

Life in the Son: “The Spirit of Truth”, John 16:1-15, BCF 2012.05.13

We live in a world that is often violently hostile to the gospel. We may feel that we are left on our own, without the visible presence of Jesus. But the Lord comforts our fears and gives us confidence to speak as his witnesses, knowing that the Spirit of Truth will add his convicting power. Further, the Holy Spirit will reveal more truth to the apostles, and will make real to us the glory of Jesus – and all that we have in him – so that we might fully trust him and experience the power of his life.

In the news we have read of the recent killings of Christians attending church in northern Nigeria. This is not an unusual event. So often the media frames these as “sectarian violence” or “religious unrest”, though if you read the articles, you discover that the violence is largely one way. It is churches and Christian homes that are destroyed, and Christians who are killed. Ever since the first century when the gospel began to be proclaimed there has often been violent hostility toward it. We may respond to this with fear, or by feeling helpless and vulnerable.

The followers of Jesus, on the night of his betrayal are sad, and confused. Jesus speaks of his “being lifted up” (his glory in death and resurrection), and of returning to the Father. It is just hours away until he is arrested, tried, mocked, scourged, and finally executed on a Roman cross. Little known to them is that most of them will die martyr’s deaths. This is a very tender time as Jesus, not thinking of his own suffering, takes to time to talk and prepare his disciples for what would follow, and to let them know they would not be left alone and powerless.

Read John 16:1-15.

Outline: The Spirit of Truth

1. The problem of the world (16:1-6)
2. The promise of the Spirit (16:7-15)
 - a. His work in the world (16:7-11)
 - b. His work in the disciples (16:12-15)

The problem of the world (16:1-6)

I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away... They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks

me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.

Jesus does not say these things to them because he feels they would ever be finally lost. Earlier he said (6:39), *"...this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day."* He desires that they not be unprepared and so be shocked by responses they will receive as they testify to the world. He is speaking to them (and to us) about these things to keep us from stumbling.

They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.

This is the problem of the world. Many religious opponents of Christianity are sincere! They are not trying to be evil though they are in fact very evil. They will be religious but not really know God. They are not consciously intending to be evil; they think they are doing good and serving God.

Sincerity, however, is no salvation! People can be sincere and sincerely wrong. Not every view of God can be right. Nor does that mean that no way is right. Jesus made some very unique and exclusive claims. A unique authority, and a unique work for people who desperately need a cure that no other religion can cure. And of course that raises the hackles on many religious people. We must agree that the claims of the gospel are outrageous, narrow, and exclusive... unless they are true, in which case they are Truth.

In the first century it was first Jewish persecution, but soon the Roman government began to persecute Christians for over 200 years. But with courage and the power of the Holy Spirit the early Christians were successful witnesses and martyrs. With no violence at all they won an empire. They out-thought, out-lived, and out-died their pagan opponents.

But through the centuries it has been others. In the modern era, it was not just religious groups but also secular nations. Where the law of God is not allowed in governing affairs, the state becomes a god, as it were. What the courts decide, or the people vote for, or the loudest voices and special interest groups establish what is good and bad, right and wrong. Even today if you live in Canada and speak out on some social issues you will have a visit by the police and end up in court. So in the end the State becomes God. And just like a religious group, no other authoritative voice can be allowed. In extreme cases like communist countries we see again the church being persecuted and Christians killed or placed in jail. As Chesterton said, "Once abolish God, and the government becomes the God."

We must also admit that the tragedy has occurred whereby people have killed others in the name of Christ, and this is a horrible blot on Christendom. There is no excuse for this.

According to Jesus, the real reason people do this is they do not really know God his Father, nor Jesus himself. Good, principled people in the world, whether religious adherents, or

enlightened postmoderns, do not think of themselves as the Bible makes them out to be, nor do they believe that Jesus dying upon the cross and rising is the only way they can be saved. They do not think they are that bad, or he is that good. But Jesus comes a Savior to people with a very serious problem. C. S. Lewis in his last published interview just before his death in 1963, said, "Jesus Christ did not say, 'Go into all the world and tell the world that it is quite right.' The Gospel is something completely different. In fact, it is directly opposed to the world." (C. S. Lewis, "The Final Interview", May, 1963) And for that the world opposes the gospel.

