

Harmony of the Gospels

Part 8

"To Abide In Jesus"

Upon opening his new store, a man received a bouquet of flowers. He became dismayed on reading the enclosed card, that it expressed "*Deepest Sympathy*".

While puzzling over the message, his telephone rang. It was the florist, apologizing for having sent the wrong card.

"Oh, that's alright." said the storekeeper. **"I'm a businessman and I understand how these things can happen."**

"But," added the florist, *"I accidentally sent your card to family having a funeral."*

"Well, what did that card say?" ask the storekeeper. "

The florist relied: *"Congratulations on your new location'."*

What is your location this morning?

- ☞ Are abiding in the world.
- ☞ Are you abiding in Jesus?

The honest answer to that question may determine where you heart truly is today and whether or not you truly have eternal life...

At The Beginning of the Ministry of John the Baptist ministry he asks this question of those that come to him at the Jordan river

Matthew 3:1-12

1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching **in the wilderness of Judea,**

- ☞ **The wilderness: literally, the desert.** The Lord does not send his messenger to the cities to announce the coming of the Messiah, He chooses the place of least distraction, where there is nothing but you and the Lord, a place where you can focus on him.
- ☞ **Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years, but** they were less than 500 miles from the promised land, just a 11 day journey, but the Lord **was trying to get their attention.**
- ☞ **Next week** as Jesus begins His ministry, He goes to the desert to be tempted in Matthew chapter 4.
- ☞ **The desert represents "A place of decision",** a place of trial, a place of purification.

- ☞ **In our own lives everyone of us will have a “Desert experience”** because this is where the Lord can speak to us the clearest. This is where we can grow the most, in those times of dryness, times of desolation, times of desperation.

Are you in the desert right now in your life? It is not for your destruction, it is for your instruction...

Matthew 3

2 and saying, "**Repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

- ☞ **While In this desert experience** The Lord **calls us to make a decision**, “Are you going the right way? Do you want to turn and follow me?”
- ☞ **Repent**: means to “**Change your mind**”. It means to be going one way, and to decide to turn and go a different way. To turn from running your own life, to turn surrender you present life to the Lord and begin to let Him run things.
- ☞ **The message** John was proclaiming is “**The Lord is about to announce the coming of his kingdom**”, **if you want to be a part of it. you need to turn from the way you are going now, and turn and follow Jesus.**

Matthew 7:21

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Matthew 3

3 For this (**John the Baptist**) is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying: "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: **Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.**"

This is a quote from Isaiah 40:3-4

Isaiah 40:3-4

3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "**Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.**

4 Every **valley shall be exalted** and every **mountain and hill brought low**; the **crooked places shall be made straight** and the **rough places smooth**;

- ☞ **Whenever a king** was about to pass through a town or village **an advance team** would be sent to prepare the roads for the king's arrival.
- ☞ **Here in the prophecy of Isaiah we see**: The low places are raised, the high places are lowered, the crooked places straightened, the rough or coarse places are smoothed.
- ☞ **Everything was prepared in advance** of the King's visit in the town or village, the roads were made ready for him to travel on.
- ☞ **John the Baptist was sent as a forerunner or advance man to prepare people's hearts for the coming of the king of kings .**

If Jesus were to come today in the Rapture and call all of us out of this earth who SAY we believe in Him, would you be ready?

- ⊕ **Jesus is coming** for those who love Him? **Do you Love Him.**
- ⊕ **Jesus is coming for those** who have been living for Him, **are you living for Him.**
- ⊕ **Jesus is not coming for those** who just **know about** Jesus, but for those who have surrendered their life to Jesus, **have you surrendered your life to Jesus Christ?**

You make it to heaven, and you get to go in the Rapture, because of what Jesus has done for you at the Cross, not because of any good work you have done yourself...

A man dies and goes to heaven. He is met at the gate by one of the attendants of heaven "Here's how it works. **You need 100 points to make it into heaven.** You tell me all the good things you've done, and I give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in."

"Okay," the man says, "I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, not even in my heart."

"That's wonderful," says Peter, "**that's worth three points!**"

"Three points?" he says. "Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my tithe and service."

