

F. Encouraging the Disciples (16:1-33)

Jesus told His disciples that He was going to continue His presence in the world in the person of His Spirit. The Spirit would carry forward His testimony in word and work, but now through Jesus' followers in whom He reproduced His life and mind. In this way, the Spirit's relationship with Jesus' disciples would parallel the Son's relationship with the Father: As Jesus' witness in the world consisted of speaking the Father's words and performing His works, so the disciples were to speak the words and perform the works given to them by the Spirit. And because the Spirit is the *Spirit of Jesus*, the disciples' speech and actions would be Jesus speaking and acting through them; their testimony, led out by the Spirit, was going to perpetuate and extend His own (cf. Acts 1:1 with verses 3-8). They were obligated to testify of their Lord as those who'd been with Him from the beginning, but as men who now knew Him in truth by the illuminating power of the Spirit of truth (15:26-27).

1. But precisely because their witness would perpetuate their Lord's, they needed to expect to receive the same reaction He had gotten. For the most part Israel had rejected Jesus as a deluded man whose claims to be the Messiah were both blasphemous and dangerous. Though many likely never saw Him personally or heard Him speak, the assessment of Him by the ruling elite and their minions was doubtless persuasive. Who better to judge this man and His claims than those anointed by God and schooled in the Scriptures? And their assessment was that Jesus was a false prophet and false messiah who, if allowed to continue, would lead many Israelites away from Yahweh and bring Rome's wrath upon the nation. Now Israel's fear and hatred were reaching a fever pitch about to climax in Jesus' crucifixion. The covenant house was poised to execute its Messiah and that same fate should be expected by those who embodied His life and testimony.

Again John focused on Israel's response (16:1-3), though the unbelieving world was equally implicated (cf. 15:18-19, 16:8-11). Jesus mentioned two specifics, both of which pertained to His Jewish disciples and their Jewish countrymen. First, these disciples should expect to be expelled from the synagogue. John's language refers, not just to an action, but to a change of status; this expulsion from the synagogue meant severance from the household of Israel. Jesus' Israelite disciples were going to be branded apostates – enemies of Yahweh and His Torah. Thus they would share their Lord's condemnation and likely His death sentence under the same premise of honoring and obeying Israel's God (16:2b; cf. Acts 6:1-8:4, 9:1-2, 21:17-23:12).

- a. Ignorance of Yahweh and His Scriptures drove Israel's rejection of their Messiah and that ignorance was not going to end with His murder. Illumined and interpreted by the Spirit, Jesus' death and resurrection would open the eyes of many, but that would only fuel the hatred of those whose hearts and minds remained veiled. What such men had hoped to stamp out was only going to grow and so would their ignorant zeal. They congratulated themselves that their treatment of Jesus proved their piety and devotion to Yahweh (ref. 6:24-31, 7:14-24, 8:1-5, 9:1-29, 19:1-7; cf. also Mark 14:55-64; Luke 22:66-71) and that delusion was going to persist in their dealings with His followers (16:2-3).

- b. Jesus knew the shock, horror and fear awaiting His disciples when they experienced His suffering and death. And if His death was sufficient to cause them to stumble, how much more would they be inclined to fall away when the fury poured out on Him was directed toward them? As troubling as Jesus' words were, they expressed His concern for the well-being of these He loved and chose as His witnesses; He wanted them to be prepared for what was coming so that, when it did, they wouldn't stumble. The fact that He'd not told them sooner (16:4) highlights the difficulty of dealing with such truths. Certainly no one in Israel, including Jesus' disciples, imagined that this would be the outcome for the Messiah. Neither did they envision their own future this way. Even now in these tender, transparent moments the apostles clearly struggled to process what their Lord was telling them. But the time had come for them to hear these things; until then He'd been with them, but now He was returning to His Father and this would leave them vulnerable on two counts: First, they wouldn't have him bodily present to instruct them and carry them in their trials. But His departure also meant that His maltreatment was going to come upon them. Their circumstances were about to change in profound ways and they needed to be prepared.
2. Just moments before the apostles were fretting over Jesus' announcement that He was leaving them. Now their concern and sorrow took on a whole new dimension and intensity as He told them what His departure would mean for them (16:5-6). It was distressing enough that their Lord was going away, but now it seemed they were to be left alone to endure all of the opposition and persecution He'd experienced. The agony of His absence was to be compounded by having to bear His maltreatment without Him.

This is the context in which Jesus remarked that none of them asked where He was going. According to John's account, Peter had already asked that question and it set the tone for the discussion going forward (13:31-14:7). Jesus obviously hadn't forgotten that; what He was speaking to here was the apostles' concern at that moment. The things He was telling them had shifted their attention from the matter of His leaving to its implication for them. To that point they'd been focused on Jesus' imminent departure; now their attention was redirected toward its dreadful significance for them. How despairing to think that their messianic hopes were to die along with the Messiah. What, conceivably, would be the use in continuing on with Him dead, especially since their faithfulness would spell their own suffering and death?

