

I Believe

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
(Genesis 1:1 ESV)*

*And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

I Believe In The Holy Ghost

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John 16:1-15

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to John 16:1-15. As I mentioned to you several weeks ago now, the VAST majority of the WORD COUNT in the Apostles' Creed is given over to the matter of Christology. 70 out of the 110 words of the Creed are about Jesus leaving only 40 words for everything else.

40 words for the Father, the Spirit, the church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, amen. So obviously we aren't going to be as EXHAUSTIVE and DETAILED here as we have been in the previous section.

But – we've already said a lot about the Holy Spirit while we were talking about other things – and that is often how it goes when you are talking about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is often in the background. He is the one who goes forth to accomplish the Father's CREATIVE WORD in Genesis 1 – he is the one who hovered over the womb of Mary to affect the Virgin Birth, he is the one who nourished and supported Jesus in his perfect obedience and vicarious suffering – the Holy Spirit has been everywhere in this story that we've been remembered – but always behind the scenes until now. And that is as it should be. The Holy Spirit was playing more of a supporting role at the beginning of this story, but now AFTER the death, resurrection and

ascension of Jesus Christ – his role will become much more primary in the life of the disciples. That’s what Jesus says in this passage that we are looking at this morning. Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 1 of John 16:

“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.² 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.³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.

⁴But 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.⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.⁷ 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.⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me;¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer;¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

¹²“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.¹³ 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.¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (John 16:1–15 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Zoom in again on verse 7. Jesus says something here to the disciples that I think many of us have a hard time believing. He says:

“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.” (John 16:7 ESV)

It is to your advantage that I go and he come - do you believe that? I wonder if the Apostles believe that when they first heard it. But they came to believe it and we need to believe it as well.

And so this morning our plan is fairly straightforward: we are going to attempt to answer one very important question:

Why Is It Better For Us That Jesus Has Gone Up And The Holy Spirit Has Come Down?

Our reading of the New Testament would suggest that there are several legitimate answers to that question but the first one and most obvious one comes to us from the narrative of the Day of Pentecost – the story of when this promise by Jesus was initially and gloriously fulfilled. Flip forward in your Bibles to Acts 2. The first 4 verses of Acts 2 read as follows:

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place.² And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.³ And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them.⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1–4 ESV)

So this is what Jesus promised in John 16. Jesus had gone up and **HERE** we see the Spirit coming **DOWN**. He lands on the church and immediately he begins to empower and enliven their witness.

1. Because he helps us in our witness

The disciples are given **MIRACULOUS SUPPORT** in their pursuit of the Great Commission! The Holy Spirit falls on the disciples and immediately they are enabled to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in other languages. This was not ecstatic speech – this was fully intelligible **GOSPEL SPEECH**. We know that because Acts tells us that. In verse 7 one of the pilgrims speaks on behalf of the crowd saying:

“Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language?” (Acts 2:7–8 ESV)

So the disciples are enabled to **SKIP** that whole 3-4 year process of learning the native language of the mission field – and in a heartbeat they can all of the sudden speak fluently in the language of the Parthians, the Medes, Cappadocians and the Egyptians. It was a miracle, obviously, but it

was also a message. It was the Holy Spirit saying – “I have come to help you tell the world about Jesus.”

And that’s good – because as we spoke about last week – that is supposed to be our primary activity during this unexpected season of delay and intermission! Remember our giant throne – sitting now on the outer fringes of our atmosphere – ready to descend with a THUD at any moment? Well the only reason for this delay, according to the Apostle Peter – is the mercy and patience of God.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. (2 Peter 3:9 ESV)

So – that’s what this is. That’s the REASON you continue to draw breath. That’s the reason for the church age. That’s the REASON for this intermission. This TIME EXISTS for us to extend the mercy of God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Period.

Jesus made that clear in his Eschatological Discourse – his sermon about the end. He said:

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14 ESV)

And then the end will come!

So there’s our PURPOSE RIGHT THERE – and here now is our HELP, EMPOWERMENT and SUPPLY. The Holy Spirit has been given – MOST OBVIOUSLY and IMMEDIATELY to equip and empower the church of Jesus Christ in the cause of global mission.

By the way, that suggests to me, that if you want to EXPERIENCE MORE of the Holy Spirit, you don’t need louder music, you don’t need a better FOG MACHINE, you don’t need more fasting or more jumping up and down – what you need is a greater commitment to evangelism and global mission – am I reading that wrong?

Acts 2 seems to be making it very clear that the Holy Spirit CAME DOWN to provide ROCKET FUEL for the church in pursuit of the Great Commission. And it worked. Listen to the harvest from that FIRST DAY of global mission; the text says:

So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:41 ESV)

Hallelujah! That's a miracle! That's the ultimate miracle! The Holy Spirit convicts people of sin, he enables them to repent and to put their faith in Christ and then, as we also see in this initial story, he immediately begins to draw people into Christian community.