"Terrific!" says Peter, "that's certainly worth **a point.**"

"One point? Man, your tough. How about this: **I started a soup kitchen in my city and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans.**"

"Fantastic, that's good for **two more points,**" he says.

"**TWO POINTS!!**" the man cries, "At this rate the only way I get into heaven is by the **grace of God!**"

"Congratulations, you made it, come on in..."

Ephesians 2:8-9

8 For **by grace you have been saved through faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Grace means that you received from God something that non of us deserved, we received forgiveness and heaven, **because of what Jesus did**, not what we did. Our part is just to believe it and then LIVE THE REST OF OUR LIFE LIKE WE BELIEVE IT...

But, on the other side of this issue, if you have accepted Jesus offer of Salvation, but then go back and live your life just for yourself, and there has not been a surrender of your life to Jesus as Lord.

- ⊖ **If you continue** in the same lifestyle that you had before you knew Jesus.
- ⊖ **If there has been no change** in your life.
- ⊖ **If you do not have desire** to know and follow Jesus.
- ⊖ **If you just know about Jesus**, but are not living for Him.
- ⊖ **That is not salvation, that is deception**...you have deceived yourself.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, 10 nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

11 And **such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus** and by the Spirit of our God

If your everyday lifestyle still includes the things that Paul listed here in these 3 verses, what did Paul SAY?

“Do not be deceived...These will not inherit the kingdom of heaven...”

But if you have come to Jesus Christ and surrendered your life to Him, and are **trying to follow Him** with all of your heart, **even though you still sin from time to time, You Are Saved.**

- ⊖ **As John the Baptist came on the scene**, He caused men and women to evaluate where they are with the Living God.
- ⊖ **It is time this morning** for you to evaluate your own life.
- ⊖ **Are you truly living for Jesus? Then you are His**, and can have confidence that He is coming for you very soon.
- ⊖ **But if you look at your life** and you see that you know ABOUT Jesus, but **you have not really been living your life for Him and to please Him**, then its time to change that...

Isaiah 40

4 Every **valley shall be exalted** and every **mountain and hill brought low**; the **crooked places shall be made straight** and the **rough places smooth**;

- ⊖ **The valley or low places will be exalted**: Hebrew—“**Nasa**” (naw-saw’) To be lifted up or sustained, **to take away guilt or to forgive, to bear or carry continually.**
- ⊖ **The lifting up or exalting here** is directed at those who have been beaten down, either by their own sin, or the sin of other people against them.
- ⊖ **Those who hunger and thirst to be righteous** the humble before the Lord, those who feel helpless and unforgivable, **here the Lord promises to lift you up.**

- ☞ **Jesus said** *“Blessed are you if you hunger and thirst to be righteous but you are struggling to be righteous, His promise is, you will be Righteous...someday...”*

The high places lowered: Hebrew—“**Shaphel**” (shaw-fale’) to be humbled, to surrender, to cause to be lowered or made destitute.

- ☞ **The lowering is directed at the pride of man**, those who think they are better than others, who believe their money, their power or position in life makes them more valuable. Here the Lord promises that He will humble them.
- ☞ **If we get lifted up in our life** and think that we don’t need the Lord any more, we get too busy for Him, or don’t abide in Jesus as much any more, He will cause our circumstances to be hard to humble us and bring us back to Him in Brokenness, that is how important your relationship is with Him.

So, if you will humble yourself now and submit your life to the Lord every day of the rest of your life, He won’t have to humble you...

A man was celebrating his 100th birthday and everybody complimented him on how athletic and well-preserved he appeared. ***“Gentlemen, I will tell you the secret of why I am in such tremendous health,” “I have been out in the open air day after day for some 75 years now.”***

The celebrants at his party were impressed and asked how he managed to keep up his rigorous fitness regime.

“Well, you see my wife and I were married 75 years ago.

On our wedding night, we made a promise to each other. **Whenever we had a fight, the one who was proved wrong would go outside and take a walk.”**

If you will honestly look at your life and humble yourself and just admit to the Lord that you have been wrong, He will not have to humble you through trials...

1 Corinthians 11:31

For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

Maybe some of us need to start taking some of those long walks...?

In Isaiah 25:11 the Lord promises that he will **“bring down”** the pride of man...”

