples saw it, and testified to it. This does not mean that He is definitely going to save every last human being. Rather, it means that the whole world was lost to God and His authority when Adam fell into sin — and that Jesus is reclaiming the world for God and His control. The Father deputized Him to do this. Here on earth, we see men given a specific domain and told to manage that domain. But in heaven, we see the Son of Man managing every domain, retaking the whole of reality from the kingdom of darkness. When we were saved, we were delivered from death's dark kingdom. And as the rule of Christ marches forward, we see that our abiding in Him is just a piece of the cosmic deliverance He is bringing.

Don't write off this world. Jesus is saving it. Indeed, we have heard and seen, come to know, that He is the savior of the world. There is no salvation in anyone else, in any other creed or philosophy or standard operating procedure. Salvation is only to be had in Jesus. Amen.