

The Witness of The Spirit (Part 3 of 3)

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[0 : 00] Living God, we are so grateful that you enabled the Apostle John to remember these words of the Lord Jesus. And we're so grateful that over so many centuries now you have protected this word and you've made it available to us.

Will you in your mercy and grace now bring us more deeply into the reality of which these words speak? And this we pray in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen.

Yet once more, I invite you to explore with me the space. The space in which we are now called to follow Jesus Christ.

It is not the space in which the first band of disciples followed him. Peter and Martha, Mary Magdalene and John, James and Susanna could actually see him with their own eyes.

And hear him with their own ears and touch him with their own hands. They are of all people the most fortunate to ever have lived. And the space in which we follow him is not like the one in which we will one day follow him.

[1 : 23] In the new creation, in the new city, we will, as the last book of the Bible puts it, see his face. And oh, what a day that will be. The space in which we now follow him is marked by the absence of Jesus' physical presence.

Not by his absence, thank God, but by the absence of his physical presence. And it was for living in that space that Jesus prepares his disciples on the night before going to the cross.

During what has come to be known as the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples that he would be leaving them. I'm going to the Father, he said. I've come from the Father and I'm going back to the Father.

And then he spent the rest of the evening preparing them to go on living in the absence of his physical presence. In what has come to be known as the Upper Room Discourse, recorded in John 14 to 16, Jesus helps us disciples understand what is happening in the places where we live and work.

As I said last Sunday, four great facts stand out to me from what Jesus teaches in the Upper Room. First, I know that for the most part, the people in the places where we live and work are trying to make sense of life.

[2 : 49] They're trying to do the best they can in light of what they know at the moment. Some are making progress, some are not. Some are blowing it big time.

But everyone, for the most part, is seeking to make sense of their existence, wanting to be, in the words of St. Irenaeus, fully human, fully alive. Second, I know that the great enemies of life, sin and evil and death, are at work in the places where we live and work.

I know that sin and evil and death are at work in my situation and in your situation. Need I illustrate? Jesus never sends his disciples into life and ministry with rose-colored glasses.

He does not want us to be blindsided. He wants us to face the fact that there are powers at work moving against him, seeking to thwart his redemptive purposes. Third, I know that sin, evil and death do not have the last word in our situations.

Oh, it often appears that they do. And it often feels that they do. Right? But they do not. Jesus has come and he has not only done something about sin, evil and death, he has done something to sin, evil and death.

[4 : 16] He has faced sin, evil and death head on and he has done something to them. They tried to defeat him but could not. He defeated them.

He did not abolish them, at least not yet. But he did defeat them. Sin, evil and death, though present and though at work, do not occupy the place they once did in our existence.

They do not have the last word. And we experience this at every funeral or every memorial service. We look at the body of our loved ones and we say in one way or another, death has done all it can do.

It can do no more. Jesus gets the last word. Again, I'm going to try to unpack that for us on the first three Sundays of July. And fourth, and most importantly, I know that we are not alone in any of our situations.

Oh, it can often feel that we are alone. Right? But our feelings, however intense they may be, are out of touch with reality.

[5 : 29] And it's this great fact of life that Jesus wants us to get. We are never alone. Never. Anywhere. Anytime. There is a presence in the absence of Jesus' physical presence.

A holy presence. A person. A person. The paraclete, as Jesus calls him. One called in alongside. Another paraclete, as Jesus says. Another of the same kind.

Just like Jesus. So much so, that the presence of the paraclete is the presence of Jesus. I go to the Father. And when I go, I will send the paraclete.

I will send the Holy Spirit to be with you and in you. And as we emphasized last Sunday, not just there. Not just hanging out.

But at work there. On the job there. In every situation in which we find ourselves, the paraclete is there on the job.

[6 : 33] Do you believe this? And, at work, not only in us, in our situation, but at work in others in our situation.

The paraclete is at work in Jesus' disciples and he is at work in those who are not yet Jesus' disciples. Do you believe this? When the paraclete comes, says Jesus, he will bear witness of me.

That is his chief job. To bear witness to Jesus. John 15, verse 26. He will bear witness of me. To those who already believe in Jesus and to those who do not yet believe in Jesus.

Yes, we, who already believe in Jesus, are to bear witness to those who do not yet believe. It's one of the greatest privileges that a human being can ever be given to speak a good word of the Savior to another human being.

But what Jesus wants us to realize is that even if we do not bear witness, the paraclete does. The Holy Spirit does.

[7 : 45] Indeed, even before any disciple of Jesus shows up to bear witness, the Spirit is already there on the scene. He's already there on the job.

Do you believe this? In the space, in which Jesus calls us to follow, the paraclete is present and active, bearing his own witness to who Jesus is and what Jesus does.

I like how Michael Green puts it. It is the role of the Spirit to make Jesus attractive to people. It's the role of the Spirit to make Jesus attractive to people.

What a relief. We try to, do we not? We try to make Jesus real and attractive to loved ones and co-workers and friends.

We so want them to know and follow Jesus. The great mystery of any situation is that the Spirit is there and it is finally His job to make Jesus real and attractive.

[8 : 54] Michael Green goes on. There never was a man, woman, or child who came to living faith in Christ unless the Holy Spirit made Jesus real and winsome to them.

You and I cannot do that. We can only construct a neon light. The Spirit has to light it up. How? How does the Spirit witness to Jesus?

Look more carefully at what Jesus says in John 16 verses 8 through 11. John 16 verses 8 through 11. When He comes, when the periclete comes, He will convict the world.