Isaiah 25:11

...And He will bring down their pride Together with the trickery of their hands

But if you are willing to humble yourself before the Lord today, notice what He says:

Isaiah 57:15

For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, **With him who has a contrite and humble spirit**, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

When John the Baptist came, Isaiah said that he would also make the crooked places straight:

Isaiah 40

4 Every **valley shall be exalted** and every **mountain and hill brought low**; the **crooked places shall be made straight** and the **rough places smooth**;

- ⊖ **The crooked places straightened**: In Hebrew—“**miyshowr**” (mee-shore)—to be made righteous—to be made plain and level.
- ⊖ **Speaking of those who are dishonest, deceptive, manipulative**, this Hebrew word suggests **you will be made plain and level by the Lord**. A promise to straighten out the crooked people of this world.
- ⊖ **Ever get tired** of all of the dishonesty in the world, here the Lord promises that there is coming a day soon when all that is going to be straightened out.

Proverbs 11:1

Dishonest scales are an abomination to the LORD, But a just weight is His delight

- ⊖ **Isaiah 40 said that “The rough places will be smoothed”**: Hebrew—“**biq**” (bik-aw”) and is used to describe a plain valley that is smooth and flat.
- ⊖ **This is speaking of those who are coarse and rough in nature**, those who treat others roughly, speak harshly or critical of others. **The Lord promises that he will smooth you out, he will cause you to be soft and gentle**.
- ⊖ **Proverbs 15:1**—a gentle answer turns away anger, but harsh words cause arguments.

Proverbs 15:1

A soft answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

So, as John the Baptist comes on the scene in advance of Jesus, 4 things will happen.

1. **Humble hearts will be lifted up.**
2. **Prideful hearts will be put down.**
3. **The dishonest or crooked will be straitened out.**
4. **Those that are rough and harsh will be smoothed out.**

Matthew 3

4 And John himself was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey. **THE CLOTHES, AND LIFE STYLE OF A SERVANT OF GOD.**

5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him
6 and were **baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins**.

- ⊕ **Baptism:** john's baptism in the Jordan river was a Jewish ceremonial type for purification, it was not the same as baptism for a Christian.
- ⊕ **This baptism that john was giving was for repentance,** it was an expression that the coming of God's chosen Messiah was about to happen. **This baptism was to prepare people's hearts.**
- ⊕ **Those who came to john for baptism** had already repented from their sins and were "made ready" for the coming of the messiah.
- ⊕ **When a Christian comes to the water to be Baptized,** it is after they have already been saved and have committed their life to Jesus Christ.
- ⊕ **This Baptism is a sign to the world** that this person who has given their life to Jesus Christ, is publicly declaring that they are finished with their old life and want to live a new life now fully committed to Jesus.
- ⊕ **Baptism does not save** it is an outward sign of something that has already happened in the heart of the believer in the Lord Jesus.

Matthew 3

7 But when he saw many of the **Pharisees and Sadducees** coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

8 "Therefore **bear fruits worthy of repentance,**

In other words, you say that you are saved, well then are you living like you are a saved person?

- ⊕ **"Bear fruits worthy of repentance"**, If you are truly thankful that Jesus died for you, then Live for Him.
- ⊕ **How dare us** that we would take Jesus as our savior and claim His blood as our cleansing from all of our sins, but then we go on and live the rest of our life for our self.
- ⊕ **John says here that is not repentance.** True repentance is when I am willing to totally transform my life to come and follow Jesus.
- ⊕ **You cannot live halfway in the world** and the other half in Jesus kingdom, Jesus demands all or none.

Matthew 3

9 "and do not think to say to yourselves, '**We have Abraham as our father.**' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham **from these stones.**

10 "And even now **the ax is laid to the root of the trees.** Therefore **every tree which does not bear good fruit** is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11 "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals **I am not worthy to carry.** He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

12 "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out **His threshing floor,** and gather **His wheat into the barn;** but He will **burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."**

- ⊕ **Verse 7 the Pharisees and Sadducees were the 2 ruling religious parties at the time Jesus came to the earth.**

- ⊞ **The Pharisees** were religious fanatics who believed in strictly keeping the law to be saved.
- ⊞ **The Sadducees** did not believe in the resurrection or life after death, that is why they were SAD-U-SEE...
- ⊞ **They did not believe** in eternal punishment and believed that the Lord does not intervene in human history, nor did they believe in the existence of angels.
- ⊞ **Verse 8:** When John tells them bear **the fruits worthy of repentance**, John is condemning them.
- ⊞ **They believed that they were righteous because they kept the outward law of Moses, they** even gave to the lord 10% the spices they had in their houses.
- ⊞ **John gets to the heart of the matter,** their hearts were not right towards God , everything they did was just to be seen by people, but they did not have a surrendered life to the Lord.