2. Because he draws us into community

That's a major feature of this foundational story. We have people from all over the known world at that time:

Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome,¹¹ both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians (Acts 2:9–11 ESV)

And they hear the preaching of Peter and they fall under the conviction of the Holy Spirit and they ask Peter and the other disciples, “what shall we do to be saved?” and he says:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38 ESV)

And:

“those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:41 ESV)

Are you seeing that? There were ADDED that day about 3000 souls - added to what? Added to the church.

Becoming a Christian IS an individual experience – no one can do it for you – it is something you've got to do on your own - but as soon as you are truly converted – the Holy Spirit immediately begins to move and draw you into community. Peter talked about this all the time. He said in 1 Peter 2:4-5:

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, ⁵ you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:4–5 ESV)

Well that's exactly what happened on the Day of Pentecost! As people came to Christ, through faith and through baptism, they were immediately ADDED to the church. Their single stone was added to the house. That's what the Holy Spirit does. He comes inside of us and immediately begins to reach out for the brothers and the sisters to the left and the right of us. He links and joins all these stones into a house. There is no SURE sign that a person has been saved and filled with the Spirit than love for the brothers and sisters of Christ.

Gifts and powers can be FAKED. Tongues and miracles can be deceiving works of the devil – but Jesus said:

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35 ESV)

So we are thankful that Jesus went up and the Spirit came down because it is only BY the Spirit that a miracle like the church of Jesus Christ can be explained.

Thirdly, as hard as it is to believe, it is better for us that Jesus went up and the Spirit came down because the Spirit leads us deeper and deeper into all truth.

3. Because he leads us into all truth

The Holy Spirit is ultimately the author of all of Scripture. The Apostle Peter said:

For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:21 ESV)

By the way – kids if you are listening in with mom and dad – this will give you a chance to show off your homework from Prospectors. I’ve got the new, updated catechism here with me – but the questions and the answers are all the same. So kids, I’m going to ask a question, and then you tell mom and dad the answer.

This question is from page 14 in the new Faith Foundations catechism book. Question 1 on page 14 asks:

Who wrote the Bible?

Kids, I’ll pause and you tell mom and dad the answer.

The answer is: Holy men who were taught by the Holy Spirit.

And the citations provided are 2 Peter 1:21 which we just looked at and 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Let’s turn to that as well. The Apostle Paul there says:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17 ESV)

In both Greek and Hebrew the same word is used for “breath” as is used for “spirit” – so this verse literally says that all Scripture is “God-spirited” or “God-breathed”. And so when you put these passages together you get the idea that God speaks – he breathes out – and the Spirit carries that Word into the hearts of the prophets – Old Testament and New – and they are helped and enabled to say accurately and truthfully what God wants to be said.

So that’s pretty amazing – and that’s exactly what Jesus said would happen when he poured out the Holy Spirit on his people. Back in John 16 he said:

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.¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:13–14 ESV)

So if you add this passage to what we've already read in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and 2 Peter 1:17 you get the idea that after the ascension, God the Son spoke some additional things, and the Holy Spirit carried those words into the hearts of the Apostolic prophets and they wrote them down for all of us to see.

That's how the Bible came to be!

And so we're thankful for that! If Jesus hadn't ascended into heaven and hadn't sent forth the Holy Spirit then we wouldn't have this very human, very diverse, and yet fully divine and fully reliable testimony to the saving work of God in Jesus Christ.

But we do. We have that because Jesus went up and the Spirit came down.

He came down to lead us into all truth and also to comfort us in all our troubles.

4. Because he comforts us in all our troubles

Remember this promise of the Holy Spirit was given to the disciples in the context of some rather bad news. Jesus said in John 16 verses 2-3:

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.³ And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. (John 16:2–3 ESV)

So, Jesus says, things are going to get WORSE before they get better. Like I have to suffer the cross before rising up to glory, so too your road will lead DOWN before it leads UP and I won't be here with you in the flesh for that part of your journey. I know that hearing that makes you sad - he says that in verses 6-7:

because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ 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. (John 16:6–7 ESV)

Jesus tells his disciples the TRUTH but then he provides them with the resources to face the truth. I love that approach. Al Mohler says here:

“The Spirit’s ministry of abiding in us restores all hope and secures us on the sure foundation of faith.”¹

I like that. The Holy Spirit restores all hope – when troubles threaten to steal all hope – and he secures us on the sure foundation of faith. Have you been experiencing that ministry of the Holy Spirit lately?

The other night at Elder Prayer I was praying – and I hadn’t planned to pray this – but I just felt overwhelmed by the presence and comfort of the Holy Spirit and I prayed: “Lord I thank you for all that you’ve given us in Christ that cannot be touched or shaken by COVID19. Lord, I can’t summon an ounce of anxiety over our present situation. All things are in your hand and you are Sovereign over them all. Do your work. Refine your church. Prepare the field. Enable the harvest. Lord, we trust in you!”

I believe that was a Holy Spirit prayer. It is the job of the Holy Spirit to enable us to pray those kinds of prayers. His job is to STEADY US and to COMFORT US in times of trouble.

