

The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit

Text: John 14:15-21

Exegetical Big Idea: Jesus promises to send the Holy Spirit to comfort and guide his disciples in the absence of Jesus' physical presence.

Homiletical Big Idea: **Knowing and experiencing the person of the Holy Spirit is vital for our Christian walk.**

Fallen Condition Focus: The primary means by which God works in his people today is the person of the Holy Spirit, and yet, how much attention do we pay him? How much do we consider his work? We too often do not value and abide in his presence, and that is to our detriment.

Background:

Jesus is eating his final meal with his disciples. It's a joyous celebration. It's Passover! Remembering the great power of God as he freed the nation of Israel from slavery in Egypt by killing every firstborn in Egypt and sparing the lives of the Israelites who placed the blood of a sheep or goat on their doorframe.

In a show of great humility and sacrifice and service, he wraps a towel around his waist and washes his disciples' feet.

Then he drops the bomb. Jesus tells them that he will be betrayed into the hands of man, and that he will be going away. The disciples are confused and Peter does what Peter does and declares that he will follow Jesus anywhere, even if it means death. But of course Jesus turns to Peter and reveals to him that yes, even you Peter will disown me.

At this the disciples' hearts are troubled. What does Jesus mean he is leaving? Why can't we go with him? What does Jesus mean by "a little while?" The next few chapters are devoted to the theme of giving comfort to the disciples.

Intro:

At some point this summer my family and I are going on a trip to a cottage. It's near Mont Tremblant in Quebec. We're looking forward to the rest and spending some time outdoors and some family time. So naturally, and if you know me this will come as no surprise, I googled places we could go around this cottage that have good food. One of them in particular caught my eye. It's a little chocolatier about 5 minutes down the road where we are staying. This is awesome. I love chocolate, my wife loves visiting different shops and trying out different things. So I may taking a trip there while we are in Quebec. As I was browsing the website though, I clicked on the page that allows you to shop for their chocolate, and to my amazement, realized that a 70g bar costs between \$12 and \$15! For reference, you can buy a 100g chocolate bar at Walmart for a buck. Why do they cost \$15? Well my guess is that the quality and craftsmanship of the chocolate is very good, and therefore the taste and experience of eating the chocolate will be much much greater than eating one from Walmart. So while I'm there, I may buy one of those overpriced chocolate bars for my wife. But unfortunately for my kids, I will not buy one for them. I won't buy one for them, because to them it doesn't make a difference if I buy them a chocolate bar from the dollar store, or if I spend \$15 on one of presumably way better quality. Why? Because they won't appreciate the one of great value.

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We have been given a gift of immeasurable value, one that brings joy, comfort, guidance, encouragement for the Christian life, and I fear I do not appreciate this gift near as much as I should.

I'm talking of course of the gift of the Person of the Holy Spirit. As we're going to see today, Jesus promised the gift of the Spirit after his glorification and ascension into heaven, and we find throughout the New Testament that the Holy Spirit is the primary means by which God works in the lives of his people today. And if that is the case, then

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Verses 15-17a – Love and Obedience to Christ is a pre-condition for the Spirit.

Remember that this verse is coming directly after Jesus tells his disciples that he is leaving to prepare a place for them with the Father. The disciples are confused, they don't understand why they can't go with Jesus. They are disoriented because Jesus says he is leaving and they are anxious because they have left everything to follow Jesus, and now he tells them he is going away.

Then Jesus hits them with this "if you love me, you will obey what I command".

But Jesus, haven't they shown you that they love you? They have left everything to follow you and obey you. Yes they have, and Jesus here is not questioning their obedience and love so much as he's assuring them that their love and obedience is precursor of better things to come. Jesus is assuring them that if they love him, and the implication here is that they do, then Jesus will ask the Father for "another Counselor".

Before we talk about this Counselor, look down at verse 17 to see the contrast. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him, nor knows him.

So who is the Counselor for? Not for everyone, but for the disciples. Specifically, those who love Christ, obey his commands, and therefore, can accept the Counselor because as we're going to see, in a sense they are already acquainted with him.

Obedience and love of Christ comes first, and then the Counselor is given. Before we go on though we need to understand that love of Christ is not initiated by us, it's initiated by God himself. Love for Christ is a response to the love of God. The opening verses of John make this clear. The Word of God became flesh, that is Christ, and came into the world. The world did not accept him, but to those who received him, those who believed in him he gave the right to be called children of God.

Here is the flow: Christ displays his love for his people. His people recognize this love and accept it. The natural response to this love is to obey what Christ has said.

We see that playing out in these verses. The world does not accept the Spirit because they do not accept Christ. But the disciples do, and to them is given the gift of another Counselor.

"Another" is important here. Christ is their current helper, but as is alluded to in this verse, Christ's physical presence will not be with them forever. Christ's work of helping *on earth* will come to an end with his death and resurrection. Christ's helping however does not end, he is now at the right hand of God ruling over all things and interceding on our behalf before the Father. Another has the meaning of "one like the first".

