

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Studies in John's Gospel: Jesus' Farewell Words - John 16

We know that friends do not like leaving each other. If, as sometimes happens, the circumstances of life are such that it's a permanent separation, the experience is always painful. In this morning's talk on John 16, we find this was especially so for the close friends of Jesus. These are His very last words in this farewell talk to His disciples. His divine love expresses itself again in the opening verse, "These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble" (verse 1). How concerned He was for them!

Our series on chapters 13-15 has gone over "these things". Two major points have been made by the Lord.

First, that He was going to leave them and they would have to live without Him being physically present with them to manage their affairs.

Second that a new 'day', which we now know to be the Christian era, would start after He left.

With the first He prepared them for the difficulties of Christian life in a hostile world; and in the second He gave them to understand the advantages to them of living in the Christian age. Today, we too can learn these same lessons.

Chapter 13 introduces the necessity for Christians to love and serve each other, as is shown by the feet washing example. In chapter 14 there are the heart comforting assurances of the Christian's communion with God, the Father, the Son and the Spirit. The Spirit indwells, and abides with, each believer. Chapter 15 presents the way Christians can show the character of Christ, the true Vine, in their lives, by abiding in Him, so producing fruit for God.

But now in chapter 16 Jesus speaks openly of His "going away". He is very conscious of its immediate effect upon His followers, as He says in verse 6: "But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart". They were sad because they realised that they would soon be separated from the One who had been their Helper. However Jesus wanted to comfort them and to assure them that it was for their ultimate good, so He says in verse 22: "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you."

In this chapter Jesus tells them about:

- the suffering and the sorrows they had to face, verses 1-6;
- the work of the Spirit, verses 7-15;
- the meaning of His going away, verses 16-21; and
- the Christian's privileges in that day, verses 22-33.

First of all it was necessary to tell them about, and to forewarn them of, the persecution they would receive from the world, especially from religious Jews. The world had hated their Master and so they too would receive the same treatment. The time was coming when this would extend to excommunication and even to murder, as we find in the accounts of the early church in Acts. There we find that those who treated believers in this way thought they were offering a service to God, as 16:2 states. Jesus goes on in verse 3 to point out that the reality was: "These things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me".

However Jesus was not abandoning His followers to face this situation in their own strength. According to chapter 15:26, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, was provided to be the power for witness in these circumstances. Jesus had stressed in 14:16-17 that the Spirit is "another Helper" exactly the same as Jesus Himself who would come to be permanently amongst the Christian company and to indwell each of them. He is still present with believers today to strengthen their witness and to enable them to withstand this world which remains hostile to God and His people.

The coming of the Spirit was a direct consequence of Jesus going "away to Him who sent [Him]", as He explains in verses 5-7. We can see the advantage of this now, but just then the disciples did not really grasp it because they were overwhelmed with grief. Jesus then speaks about the Holy Spirit not only as assisting them, but also in His other

activities as the Spirit of truth. By His coming He exposes the true nature of the world in a threefold way as is described in verse 8: "And when He has come He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement". This work continues today in the preaching of the Gospel.

First there is a demonstration about sin: "of sin, because they do not believe on Me", Jesus says in verse 9. In the works and words of the Lord Jesus there had been the full revelation of God so much so that the world is now without any excuse for sin. He made this plain in 15:22-24: "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates Me hates My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would have no sin; but now they have seen and also hated both Me and My Father." The Spirit shows to a guilty world man's defiance of God, so that people can repent and find salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ. However if this witness of the Holy Spirit is refused, there is condemnation: "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (3:18). Unbelief is the ultimate sin!

If the world is so wrong, the next part of the Holy Spirit's work is to prove God is right: "of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more", Jesus states in verse 10. By its treatment of God's Son the world has shown it is not righteous. Not only was the trial, conviction, punishment and crucifixion of Jesus unjust, but it was publicly voiced with the words: "we will not have this Man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). By contrast, everything Jesus did was right. He could say: "Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?" (8:46). Only He has lived completely in, and done, God's will. The result of this is that He is now glorified at His Father's right hand, the place of righteousness in an absolute sense. God is right in all that He has done, is doing and will do through His Son. The Gospel message is about: "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...to demonstrate at the present time [God's] righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:24-26).

In verse 11 Jesus informs us that the third part of the Holy Spirit's work is to convince the world of its condemnation: "of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged". In the Bible 'the world' is an expression used to describe that society of all peoples without God and in opposition to Him. They have their own plans, pursuits, philosophies and way of life away from God, and they are led by Satan, who is their prince. In 12:31 Jesus explains God's verdict on such a system: "Now is the judgment of this world: now is the ruler of this world cast out." At the cross, this evil person, Satan, was defeated in every way, when he came and "found nothing" in Jesus, and was "cast out". The Holy Spirit's work then is to point out that the world system was condemned at the cross. Therefore judgment is inevitable for everyone who is in it, unless they believe on the Son of God. Today Jesus still says: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (5:24). Meanwhile the Christian is instructed by the apostle John in 1 John 2:15-17: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever".

At that moment, both their separation from the Lord and the ensuing hostility of the world were causing much sorrow to the disciples. However when Jesus said in verse 12: "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now", He was not referring to their distress. Rather it was that they would receive the necessary capacity and ability to learn new truths only from Holy Spirit. In verses 13-15, Jesus therefore returns to the theme of the Holy Spirit's work for them in that new day, when He had gone away to the Father and the Spirit had been given: "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you".

