

8. An Abiding Word

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[0 : 00] Well, I'd like you to turn now in your Bibles, if you would, to John's Gospel, and to John's Gospel, Chapter 12, that's page 899, if you have one of our church Bibles. Coming this morning, I think, to our final study, for the meantime anyway, in this question of what is the Bible.

And we're going to read these last few verses, John 12 at verse 44. These are the last recorded verses of Jesus' public ministry. After that, you have the upper room, the private discourse with his disciples.

And then, in John's Gospel, the description of the Lord's death and resurrection. So these words are the climax of Jesus' words to the people of his day.

And we'll be thinking about these a little later on. Jesus cried out and said, Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me.

And whoever sees me, sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him.

[1 : 26] For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge. The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment. What to say and what to speak.

And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me.

Amen. May God bless to us his word. Well, we'll be thinking particularly about these words of Jesus, the words of God, again later on.

But we're going to sing now again number 19 in our blue hymn books. 19B. There's two versions of this 19th psalm. And you'll notice that it's a psalm that speaks about the revelation of God, both in his glory and creation in the heavens and the earth, but above all in his perfect law, in his words that enable us to know truly everything that God requires us to know of him.

[2 : 43] So psalm number 19B. God's glory fills the heaven with hymns. Well, perhaps you turn with me to John's gospel and to that passage in John chapter 12.

We'll be referring to that a bit later on and to some other passages in John. We're coming to the last of this little doctrinal series asking the question, what is the Bible?

What is the nature of the scriptures? And today we're thinking about it as being an abiding word.

God's word, the Bible, is an abiding word.

It is a necessary revelation. If I had to choose one particular text, I guess it would be the one that I've put on your sheet there.

When Jesus says in Matthew chapter 24, Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. God's word is an abiding word.

[3 : 41] God's word is an abiding word. God's word is an abiding word. God's word is an abiding word. God's word is an abiding word. God's word is an abiding word. God's word is an abiding word. As we saw last time, the scriptures are a sufficient revelation.

They give us all that we need for life and godliness. That's how Peter puts it in the beginning of his second letter. Everything that pertains to life and godliness.

Therefore, in the scriptures, we have a sufficiency from God. We have everything that we need.

And because we do have all that we need, that means that we need it all.

It means that we can't live without it. And that's why we have God's word written. That's why God's word is an abiding word. That's why it's preserved for us.

Because it is necessary. It's a necessary word. Because without it, we can't know God. Without it, we can't find salvation. And without it, we can't live rightly under God's rule.

[4 : 46] God's word, as we now have it in scripture, it abides because it is necessary for the revelation of God. It's necessary for a true relationship with God.

And it's necessary for the true rule of God. I want to think about those three things this morning. First of all, God's word abides because it is necessary for a true revelation of God.

And that's the point that's made in the very first paragraph of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is the confession of our church. It's on the reverse of your sheets there, but let me read it for you.

Although the light of nature and the works of creation and providence do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God as to leave man inexcusable, yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God and of his will which is necessary unto salvation.

Therefore, it pleased the Lord at sundry times and in diverse manners to reveal himself and to declare that his will unto his church.

[5 : 56] And afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of Satan and of the world, afterwards to commit the same holy unto writing, which maketh the holy scripture to be most necessary.

Those former ways of revealing God's will unto his people being now ceased. Now what that is saying is, summarizing the teaching of scripture, God does reveal himself in the light of nature and in his works of creation and of providence, and the Bible testifies to that.

We say it in Psalm 19, the heavens declare God's glory. God's work in nature alone gives us the manifest goodness and wisdom and the power of God made plain so that man is inexcusable in the face of that revelation.

That's what we're told clearly in scripture. Well, if that is the case, then why then does the confession say that nevertheless they are not sufficient? Not sufficient to give a saving knowledge of God.

Why is that? Well, of course, the answer lies in the very fact that a saving knowledge is needed at all. We need to be saved. That's the problem. Why is it not sufficient?

[7 : 27] Well, because of the fact of sin. The Apostle Paul says that very plainly, if you remember back to our studies in Romans chapter 1, God's invisible attributes, he says, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world, and so we are without excuse.

But, he says, we have blinded ourselves to this reality. Because, in our rebellion, what do we do? We suppress the truth, says Paul.

God, in his mercy, has not left himself without a witness in his creation in the world. Paul declares that. You remember in the book of Acts, to the people in Lystra, in Acts 14.

He did good, he said, by giving rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and with gladness. That's what God has been doing to the peoples of this world right since the beginning.