Can you feel him doing that right now in your life?

I will tell you this, I’m concerned a little bit about brothers and sisters who are falling into despair and flying off the handle due to COVID19. That’s not what is supposed to happen in Spirit filled believers. I hear believers saying: “This pandemic is going to lead to

¹ R. Albert Mohler, *The Apostles’ Creed: Discovering Authentic Christianity In An Age Of Counterfeits*, (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2019), 137.

TOTALITARIAN GOVERNMENT! We've all given too much power to the state! It's going to be BRAVE NEW WORLD out there by September, you just wait and see."

Well, maybe – you could be right. After all the Bible does talk about a BEAST that rises out of the SEA – the beast represents an anti-Christian government and the SEA represents the chaotic mass of humanity – so YES, it does sound as if at some point the waters of humanity will be stirred and a great and ghastly government will emerge – but the correct response to that is not for us to stand at the water's edge wringing our hands and gnashing our teeth. We were told that troubles would come. We were told that people would kill us and think they're doing the world a favour. We were told that we would finish our mission under extreme duress. So nothing is out of control by my reading of things, nothing has hopped the rails – all things appear to be proceeding according to script.

So calm down. Settle in.

Do your job and rest in the provision and assurances of Christ – delivered directly into your soul by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Fifthly, and quickly, because we know this one well, it is much to our advantage that Jesus has gone up and the Holy Spirit has come down:

5. Because he empowers our growth and sanctification

You know this verse if you attend this church. The Apostle Paul said:

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV)

It is the Spirit who works from the inside of every true believer, slowly but surely, from one degree of glory to the next, CHANGING US into the very same image as Jesus Christ. He does this by CONVICTING US OF SIN, he does this by changing our desires, he does this as the Word of God washes over us. He reaches up from inside our hearts and he grabs on to something

as this week's sandpaper or this week's wedge and he uses it to chip and to shave and to smooth. And over the years, week by week, morning by morning, he brings something out of us that we would never have guessed was even there – thanks be to God!

And sixthly, we welcome, we celebrate – we thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit:

6. Because he corrects and perfects our prayers

Paul talked about that in Romans 8:26-27, he said:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26–27 ESV)

So God knows the Spirit and the Spirit knows us – and because of that he is able to MAKE A CONNECTION that far surpasses what we would be able to achieve on our own! He is the go between – he is the intercessor and that's good news because our prayers tend to reflect our ignorance and immaturity. We ask for things we shouldn't ask for and that God would be wise to ignore – but thankfully, according to this passage, our prayers are intercepted, as it were, by the Holy Spirit and corrected and perfected before they are passed on to God! He takes them and he improves them based on what he knows about the Will of God – which is everything – and what he knows about us – which is everything – and having thus ennobled our prayers he presents them in Jesus' name before the throne of our Father who art in heaven.

So that is better. That is gloriously and marvellously better.

And then lastly, it is much to our advantage that Jesus has gone up and the Spirit has come down because the Spirit seals us for the day of salvation.

7. Because he seals us for the day of salvation

Turn quickly in your Bible to Ephesians 1:13-14. This is a good place for us to land. The Apostle Paul says:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13–14 ESV)

So the Apostle Paul says that when we hear and believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ we are SEALED with the Holy Spirit who is the GUARANTEE of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.

That TOO is very good news!

Because we face a lot of danger and uncertainty down here on planet earth, don't we? There may be a BEAST rising up from the SEA, there may be false prophets, antichrists, WHORES of BABYLON – who knows what's out there coming for us! The devil's chain certainly appears to have been lengthened and he is roaming throughout the world, seeking whom to devour – so it is REALLY GOOD NEWS that our fate is SEALED and our inheritance guaranteed. You can play differently when you know you've already won.

Peter O'Brien comments on this fabulous verse and these wonderful promises saying:

“By giving Gentile believers the Spirit, God ‘seals’ or stamps them as his own now, and he will protect them through the trials and testings of this life (cf. 6:10–18) until he takes final possession of them (cf. v. 14) on ‘the day of redemption’ (4:30).”²

So you've been branded. You've been marked. You've been sealed.

So you don't need to worry about the mark of the beast, you've already received the mark of the Lamb. So stop worrying about things you cannot stop or control. Let the beast rise wherever he will – you just do your job, execute your mission and rest in the assurance and protection of the

²Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 120.

Holy Spirit. Should you be brought before the authorities, he will give you the words to say. Should you be tested, put to trial, or even put to death, he will be with you and he will be for you through it all.

Jesus has generously provided for us all that we need to SURVIVE and THRIVE in the time between. He would never leave us as orphans. He would never fail to empower that which he has commissioned. He isn't here with us physically right now – he sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty – from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead; but in the meantime he has lavishly poured out the GIFT of the Holy Spirit upon the church.

I believe that.

I believe in the Holy Ghost.

He is our Comforter. He is our Helper. He is our Advocate – thanks be to God.

Let's pray together.