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[suppose for minute that you invite me over to your house because you're kind and generous. And when I get there you lay out before me a big piece of chocolate cake. Now let's say I take a look at that slice of cake and I say to you "is there another cake?" Now I could mean one of two things by that. I could mean that I would like "another" option different than the one you've put before me. Or I could mean I would like "another" slice the same as the one you put before me. As we've already established you can be sure I mean the second option.]

The Holy Spirit, the Counselor that Jesus will ask the Father to send is of the same nature as the Counselor that is already in their midst. That Counselor is of course Jesus. We know this because Jesus just told them that he himself is the Way the Truth and the Life, and here he calls the Counselor the "Spirit of Truth".

The Counselor to come will always point to the Truth, that is Jesus, because the Counselor and Christ are of the same nature! Be very skeptical of someone who tells you they are listening to the leading of the Spirit, but their actions are in direct opposition to the Word of God. That's impossible! The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth because he always confirms the truth of God's Word, and Christ's commands.

Oh how we need to foster a close relationship with the Holy Spirit.

If Christ's help is now in the heavenly realm, then the Spirit's help is here on earth. And the difference is that the Spirit, as Jesus says in verse 16 will be with his people forever.

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Jesus adds more to that thought in the next verse.

Verse 17b – We know him, and will know him

As Jesus is comforting his disciples with the promise of the coming Holy Spirit, he assures them that they already know him, but at the same time, they will know him better because the Spirit will live with them.

But if the Spirit has not already come, how do they already know him?

They have been walking and talking with God himself, and so united are the persons of the Trinity, and they glorify each other and reveal each other to such an extent, that Jesus in a real sense can say that his disciples know in some fashion the Spirit already! One commentator points out that in one sense, that the only person who will understand the words about the Spirit has already felt his presence.

Here we see that it's the Father who is sending the Spirit, but later on in verse 26 of the next chapter we read that Jesus himself is sending the Spirit, from the Father. "Spirit of truth" is what Jesus calls him, and yet fewer than 10 verses earlier, Jesus calls himself the "Truth".

Are we not seeing a "same and yet different" hint here?

In this sense, the disciples are intimately familiar with the Spirit of God since the Spirit of God and Christ share the same perfect will and essence, though they are distinct in person. So they know him already! He is already familiar to them. But they will know him *better* at Pentecost.

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And if Jesus and the Holy Spirit are of the same essence, then that means that the Spirit is a person, not a feeling or power or “energy”. And if the Holy Spirit is a person, then that means we can have a relationship with him, in the same way we have a relationship with the Father and the Son.

The Spirit is the one who confirms the Word of God in our hearts. In conjunction with the community of the Church, the Spirit makes known to us the proper understanding of Scripture. It is the Spirit who gives us a joy for the Word of God. Without the work of the Spirit we would only understand the words on the page, but not experience and submit to the power of God’s Word. We need the Spirit to cause the Word of God to dwell deep in our hearts, giving us an affection for God and his Word.

The Spirit needs to be experienced.

Why is it important to distinguish the Spirit from the Father and the Son? Why not just pray, for example, to “God” and let God decide to which person of the Trinity it should go to?

For one, God has revealed himself to us as a Triune God who exists as one God but in three distinct persons. If God has thus revealed himself to us, then he has done so for a reason. God is very concerned about *how* his people worship him, and we should be to. Giving God all the glory he rightfully deserves.

But also, God always makes commands that are for the good of his people. God has revealed himself as the Triune God *for our joy*. To better understand God and distinguish between the persons of the Trinity is for our good and for our joy!

[One example. Think about God the Father, where do you conceptualize him to be? In Heaven. Now think about God the risen Son, where do you conceptualize him to be? In Heaven. Now think about time when we are in desperate need for God to come to our aid. Is it possible that in those times, when we don’t feel the presence of God closely, it’s because we are crying out to God who we consider to be far off in heaven?

Now think about God the Spirit. Where do you conceptualize him? Right in your chest. Perhaps if we spent time growing our relationship with God the Holy Spirit by addressing him in prayer more often, and considering his presence as he guides us and helps us convicts us and grows us in Christian maturity, perhaps if we did that more, we would be quicker to feel the deep, faithful, abiding presence of God not just close to us, but in us.]

After all, Jesus teaches of the coming Holy Spirit to his disciples here for the specific reason of comfort in their coming disorientation and sorrow.

We know him, may we know him better.

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Verses 18-19 – Christ’s resurrection is necessary for the coming of the Counselor

Jesus shifts now to talk about his death and resurrection. Verse 18 and 19 in the context of the larger discourse of these few chapters before Jesus makes his way to the cross is clearly talking about his resurrection. So somehow, the coming of the Counselor is connected with Christ’s death and resurrection. But how?