Showering his good gifts upon them. And yet, we've been blind to that reality. At best, the knowledge of God human beings have through God's work in creation and through his providential care in history, at best, it's confused and it's distorted.

[8 : 40] As we saw when we looked at Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 2, in a previous study, the natural person, he says, can't understand.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, the God of this world, the God of this world, the evil one, Satan, he has blinded the eyes of unbelievers.

And that's why more is needed than just this revelation of God in nature. A trumpet call is needed to pierce the fog and the darkness of human sin and to bring to light the truth of God.

And so, as Hebrews chapter 1 tells us, in past times and in many ways, as the confession quotes those words, God has spoken. As it says, to reveal himself and to declare his will to his people.

And, in order to preserve and to propagate that true and fulsome revelation of himself, he caused and committed these words that he spoke through his prophets and his apostles and his son, he caused these words to be written, committed to writing, so that that revelation would be indelibly preserved for all people for all time to come.

[10:01] Which makes the Holy Scriptures most necessary, says the confession. These former ways of God's revealing his will to his people being now ceased.

That's what we were thinking about last time, wasn't it? Because God's redemption in Christ is the climax of his revelation of himself to humankind, and because that redemption in Christ is now complete, then the revelation of God to man is now complete.

And because it's complete, God has caused it to be preserved indelibly in the words of Scripture, so that that revelation can be passed on and propagated, so that sinful people all through the ages and all around the world, who are blinded by their rebellious hearts, can still receive sight, can still have their eyes open to the glory of the one true and only God in the face of Jesus Christ.

It's through God's words that God himself is revealed. Those words we opened the service with in John 17, Jesus said, I have manifested your name, for I have given them the words that you have given me, and they have received them.

And these same words, committed to writing, are most necessary, so that we also might know the only true God. These words are written, says John at the end of his gospel, that you may have life in his name.

[11:34] That brings us to the second thing. The word of God in Scripture abides because it's necessary for a true revelation of God, and in order that we might have a true relationship with God.

His words are necessary for salvation. Just as the universe was created by the word of God, so also the word of God is the thing that brings lost human beings to new creation in Christ.

Out of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth, says James 1, verse 18. We have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God, says Peter in 1 Peter 1.

Truly, truly, I say to you, says Jesus, whoever hears my words and believes him who sent me has eternal life. The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.

The words I have spoken to you, he said, are spirit and life. At least, Peter the disciple understood what Jesus was talking about.

[12:51] He said, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. And that's why at the end of his public ministry here in John chapter 12, the passage that we read together, you'll see Jesus is focusing so clearly on his words.

Just look at the paragraph there at the end of John 12, beginning at verse 44. You see how he makes belief in his person and belief in his words utterly inseparable.

Can you see that? Because he alone is the way, then his words alone are the way to eternal life. Look at verses 44 to 46.

See, it's all about how belief in Jesus is belief in God the Father. Verse 44, whoever believes in me believes in him who sent me.

Verse 45, whoever sees me sees him who sent me. Verse 46, whoever believes in me remains not in darkness but finds light.

[13:58] Now look at verse 47 to 50 and see how clearly he says that to believe in Jesus, which is to believe and know the Father, is to receive his words.

Look at verse 47 and 48 where he says that to reject Jesus, to not receive his words, is to be judged by the words that Jesus has spoken. If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.

The one who rejects me and does not receive my words is a judge. To reject Jesus is to reject his words. To receive his words is to receive Jesus and not reject him.

His word, he says, is a word of saving power if you receive it but it is a word of condemning power if you reject it. The word that I have spoken will judge him on that last day.

Jesus says that, you see, because he is speaking the word, the commandment of the Father himself. Verse 49, he gives, says Jesus, what to say and what to speak.

[15:15] In verse 50, his commandment, the word of the Father spoken by Jesus and transmitted by his apostles. His commandment is eternal life.

See, God the Son and God the Father are known only through Jesus' words and are rejected through rejecting these words.

And that's why the scriptures are an abiding word because these words, these commandments are eternal life. They are the road to life. accepted or refused.

Now, Jesus knows his ministry here is ended on earth. He knows his cross beckons. He knows his death and resurrection and his ascension to heaven will be soon. And he knows that therefore in the future he will be known no longer by his appearance or his earthly presence but by his words. My sheep know my voice, he said. And they'll be led by that voice. Just like Mary was in the garden after the resurrection, you remember, she didn't know him by his appearance but she did know him when he spoke his words to her.