- a. Jesus understood their agonized thoughts and immediately assured them that His leaving was to their benefit, for when He returned to His Father He was going to send the Spirit to them. He'd already told them this (14:1-26), but now with a different emphasis. Previously Jesus focused on the Spirit's coming as restoring His presence with them and transforming His relationship with them. Now He emphasized the Spirit's role in informing and empowering their *witness* to Him. Yes, their mission in His name promised suffering and perhaps even death, but their Lord wouldn't leave them alone in it; He was going to endure it with them in His indwelling Spirit (14:19-20). His living union with them would provoke their persecution and suffering, but it would also sustain them in it.

- b. The world was going to come against them as it had their Lord, but specifically because the world would detect Him in them. Jesus introduced the Spirit's coming in terms of its fundamental work, namely uniting people with Him in a new and profoundly intimate relationship. But the new reality of "I in you and you in Me" was not the ultimate goal; it was to serve the larger, grander purpose of *witness*. Jesus was going to reproduce His life in His disciples so that, through them, He'd fulfill His mission to the world as the Son of Abraham. They would do His works, but greater works than He'd done because now He'd have His fullness in them (14:12; cf. Ephesians 1:18-23). In this way Jesus was going to fill the earth with His presence and power, *and the key to all of this was the coming of the Spirit*.

Jesus was emphasizing to His disciples that the Spirit and His work in them was fundamental and absolutely essential to them fulfilling their calling to testify of Him to the world. The clear implication – but one that is often missed – is that this work of witness involves more than merely telling people about Jesus; it involves manifesting His life and truth to them. This depends upon sharing in His life by the Spirit, but also being conformed to that life by "walking in the Spirit." *The witness Jesus was talking about is not men's testimony concerning Him, but His testimony through them. And not merely in their words, but in the fragrance they bear – the witness of who they are and whose they are; the witness of Jesus Himself through those animated, informed and led by His Spirit*. In a Christian culture that defines "witness" in terms of "salvation formulas" having no essential relation to the person mouthing them, such a notion is radical indeed.

- c. This dynamic between Jesus, the Spirit and the disciples' testimony is the framework for understanding His explanation of the Spirit's work of witness (16:8-11). Again, authentic witness – the witness to which Jesus was calling His disciples – is His own witness carried out by the Spirit who testifies of Him (16:13-15). But the Spirit gives this witness through the words, works and very lives of those He enlivens, instructs and leads. Jesus was sending His Spirit, not just to save people and give them life, but to testify of Him through them. And the Spirit's witness was going to result in *conviction* – that is, people being confronted with the truth as it is in the Messiah. Jesus summarized that conviction in terms of *sin, righteousness and judgment*, with each having its own basis.

The Spirit would convict men of *sin* in view of their unbelief (16:9). But not some sort of generic disbelief or atheism, but refusal to believe *in Him*. This connection between sin and disbelief in Jesus as Israel's Messiah is a core theme in John's gospel and one that Jesus already highlighted in this present discourse (15:22-24; cf. also 8:21-24, 44-46, 9:35-41). It importantly shows that Jesus wasn't talking about sin in general, but the particular offense of rejecting Him. The issue here isn't ignorant disbelief, but knowing rejection. Jesus had presented Himself to Israel openly and purposefully, demonstrating by words and works that He was indeed Yahweh's Messiah. He'd spoken and acted in the power of the Spirit, yet most in Israel rejected Him. They didn't deny His power, but ascribed it to Satan; hence their "unpardonable sin" of unbelief (cf. Luke 4:14-30; Matthew 12:10-32).

The Spirit's presence and power were the unequivocal proof that Jesus was Israel's Messiah (cf. Isaiah 11:1-12, 42:1-7, 48:16-49:13, 59:1-21, 61:1-3), yet the nation refused the Spirit's witness. He had, through Jesus, convicted Israel of its sin of unbelief, and so it would be through Jesus' disciples. The Spirit was going to continue His witness to Jesus by reproducing His life and mind in His followers and empowering them as He had done the Lord Himself. In this way, rejecting Jesus' disciples would constitute the same sin of unbelief as rejecting Him. So refusing the Spirit's witness through Jesus' disciples would carry the same sentence of unpardonability. Thus Israel's sin and guilt would become the world's, for what the Spirit testified to the covenant household in the person of Jesus He was henceforth going to testify through Jesus' disciples sent out into all nations (cf. Matthew 10:16-20 with Acts 1:1-8, 2:32-33, 4:1-13, 5:12-32, 6:9-1, 7:55-56, 8:26-39; also Hebrews 2:1-4).