But now he promises them help...

The promise of the Spirit (16:7-15)

Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. (v. 7)

Why does he say this? How could his going away be an advantage? Wouldn't it be much better to have Jesus physically present? We would be able to ask questions, see miracles, get healing when we needed it, to have power and miracles close at hand... Of course, there's a fallacy here --to think that Jesus is some kind of personal genie and there would be no problems if he were nearby... but we don't get from the first disciples that life on the road with Jesus was that simple... There was travel, difficulties, trials and tests...

So why is it to our advantage that he goes away? After his death and resurrection He ascended to the Father's presence. And a new age has begun. He has all authority in heaven and earth. And now his presence and power are seen all around the world, in many more places than just Israel. Multitudes are coming to Christ all around the world.

When I visited Africa we worked in some villages where there was only one well for the entire village. Sometimes people had to travel long distances to get clean water. It was this way in our own country just two centuries ago. And yet, now, we can turn on the faucet in our home and have access to clean water. Jesus used this illustration in John 7:38-39...

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

We have supernatural, though unseen, help. We tend to think that Jesus left and left us basically alone except for the church and prayer. He said he would send "another Helper", an Advocate, a Strength-giver just like himself. We live in a supernatural universe, but so often we act as if we do not because others do not believe it! We must guard against naturalistic thinking! We act as if we live in a closed universe where natural causes explain everything, where only time and matter and chance are real. But he who spoke the universe into existence still shines the light into hearts today.

Two works of the Holy Spirit are mentioned here. One toward the world in general, and one toward his own children...

His work in the world (16:7-11)

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

Earlier in his ministry Jesus spoke of his coming into the world as a light shining into darkness. He would expose the lies, the sin, the wicked motives and death of fallen humanity...

John 3:19-20 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

The Holy Spirit convicts (*brings to light, exposes, convinces, reproves*) the world regarding sin, righteousness and judgment. He would be sent to continue this exposing, truth-telling work of Jesus, which takes place as the gospel advances throughout the world...

John 15:26-27 *But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.*

What is the conviction by the Holy Spirit? It is like holding up a mirror (James 1:23) to see our sin and unrighteousness, or like shining a light in the dark. It is getting a vantage point which changes our whole view of things. It is a felt sense of the truth of the gospel, of my sin, of judgment, of Christ the Righteous One. [J. B. Phillips illustrations.]

Sometimes Christianity is seen as interested in producing feelings of guilt. The Bible really doesn't have much to say about feeling guilt, but rather in seeing truth about our condition. The goal of all of this is not to produce, and live with, guilt feelings. It is to see our need, our true condition of guilt before God, and then flee quickly to the abundant forgiveness and reconciliation with God that we have through Jesus Christ. That is the goal.

So, now, we should have confidence to open our mouths, that the Holy Spirit is adding his powerful testimony to ours. He is the one who convinces people of their sin, Christ's righteousness and judgment. Some years ago an American League baseball pitcher was in an all-star game playing by National League rules (where the pitchers had to bat, as well). When he faced a fast ball from the mound he jumped back, and then asked the catcher (whom he had played with on a previous team), "Is that what my fast balls look like?" The catcher said, "You bet!" The pitcher said his confidence level in his own pitching ability jumped 100% at that point. We need to realize how powerfully the words of witness or of Scripture when shared can come across to others. We may not feel it or see it, but others surely will, as God directs (Isa 55:10-11)

We can begin by praying for others to see and feel eternal realities. To pray specifically for an opportunity to talk about the Lord Jesus. This is our calling and one of the main ways the Holy Spirit shows his power in this age. See how the book of Acts begins and ends...