[16:34] The dead, says Jesus, will go on hearing my voice and coming to life just as Lazarus in the tomb heard the voice, the word of Jesus and came forth into the light.

without his words therefore there will be no salvation. Without his words there will be no knowing the Father and the Son. Without his words there will be no eternal life because his words are eternal life.

And that is why Jesus was so insistent therefore that his words will not pass away, that they will abide forever. They will abide through the written testimony of the apostolic scriptures.

That's why as we've seen many times in the upper room discourses here in these chapters of John 13 to 17 that's why he's so concerned with passing on his words. Look at John 17 verse 8 again where we began the service.

I have given them that is the apostles he's talking about his 12 disciples I have given them the words that you gave me and they have received them says Jesus.

[17:47] And he goes on praying to his father in John 17 that they have come to know in truth. Verse 17 look at that sanctify them in truth he says your word is truth.

But he goes on look down to verse 20 I do not pray for these only but also those who will believe through their words. Jesus commits to the apostles the ongoing work of the ministry of the word of life and he said that they would find exactly the same reaction to their words as Jesus found to his words.

These were the words that will bring life to those who receive them and condemnation to those who reject them. And those who speak these words will also be received or rejected in exactly the same way as the Savior himself.

Like in John 15 Jesus said if they persecuted me they will also persecute you. If they kept my word they will also keep your word. See the words of Jesus the words of Jesus are inseparable from the person of Jesus.

And just as Jesus person is necessary is essential for a real relationship with God for salvation and for eternal life so Jesus words are necessary and essential to impart life.

[19:16] His life giving voice will be heard and can only be heard through the words of testimony that he has committed to those who were with him from the beginning eyewitnesses of his majesty the apostles they are the ones who have delivered to us once for all the faith and they did that by committing that testimony to writing to the scriptures so that we can have it today in our Bibles before us.

And that's why Peter as he knew he was drawing near his life's end that's why he wrote in his second letter as we were looking at last week to stir up your minds so that you would remember the predictions of the holy prophets remember the words of the Old Testament scriptures and the commandment of our Lord and Savior through your apostles so that you will remember the words of the New Testament scriptures because says the confession rightly the scriptures are most necessary they're essential for a true relationship with God which is salvation which is eternal life the scriptures says Paul are able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and the scriptures remember says Paul are able to equip the man of God for every good work that brings us to our third consideration about the abiding nature of God's word of all of God's words the Bible is an abiding word because it's necessary for the true rule of God in our lives the scriptures are necessary for our service so that we can be truly equipped as the people of God and that is the whole of the Bible even parts of the Old

Testament that we might think are a bit obscure and ancient oh no remember Jesus words the scriptures cannot be broken I've not come to abolish the law and the prophets he said but to fulfill them not one jot or tittle will pass away now Paul is just plain isn't he he goes to great length in his letter to the Corinthians 1st Corinthians 10 to quote a big tract from the book of Numbers and he says to the Corinthian church to a New Testament church that all these things even from obscure passages in the book of Numbers all these things were written down for our instruction our instruction upon whom the end of the ages has come we're living in the great era of fulfillment we're

living in the age of the Holy Spirit says Paul but all these things that were written in former days were written for our instruction said the same to the church in Rome do you remember all this is for our instruction so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope the scriptures you see all of

God's words preserved for us they are necessary necessary for the rule of God over our lives that's because the Lord who's revealed in scripture and who brings us into relationship through scripture is the covenant Lord the Lord who rules his people in righteousness to be a believer to know God to have salvation to have eternal life that means to be under the gracious and merciful leadership and rule of God in Jesus Christ it's to be under his lordship to be right with God to be justified means to belong to God to be his it means to be to be joined in an unbreakable covenant bond with God just like in a marriage bond that means that we are to covenant to live so that we will love and honor and obey him all the days of our lives until death us do part you see