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In verse 18 he reassures them that his departure is not the end of his presence. Jesus uses the picture of orphans, without the care and protection and leadership of a father and mother. Think of the helplessness of a young child in a situation where mom and dad aren't there. It's scary. It's heart wrenching. The child is absolutely dependent on the parents. The disciples are dependent on Jesus in the same way. If Jesus goes, they are vulnerable, in danger, lost, without care or protection. The disciples need the presence of Jesus.

But they also need the resurrection. That's the whole point of the life of Christ. That's the work of the person of the Godhead who is the Son! He is distinct from the Holy Spirit in that he does different work than the Holy Spirit.

Christ's death and resurrection is the crescendo of history and God's story of redeeming his people. The disciples are worried and anxious at Christ leaving them, but they have no idea that Christ is leaving them for their own good! If Christ does not leave, and be crucified on the cross and raised to life again on the third day, there is no eternal life.

Eternal life depends on the resurrection of Jesus. But they also need the presence of God. That's the work of the person of the Godhead who is the Holy Spirit.

[I know last week I said that Alana wrapped most of the Christmas presents at our house, but she doesn't wrap all of them. I do my share of the wrapping. I admit though, it's obvious in our house who wraps which presents. Mine are a little more hastily wrapped than Alana's. She take great care in her measuring and taping and decorating. Have you ever received a gift from somebody who took great care in their wrapping job? What's the thought that runs through your mind as you hold it in your hands? It's the thought "I have to destroy this beautiful wrapping job to get to the gift". But as beautiful as any wrapping job is, what is the purpose of the wrapping paper? The purpose of the paper is to be removed so that the gift can be revealed. You don't get the gift unless the paper is destroyed.]

The purpose of Christ is his death and resurrection on the cross. This **MUST** happen in order for the gift of the Spirit to be given. Only when Christ is resurrected, do we have the gift of the Spirit, and His purpose, is to abide with God's people so that they are never without the presence of God.

But the Spirit of God is also intrinsically connected with our hope of resurrection.

Two verses that show this:

2 Corinthians 1:22. And Romans 8:11

The first tells us that the *Spirit* is a guarantee of what is to come. Those who have the Spirit of God indwelling them, and only those, will see resurrection unto eternal life.

And the Romans passage tells us very clearly that resurrection for God's people happens "because of Spirit who lives in you".

Do you see what is happening here? God the Son does the work of dying on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins and he is resurrected again to ascend to the Father in heaven. It is the Spirit who testifies to this truth, and is the seal of the future reality of this truth on the people of God. In a very real way we can be say as God's people, "You ask how I know I will be resurrected one day and see Christ? Because of God's Spirit who lives in me".

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Christ's resurrection is essential for the coming of the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of God is essential in the resurrection of his people.

How comforting to know them as Jesus prepares to leave his disciples for the task of the cross, that he will not abandon them or forsake them. They will not be like children without parents.

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Verse 20-21 – The Spirit keeps the believer in unity with God.

Jesus assures his disciples, who are in a state of confusion and disorientation at the prospect of his leaving, that on "that day" they will realize the truth. That day can only mean after his resurrection. Now the term "that day" in all likelihood refers to the time period after his resurrection, and not a single day. It took the disciples until Pentecost to fully understand that Jesus had to die and be raised to life again. But the point is that they realized it!

Look at what Jesus is saying they will realize in verse 20: First, that Jesus is in the Father. This is a statement of unity with the Father on the level of essence. Jesus, though distinct in person with the Father is nonetheless one in being with the Father. After Jesus' resurrection, they will realize this relationship that Jesus has with the Father more fully. They are confused a few verses ago when Jesus says that if they know him they know the Father. But they will understand after his resurrection.

So Jesus says "I am in the Father" but then he says "and you are in me". In the same way that Jesus is so united with the Father that they cannot be separated, so are those who are in Christ with their connection to him.

Paul says the same thing in Colossians 3 when he says we have died (to sin) and our lives are now hidden with Christ in God. But Jesus doesn't stop there. Not only are we "in Christ" but Christ is in us.

We belong to Jesus and he holds us fast, but even more than that we have the abiding presence of Christ in our lives by the indwelling of his Holy Spirit. This is how he can say he will not leave us as orphans. Now up until now you can make the argument that Jesus is only leaving the gift of the Counselor to his disciples. That's why I'm so glad this next verse is in here. Verse 21 leaves us with "whoever". Oh how glad I am that Jesus makes it clear for us that anyone and everyone who would come to him for forgiveness and receives new life in him, a life that is marked by obedience and love for Jesus, anyone who does this receives the gift of the Spirit.

The one who comes to Jesus at the cross receives love from him and love from the Father and the promise that Jesus will show himself to him. Christ's "showing" is more than just resurrection showing, but the ongoing revelation of himself through the Spirit, in conjunction with the revealed Word of God.

This is the age we now live in church. The primary means by which God works in the lives of his people today is by the presence of the Holy Spirit in us. If that is the primary means by which God works, then

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