Jesus said of these Pharisees and Sadducees:

Matthew 23:27-28

27 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear **beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness.**

28 "Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

- ⊞ **The Lord is most interested** in what is going on inside of your heart.
- ⊞ **Why are you here this morning?** To do your religious duty, to gain favor with the Lord?
- ⊞ **Or are you here** because you are falling more and more in love with Jesus, and you just want to get to know Him more and more so you can fall more in love with Him?

Verse 9:

- ⊞ **The Pharisees tell John:** "*We have Abraham as our father*"
- ⊞ **Here in verse 9**—the Pharisees and seduces claimed they were also righteous because Abraham is their father.

One of the dangers of growing up going to church with your family when you are a child, is that when you get older, you may believe that you are right with the Lord because you grew up a Christian.

Listen: "*The Lord does not have any Grandchildren*"... He only has Sons and Daughters...

- ⊞ **We are not saved** because our parents or grandparents were saved and brought us to church.

Each individual person must make their own decision whether or not to accept Jesus Christ as their own Lord and Savior...

- ☞ **And from the day on**, you must “*Abide in Jesus*”, that is, stay close to Him for the rest of your life.

John 15:4-6

4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

5 “**I am the vine, you are the branches.** He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

6 **If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out** as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned

So, once you commit your life to Jesus, you are saved forever, **IF you continue** to abide in Jesus for the rest of your life.

- ☞ **Jesus said** (Not Me) that **if you do not continue to abide in Him**, you will be cast out as a branch that is withered and they will be thrown into the fire.
- ☞ **So the question** we have to ask ourselves, is “*Am I abiding In Jesus*”
- ☞ **Well, you are here this morning**, you must be **trying to abide**, I would say that is a pretty good sign.
- ☞ **How consistently** are you here?
- ☞ **How important** is your relationship with Jesus?
- ☞ **Has He become your life**, or are other things taking up more of your time?
- ☞ **The Scribes and Pharisees were seeking to rely upon their ancestors relationship with the Lord as their security**, and Jesus tells them that will not work.

Notice Jesus response to them in verse 9, “Oh really saved because of Abraham...!--God could raise up descendents of Abraham from these stones if he wanted to”

Matthew 3

9 "and do not think to say to yourselves, '**We have Abraham as our father.**' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham **from these stones.**

- ☞ **Where is John the Baptist standing?** In the Jordan river.
- ☞ **He is pointing to stones** that are **at** the Jordan River.
- ☞ **Can you think of a place in the Old Testament** where there were some stones placed there?

Joshua 4:1-7

1 And it came to pass, when all the people had completely crossed over the Jordan, that the LORD spoke to Joshua, saying:

2 "Take for yourselves twelve men from the people, one man from every tribe,

3 "and command them, saying, '**Take for yourselves twelve stones from here**, out of the midst of the Jordan, from the place where the priests' feet stood firm. You shall carry them over with you and leave them in the lodging place where you lodge tonight.

6 **"that this may be a sign** among you when your children ask in time to come, saying, 'What do these stones mean to you?'

7 "Then you shall answer them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the LORD; when it crossed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. And **these stones shall be for a memorial** to the children of Israel forever."

What was the sign for a future date that the Lord was telling Joshua about?

Was the Lord telling Joshua to set up these stones here as a Memorial so that when John the Baptist came here hundreds of years later, He could point to them and remind the Scribes and Pharisees that The Lord can raise up people to follow him from anyone.

- ⊞ **You aren't saved** because you went through some ceremony.
- ⊞ **You aren't saved** because you went to the right church.
- ⊞ **You aren't saved** because you went up to the altar.

You are saved when you sincerely surrendered your life to Jesus Christ.