Christ is our covenant head and we are his body Paul says to the Ephesians that he loved us and gave himself for us to sanctify us and cleanse us by the washing of water with the word notice to present us to himself in splendor holy and without blemish that's the purpose of God's salvation that's the purpose of our relationship with him that we should be ruled by him that he should nourish us and cherish us and that we likewise should gladly submit to him as our covenant lord not subjugated to him as though we were under the yoke of some terrible tyrant that's where we once were do you remember Romans chapter 6 and 7 once we were under a tyrant under the power of sin but now we've been liberated we belong to a new lord and master the gracious savior a tender shepherd the one who said come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you it's not the burdensome yoke of a tyrant my yoke is easy my burden is light says the lord Jesus but the mark of those who truly know the voice of the good shepherd is that they love that yoke that means that they love and they obey his words true love for the lord of love is the thing that makes obedience to his words sweet to us makes it a glad surrender not a difficult one so we want to delight and please our god we want to delight in his commands his commands become to us sweet to the taste like honey we find ourselves speaking the words of the 119th psalm with joy and with delight like the psalmist our whole view of god's commands and his laws is totally transformed and we see them for what they are the words of eternal life and so you see god's abiding words which we have in the holy scriptures they are necessary for the true rule of god over our lives they're necessary for his gracious shepherding of us by grace and for glory and true love and true obedience that is the obedience of faith gladly given to our lord true love of the lord and true obedience to his word always go together always so you remember right back in deuteronomy chapter 6 the very heart of the old testament faith the shema the Jewish prayer began hear O Israel the Lord our God the Lord is one and you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might and these words that I command you today shall be on your heart to teach to your children to talk about in your house and you're going out and you're coming in on your journeys and so on you see that true love for the Lord means that his words his words of covenant lordship his direction of our lives his commands upon us true love of the Lord means that his words are always upon our minds and in our hearts and if that's not so then then it's not love to God not real love not at all it's just sham isn't it it's just religion maybe full of all the words of the faith and the ceremonies of the faith but it's not a real living relationship with the Lord it's not that true salvation that eternal life which is alone found in the

[27 : 28] obedience of faith through Jesus Christ our Lord that's why Jesus said on many occasions to people who purported to be followers of him why do you call me Lord and not do what I tell you as two things go together love of the Lord and being directed by his words God's words are necessary therefore for us to live under his rule and unless we love those words and unless we do them then we're not living under his rule and therefore we're not in a real relationship with him we don't really know him we can't really know or have the life that is found in him and in his words just turn over to John chapter 14 if you would just to listen to Jesus himself tell us how necessary his words are for us John 14 at verse 21 whoever has my commandments and keeps them he it is who loves me says Jesus he who loves me will be loved by my father and I will love him and manifest myself to him Judas not Iscariot said to him Lord how is it that you will manifest yourself to us and not to the world Jesus answered him if anyone loves me he will keep my word and my father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him whoever does not love me by contrast does not keep my words the word that you hear is not mine but the father's who sent me anyone loves me he will keep my word God's words abide so that we may love God so that we may abide in Christ's love

these words are necessary so that we know how to love and honor our savior and our lord how we live under his gracious rule how we please him how we delight him how we are guarded and guided by his words as we serve him abide in my love says Jesus in John 15 if you keep my commandments he says you will abide in my love that's what delights the heart of God our savior that's what brings him joy but it's also the way Jesus is saying there it's also the way to full and fulsome joy for us in our lives too these things I've spoken to you Jesus goes on in John 15 that my joy may be in you and your joy may be full God's plan for us is that our joy will be his joy and that that joy will be full in our lives full and complete and for that for that his words his words of grace and of warning his words of challenge and of great comfort all his words are necessary if we are to abide in him and if our joy is to be complete please the Lord at sundry times and in diverse manners to reveal himself and declare that his will to the church and afterwards for the better preserving and propagating of the truth and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh the malice of Satan and the world to commit these words holy unto writing which makes the holy scripture to be most necessary these former ways of

God's revealing his will to his people now being ceased these words are necessary that's why God has caused them to abide for us because they're words of eternal life that's why he's made them abide that we might have a true revelation of God despite our sin and self blinding that we might know a true relationship with God through his great salvation and that we might live gladly under the rule of God in his glad service all the days of our lives Jesus the grass withers says Peter and the flower fades but the word of the Lord remains forever and this word is the good news that was preached to you thanks be to God that this is so let's pray Lord, your word abideth and our footsteps guideth.

And how glad we are, Lord, that you have caused the words spoken to your people from the very beginning of time and all through the ages, coming to that great climax in the living word of our Lord Jesus Christ in person.

That you have caused by your Holy Spirit these words to be written, to be preserved, to be translated for us, that we might have them in our own tongue, that we might, in opening our Bibles and reading the words and hearing them, we might hear the very words of God that bring eternal life.

And so, Lord, we thank you that through these words you have opened our eyes, that we might know you and love you. And we pray that through these words you would go on guiding and guarding us, every one of us in our own Christian life, but all of us together as a fellowship of your people.

[33 : 26] May your necessary and wonderful word surround us and lead us, hem us in to keep us from sin, lift us up when we are in despair, give us hope when we are fading, and lead us in the way everlasting until your face we see.

For we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.