The Spirit was secondly going use Jesus' return to the Father to convict the world regarding *righteousness* (16:10). As with the previous issue of sin, Jesus was here speaking of righteousness in a particular sense. He wasn't referring to upright conduct in the moral and ethical sense, but righteousness related to Him, and specifically His bodily ascension to His Father. (Hence Jesus' statement that they would no longer *behold* Him, though He was returning to them in His Spirit.) This righteousness, then, has two dimensions, one pertaining to Jesus and one to men.

The *first dimension* is the "righteousness" of Jesus' faithfulness as the Messiah. He was the embodiment of Yahweh's own faithfulness, having come to accomplish all that Yahweh had promised and purposed for the world. Jesus gave Himself fully to that work, even yielding up His life, as sharing one mind, heart and will with His Father. This "righteousness" of Yahweh's faithful Servant-Son was attested in His resurrection and enthronement as the world's sovereign King (cf. Philippians 2:5-11; Ephesians 1:18-23). Not just the empty tomb, but the ascension in glory evidenced in the outpouring of the Spirit (Acts 2:1-36) testified that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed Yahweh's "righteous one" (cf. Isaiah 53:11-12; Acts 3:12-15, 7:51-56, 22:1-14; cf. also Romans 8:33-34 with 1 John 2:1).

The *second dimension* is the consequence and implication of Jesus' righteousness, which is the righteous obligation to embrace Him in faith. As noted, Jesus' resurrection and enthronement as sovereign King attest the truth of His person and work and so call men to respond in truth. In Jesus' words, His return to His Father would serve to convict men of "righteousness" – His and theirs. He was going to send His Spirit, thereby testifying to Israel that the messianic age – the age of the Spirit – had begun. And that testimony by the Spirit would itself substantiate that He is the Messiah promised by the Scriptures, the Servant and King who has accomplished Yahweh's triumphal work of judgment, purgation, deliverance, renewal and ingathering. Thus the Spirit, speaking and acting through Jesus' disciples, would convict Israel (and then the wider world) of *His* righteousness as the exalted King of all the earth (Zechariah 14:9; Matthew 28:18) and *their* righteousness – that is, their righteous duty to embrace Him as Lord and Christ.

Lastly, Jesus identified *judgment* as the third aspect of the Spirit's convicting work. And He'd convict men of judgment by pointing to the judgment of the ruler of this world (16:11). Judgment/judging refers to the accurate assessment of something or someone according to the truth and thus has a neutral connotation. It can equally connote vindication or condemnation, depending on the finding. In this instance, "judgment" as it pertains to men must be understood in terms of the world ruler undergoing "judgment." The context shows that Satan is the "world ruler" who is judged and this judgment consists in his condemnation. And it was Jesus' atoning death, resurrection and enthronement that were going to attest this condemnation and impose its just sentence; the world ruler was to be deposed and stripped of his authority and dominating power by a new King (ref. 12:23-32, 13:21-27, 14:27-31; cf. Luke 4:5-7; Hebrews 2:14-15; Revelation 12:1-11).

This is the framework for understanding how Satan's "judgment" convicts the world of "judgment." Some suppose Jesus was simply saying that the Spirit would show the world that Satan had been judged, but He was saying much more than this. Yes, the events of the coming days would testify to Satan's condemnation, but the Spirit's role was to illumine not merely this fact, but its crucial implications for the world of men. For Satan is the world ruler – the "god of this age" whose mind and ways order and administer the world as we know it. *If he has been judged (assessed in truth and condemned), then the "world" – that is, the human order over which he presides and which conforms to him – has also been judged and condemned.* The Spirit, whose work is to testify of Jesus, was going to convict the world of "judgment" in the sense of showing human beings that the world they know – the world which reflects and expresses their humanness – has been judged as false and condemned in Jesus, the true Man.

The Spirit was going to attest to an atonement that is not so much the payment of a legal debt as the "putting to death" of the counterfeit satanic humanness by which every human being is a child of "*the Satan*" who personifies the reality and power of antithesis and antipathy toward the truth of God, man and creation as they are "yea and amen" in Jesus, the true human. But the Spirit would bear this witness through Jesus' disciples (15:26-27); *they* would have to testify of this judgment and they would do so, not by merely speaking words, but by embodying the truth they proclaimed. *They were going to convict the world of God's condemnation and destruction of pseudo-humanness by living out Jesus' true humanness in the Spirit's power* (cf. Ephesians 4:1-6:20; Philippians 1:27-2:16).

- d. At that moment the disciples weren't capable of grasping the profound significance and implications of what Jesus was telling them. Indeed, there was much more they needed to understand but they weren't yet ready. Doubtless they were overwhelmed and baffled, but He assured them that the Spirit of truth would meet their need of insight and understanding. He would convey and illumine what they couldn't presently bear. And what He'd convey was Jesus Himself; the *Spirit of truth* is the *Spirit of Jesus*, and thus He was coming to communicate the Lord's life and mind to His disciples (16:13-15; cf. Romans 8:9-10; 2 Corinthians 3:18).