

Sunday February 18th sermon: "When Christ Leaves, the Comforter Comes -- The God of All Comforts (Pt 45)"

Preached at the Lord's Table at Grace Bible Church in Greenwood, MS,
by John Pittman Hey

1 Corinthians 1; John 16:1-15

Christ has promised us another Comforter, the Holy Ghost, Who will dwell within all the Lord's people. The Comforter gives us life, and sustains that life on account of the sacrifice of Christ for our sins.

It is clear that Christ deems the dual testimony of the Comforter and of the apostles in the Scriptures as fully sufficient to refute the lies, the slanders, the persecutions by wicked men, and the evil conduct of those who oppose Christ and hate God.

Christ reiterates the coming persecution of His people. The cause is, that the wicked have not known Christ or the Father.

Christ tells us that He gives this warning so that when it happens, we will recall that He told us so.

Christ explains that He didn't tell His disciples these things earlier, because He was then with them. But now He is dying, and ascending to glory, so they will be without His personal, tangible, physical presence and comfort and protection.

Because Christ was protected from death during His ministry, for His hour had not yet come, the physical presence of Jesus shielded His people, and comforted them during His earthly ministry.

But when Christ dies, and rises again, and ascends to glory, a different condition will prevail – they will lose their comfort zone they had with Jesus there with them. They will lose their conception of safety and the stability of a physical kingdom, which is delayed until Christ's return.

What they receive in exchange is far better: salvation by the death of Christ, a perfect priest before God, peace with God, and everlasting life!

But Christ promises them something that He knows is better than His continued physical presence with them: the presence of the Comforter, the Holy Ghost of promise!

Indeed, Christ states that the Comforter cannot come to them, unless Christ first departs, or "goes away." But if Christ goes away, He will send the Comforter to His people!

Recall that the spiritual river of life Christ promised was to be by the Holy Ghost, Who had not yet come, because Christ was not yet glorified.

That spiritual life should dwell in them by the Comforter, is far better than Christ's physical presence with them during His ministry.

Christ is anticipating, as well, an innumerable host of saints in this world after He dies and ascends to glory, and His physical presence would not be of nearly the help to us as would the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. That's because Christ's body, as a man, is not omnipresent, and could not be with all His people the world over at the same time.

But the Comforter, when He comes, is with all of the saints simultaneously, because He is the Spirit of God, and is not bound by a physical body.

So Christ is telling us that it is expedient that He die and ascend to Glory, so that the Comforter can dwell within all the Lord's people, all the time.

But more importantly there is this: the Comforter cannot comfort us except the Son first die to save us! Without the completion of Christ's sacrifice at Calvary to save us, the Comforter has no comfort to give us.

But when Christ went away in death, and resurrection, and glory, His work on earth is complete, our salvation is finished, and the Comforter comforts us by applying Christ's work to each of us.

The Comforter conveys to us the truth about Jesus, and what His death does for us. The Comforter confirms in our hearts and minds the reality of what Christ has accomplished in saving us.

Rather than Christ staying physically with His people, better that He dies for us, and ascends to glory, and perfects our redemption, so that the Comforter may come and comfort us by Christ's work on the cross.

The work of Christ on the cross and in glory as our high priest is far better than His staying on earth and teaching and doing miracles, but never dying to save us.

The Comforter would have no comforting work to do before the sacrifice was perfected. There would be no real peace with God, no final and full sense of forgiveness, no spirit of adoption to knit us to our God.

The irony is that almost all of the hatred of Christ and persecution of believers is also on account of the death of Christ.

Had He not died for us, none could trust in Him, none would follow Him or believe in Him, and we would have no hope, just like the lost world has no hope. The world's persecution would come to an end.

Because of Christ's death, the world keeps on hating Him and His people, but we are saved, and blessed, and promised everlasting life.

Christ here explains at least a part of this reality for His people, about the importance of His going away, and the Comforter's coming to us.

By this explanation by Christ, the crucial work of the Comforter becomes apparent to us.

This connection between the persecution and hatred of the world, and the glorious redemption that Christ's death has brought to us, shows why they go hand in hand, as Jesus taught us. It also makes very clear why it is better for Christ to go away, and for the Comforter to take up His glorious work of comforting the Lord's people.

We love the words of Horatius Bonar's great hymn, which describes this connection:

The cross it standeth fast,
Defying ev'ry blast;
The winds of hell have blown,
The world its hate hath shown,
Yet it is not overthrown:
Hallelujah for the cross!

It is the old cross still,
Its triumph let us tell;
The grace of God here shone,
Thru Christ, the blessed Son,
Who did for sin atone:
Hallelujah for the cross!

'Twas here the debt was paid,
Our sins on Jesus laid;
So round the cross we sing,
Of Christ, our offering,
Of Christ, our living King:
Hallelujah for the cross!

Hallelujah, hallelujah,
hallelujah for the cross;
Hallelujah, hallelujah,
it shall never suffer loss!