In the workings of the Godhead there is unity and harmony. The Son does nothing from Himself; He always operates from His Father, seeing and doing His works (5:19). In like manner, the Spirit of truth, as proceeding from the Father, hears and speaks from Him; He will not speak from Himself. His task is to glorify Christ by showing all that the Father has given into His hands.

The Spirit is also the Teacher, guiding believers into all the truth, and telling them about the future. When we link these verses here with 14:26, we see the way God arranged for the writing of the New Testament scriptures. The Spirit first of all brought "to remembrance" all things that Jesus had said to His disciples, and so we have the four gospels. He then guided the apostles into "all truth" for the writing of the epistles. Finally He told them "things to come" for the prophetic portions of the New Testament, especially the book of Revelation.

The meaning of verse 15 about everything of the Father being given to the Son and shown to us by the Spirit, we understand to be all the detailed truths about the risen and glorified Christ. For example, Romans is the doctrine about the Gospel; the truth of the Church as Christ's body (the mystery) is revealed in Ephesians; spiritual worship is

described in Hebrews, where our Great High Priest is seen within the veil; and the practical precepts of the Christian faith are outlined in the Pastoral Epistles. Three times in these chapters of John, chapters 14, 15, and 16 the Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of truth". He shows the excellencies of Jesus, who is the Truth (14:6) from the Word of God, which is truth (17:17).

Now the point had been reached in the journey from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane where it was necessary for Jesus to talk plainly about the imminence of His separation from the eleven. First of all there was that "little while" when they would not see Him. The phrase describes the time from His arrest in the garden until His reunion with them following His resurrection. He had to emphasise the real grief they would experience, while the world rejoiced. But as in child birth when a woman's pain is soon forgotten by the joy of getting a child, so also the disciples would lose their sorrow and find permanent joy. This "joy no one will take from you" they received from Him when they saw Him again.

However He wanted them to grasp that "seeing Him" was more than just meeting Him again on earth after His resurrection. This comes out in verse 16: "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." The new day then is about seeing Him by faith in His Father's presence. But when Jesus said this to His disciples they were confused and afraid to ask about it. So He underlined to them in verse 23 that a special new day of privilege would begin then: "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My Name He will give you." The disciples had been in the habit of asking and receiving from the Lord while He was with them on earth. But from now on their prayers would go straight to the Father, in the Son's Name. Believers on the Lord Jesus Christ now have this direct access to the Father in prayer for all the needs of the Christian life. Our Lord directs in verse 24 to: "Ask, and you will receive". We can confidently ask "in His Name" because we are asking for Christ's glory, and claiming the full value of that Name to His Father. Because the Father is the great Provider, the promise is that we will receive and that our joy will be full!

Another feature of the new day for the believer is that Jesus can now, as He says in verse 25, "tell you plainly about the Father". In declaring the Father's name to us we are brought to know all about the Father, and that His love rests upon us. In verse 27 Jesus assures us: "The Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God". The Father wants those who love and believe on His Son to be conscious of this great favour, and to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

The words of Jesus in verse 28 summarise the meaning of Him being the Sent One of the Father: "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father". By His coming He made known the Father. In His going back to the Father, He was taking up all things for God as Man, and as Man representing believers there in heaven. This is a "dark saying" for the uninitiated! However the disciples thought that He was now using plain speech, so they confidently say in verse 30: "by this we believe that You came forth from God". But Jesus cautions them with a question in verse 31: "Do you now believe?" There had to be a most important event before "that day" of fullest blessing and privilege for believers. Just then it was necessary for the Lord to leave them to face the ordeal of the cross.

Verse 32 tells what would take place: they would be dispersed and Jesus would be on His own: "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me". To go to the Father He had to go through suffering, pain and death before rising again to ascend to heaven. Here is that deeply moving truth of the joint activity of God the Father and God the Son. They are pictured in Genesis 22 by Abraham and Isaac, who went together to the place of the burnt offering. Throughout Jesus' farewell talk, He presents the cross as a completed fact, but it was a necessary part of the divine counsel: "God providing for Himself the Lamb for a burnt offering" (Genesis 22:8). The Lord laid down His life that He might take it again, as commanded of His Father (10:18). It had to be faced. His hour had now come!

Jesus ends this talk to His disciples with words of great comfort and encouragement. In verse 33 we have this conclusion: "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world". He knew that the "in Me ... peace" message would strengthen them against the "in the world ... [trouble]" warning. The world today continues to oppose God, so there are still difficulties for the believer to face. These words of Jesus are for believers today: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (14:27). This means that both the calmness with which He faced the world that night, and the confidence He had in His God and Father, can be ours today.

But the resounding battle cry on which we can finish our talks about Jesus' last words is that He has the victory! He has overcome! And He did so at the cross, the place where the world and its ruler thought they had succeeded by putting Him to death. But He rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, and is sat down with His Father on His throne! Because He lives by the power of God we, today, can face everything in His glorious Name. 1 John 5:4-5 triumphantly reminds us: "And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is he who overcomes the

world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" We take heart this morning as He brings to us afresh these words of great encouragement: "Be of good cheer!"

Let's pray.

God the Father, we are instructed by Your Son to directly approach You and to ask in His Name. We pray therefore that You will give us to understand the benefits of living in this the Spirit's day, and of having Jesus glorified in Your presence as One in whom our faith is placed. We give You thanks for these words, for His peace that He has left with us; and for His victory which encourages us through this difficult world. Now we recall that He also said He is coming for us to take us home to Your house, and we pray that this will happen soon. We ask for all of these things for His glory, and in His Name. Amen.

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