- ⊞ **What is the altar for** anyway?
- ⊞ **In the Old Testament**, the Altar was a place to die.
- ⊞ **Did you come up to the altar of the Lord** to die to yourself and live for Jesus Christ?
- ⊞ **Then** you were saved.
- ⊞ **Now abide** in Jesus.

Anything less than a total surrender to Jesus and a continued abiding in Him is "Dead Religion".

A new Pastor in a small town spent the first four days making personal visits to each of the members, inviting them to come to his first services.

The following Sunday the church was all but empty.

Accordingly, the Pastor placed a notice in the local newspapers, stating that, **because the church was dead, it was everyone's duty to give it a decent Christian burial**. The funeral would be held the following Sunday afternoon, the notice said.

Morbidly curious, a large crowd turned out for the "funeral." In front of the pulpit, they saw a **closed coffin, smothered in flowers**. After the Pastor delivered the eulogy, he opened the coffin and invited his congregation to come forward and pay their final respects to their dead church.

Filled with curiosity as to what would represent the corpse of a "dead church," all the people eagerly lined up to look in the coffin. Each "mourner" peeped into the coffin then quickly turned away with a guilty, sheepish look.

In the coffin, tilted at the correct angle, was a large mirror.

We don't need a dead religion, we don't need ceremonies and rituals to save us, we just need a daily vibrant and alive relationship with Jesus Christ...that is what John the Baptist is saying here.

Matthew 3

10 "And even now **the ax is laid to the root of the trees.** Therefore **every tree which does not bear good fruit** is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Wow, that sounds strangely familiar to what Jesus said:

John 15:5-6

5 "**I am the vine, you are the branches.** He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

6 **If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out** as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned

I don't want the axe laid to me, I don't want to be gathered up as a withered branch and cast into the fire...how about you?

Jesus promised if we stayed close to Him and Abided with Him for the rest of our life, we would have confidence that we would not have the axe laid to us...

Abide

1. **To find somebody or something acceptable or bearable** Is Jesus Acceptable as the Only Savior?
2. **To wait for somebody or something**, are you anticipating every day that Jesus can come for you at any moment?
3. **To live or reside in a place** Who are you living for, where are you living, In Jesus, or apart from Him.
4. **To endure or withstand something** Are you enduring difficulties in your life, but you will not let go of Jesus because He has become your whole life?

If all these things are true of you, **then you are abiding In Jesus** and can have confidence that you are His and you have eternal life...

But if you have examined your life and you know that you have not really made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ with all of your heart, and you cannot see your life as abiding in Jesus as it is defined here in the Bible, you can change that today...

☞ **We are going to give you the opportunity** to publicly declare who you belong to.

Matthew 10:32-33

32 “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.

33 But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven

If you are not sure if you have fully committed your life to Jesus Christ, and have been abiding in Him, I want to ask you to do what Jesus said:

Confess Him before men...

Get up out of your seat and come forward and stand here at the stage.

- ☞ **We are going to sing a song of invitation**, to give you some time to make your decision.
- ☞ **If you have never made this decision** to either follow or reject Jesus as Lord and Savior, it is the most important decision you will ever make, it will decide where you spend eternity.
- ☞ **When we finish that song** we are going to lead you in a simple prayer of commitment of your life to Jesus Christ.
- ☞ **Don't worry what anyone might think**, if you are not sure and you want to settle this issue, you come.

By the act of getting up out of your seat and coming forward, you are exercising enough faith for the Lord to save you...

If you remain in your seat, this moment will pass and you may never again have this opportunity...

Remember though that coming forward is a public declaration that you are surrendering your life to Jesus Christ and making a commitment to live the rest of your life for Him.

- ☞ **You are coming forward to say** that you want to abide in Jesus and live for Him the rest of Your life.
- ☞ **If you will do this and mean business with the Lord**, He will do what He promised, He will give you eternal life.

Now, if you know that you are already saved, then you don't have to come forward to get saved again...

But perhaps you have **not been abiding in Jesus** as you know that you should have...

If you want to change that, and you want to begin today to draw closer to Jesus and abide in Him in a deeper way than you ever have before...then you get up out of your seat and come...

By the simple act of getting up out of your seat, that is enough faith for the Lord to change your life...