Acts 1:8 ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." **Acts 28:31** ³¹ proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

This truth also helps us be calm and gentle in our approach to others. We don't have to wrestle people into a decision about Jesus, or to convince them with our arguments. This truth of the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit gives us confidence to speak truth, share the gospel and leave the results to God. This is something we cannot engineer or produce, but God sends his Spirit to accomplish.

His work in the disciples (16:12-15)

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

"Guide you into all the truth..." Primary reference here is to the disciples to whom Jesus is speaking. Confidence in NT writings (not just Jesus red letter, but the apostles). John in Revelation is the fulfillment of "what is to come" and Paul in 1 & 2 Thess, etc. Primarily to the apostles and only secondarily to us as believers...

John 14:26 ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

Application: Having confidence in NT writings (not just Jesus red letter words, but the apostles' letters too). People seek to extract Jesus from his environment and make he something he wasn't. He changed and turned against the OT, or his disciples got him wrong and misunderstood. Jesus stood in perfect continuity with, and fulfillment of, the Old Testament (Mt 5:17; 26:56; Lu 24:25-27; Jn 5:39; 10:35) and his promise to and authority upon the writers of the New Testament (Lu 9:1-6; Mt 10:4; 18:18; Jn 14:26; 20:21-23). (For a good study on this, see J. Norval Geldenhuys, "Authority and the Bible," Carl F.H. Henry, ed., *Revelation and the Bible. Contemporary Evangelical Thought*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958 / London: The Tyndale Press, 1959.)

Yet, verse 14 is a wonderful summary of the Holy Spirit's work to the church. He comes to be a presence, to give power, but here is what puts it all together. The Father plans our salvation, the Son accomplishes, and the Holy Spirit applies. When Jesus is glorified and returns to the Father's presence in heaven, the Holy Spirit comes to reside within us, and glorify (put on display, draw attention to, magnify, to show how he deserves worship and honor) Jesus to us

and reveal (to the apostles; to us: make real) the benefits of what he has done and what belongs to us. Thus, he gives us power -- power to be witnesses, and power to know what resources he has given us.

So, secondarily, this work of the Spirit may be applied to all Christians, in the sense that we need to see and feel the reality of the promises of God. In Ephesians, Paul prays...

...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might... (Ephesians 1:17-19)

Theologians sometimes called this the illuminating or teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit, which is not the giving of new truths but whereby the truths given about Christ are made very real to us and applied personally to us. So as we study the Bible we should not mechanically just read the text, but read prayerfully, seeking to see the glory of God in Jesus. Ask, "Lord, what do you have for me here today... what promise, what truth, what calling, what commandment, what rebuke, what correction, what comfort, do I need?"

A couple of weeks ago I had a frightening dream, filled with violence, and I awoke feeling that the Lord was very far away. But as I prayed, the Lord brought to mind this one phrase from this very passage: "sorrow has filled your heart". Jesus is not the kind of Lord and King who is only preoccupied with his concerns and goals, he is concerned with me, with all his followers, how they are feeling and what is in their hearts. He knows my fears, he is fully aware of those irrational fears in me. Jesus was glorified to me in that. My heart felt he was trustworthy and caring. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, to make me know the realness of my relationship with Christ, the glory of his power, etc.

We need fresh discoveries of Christ. Like sitting on porch in springtime and noticing the dew on the hostas, or the birds singing, or the flowering plants, how beautiful they are. In a sense it is like feeling the wonder of your salvation all over again.

Conclusion, prayer for a Christian pastor on death row in Iran, where he is currently being held for charges of practicing Christianity and renouncing Islam. Iranian pastor Youcef Nadarkhani has been jailed since being arrested in 2009 after he went to his son's school to complain about them starting mandatory Koran classes. He was then charged with apostasy from Islam. He was found guilty by the Iranian Supreme Court and sentenced to death and has been imprisoned ever since. Pray not only for his release, and comfort for his family, but for the conviction of the Holy Spirit and conversion of those around him, and for Youcef to have a strong awareness of the power and presence of Christ with him through the Spirit.