Or as the NIV has it, He will prove the world to be in the wrong. the Spirit will convict. Like a brilliant prosecuting attorney, the periclete will break through unbelief and convict the world.

Not in the sense of bringing a conviction before a judge to be judged, but in the sense of drive home personal conviction in an individual's heart and mind. So we can also render Jesus' words then, the Spirit will convince.

[10 : 07] The Spirit will convince the world about Jesus. How? I do not know. But I know He does it. He did it for me. I am a witness of the fact that the Spirit brings conviction and convinces.

Again, verse 16 verses 8 John 16 verses 8 through 11. Look carefully at what Jesus is saying about this work of the Spirit. 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 concerning judgment because the ruler of this world has been judged.

those are theologically loaded words. Let's reflect on each of Jesus' affirmations one at a time concerning sin, concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment.

[11 : 15] Jesus says, the paraclete is out there in all of our situations convicting people of sin because they do not believe in Me.

He says, that has to be one of the most audacious things Jesus of Nazareth ever said. Sin because they do not believe in Me.

Jesus has changed the definition of sin. Jesus has given sin a new center of gravity so to speak. He has revealed the very heart and root of sin.

Sin is not just breaking God's law. Sin is not just bad attitudes and behaviors. Sin is essentially unbelief. Sins, plural, are symptoms of sin, singular.

Sin is refusing to come to Jesus to be forgiven and reconciled. Refusing to receive His grace and bow before Him as Lord.

[12 : 20] Sin is not believing who Jesus says He is. Sin is not believing who Jesus says, who the Father says Jesus is. Sin is not trusting Jesus to be all that He says He is.

And Jesus says that the Spirit is at work in all of our situations convicting men and women of this sin of unbelief. This happened big time at the day of Pentecost.

When after Peter declared who Jesus is, let the house of Israel know for certain that Jesus is both Lord and Christ whom you crucified, the text says the people were cut to the heart and repented of being wrong about Jesus.

You can see then that this convicting work of the Spirit has to happen not only in the world but in the church. The church needs the Paraclete's ministry too.

Jesus can say to us who believe, they do not believe in me. He can? Yes. What does our grumbling and complaining say?

[13 : 36] What does our cowering in fear say? What does our playing games with the cost of discipleship say? It says that we too do not yet really believe that Jesus is all the Bible says He is.

That we too really do not believe that Jesus is as good and faithful as He claims to be. The Spirit convicts us of sin. Thank you Paraclete.

And Jesus says that the Paraclete is out there convicting human beings concerning righteousness. He's revealing human inability to discern right from wrong.

The religious righteousness of Jesus' day got it all wrong. And so religion ends up crucifying the righteous one. The political righteousness of Jesus' day got it all wrong and it too then ends up crucifying the just one.

Human righteousness the sense of right and wrong considered Jesus to be a sinner or a pretender or a deluded Messiah. Because I go to the Father.

[14 : 49] In going to the Father Jesus is vindicated. The resurrection and the ascension say that Jesus is not a sinner. It looked like he was a cursed person.

Cursed is he who hangs on a tree. But it turns out that he was taking the curse on himself that he had become the curse for us. The Spirit comes to convict us that we have misinterpreted Jesus' death.

And the chief example of that is Saul of Tarsus, the Apostle Paul. He is the witness to this miraculous work. Saul hated the name of Jesus.

Saul wanted to wipe out the Jesus movement. But the Spirit broke through to him and revealed to Saul that he was wrong about Jesus' death. And revealed that it was through that death that Saul would find righteousness before God.

Thank you, Paraclete. And Jesus says, the Spirit is out there convicting the world concerning judgment. Because, says Jesus, the ruler of this world has been judged.

[16 : 03] The point? The world's standards of judgment are wrong. Not just in the particular instance of falsely judging Jesus, but in standards generally of which the judgment of Jesus is the supreme example.

Jesus is saying that the world got it wrong in its judgment of things having to do with the living God. And the Spirit comes to convict us. To convict us that we just do not get it.

That we don't understand the ways of God. The world thinks that the cross is the place where Jesus is judged. Where Jesus is condemned.

But the exact opposite is the case. the cross is where the world is judged and then redeemed. The cross is where the devil and Satan, the ruler of this world, is judged and then dethroned.

At the cross, the power behind all rebellion against God is condemned. A battle is won. The decisive battle is won. It's only a matter of time until the whole war is finished.

[17 : 06] And the paraclete comes to convince the world of this great fact. And to convince the church of this great fact. for we too slip into a misunderstanding of God's judgment.

We too do not get it. We don't realize that the weakness of the cross is the power of God. That the foolishness of cross is the wisdom of God.

He will convict the world. He will convince the world. How? I do not know. It's a great mystery to me. But I know that he does it.

In the rough and tumble of daily life, as we mere mortals grapple with the joys and pains of life, as people search for meaning and hope, he does his work of grace and truth.

Sometimes the work happens quickly and joyfully. Sometimes it takes much time and much agony, like Jacob wrestling all night with God. And sometimes the work of the spirit generates great hostility in the human soul.

[18 : 11] As the soul realizes that its whole understanding of reality is being shifted. He will convince. He will convict the world.

In order that the world would stop being the world. How? Again, I do not know. But he's doing it for me. He's doing it for you.

He's doing it for many of your family members, your colleagues, and your friends. So, let me tell you about my friend named Hafshin. Hafshin has been living in Canada now about 12 years.

I met him seven years ago when he showed up at a preaching course I was teaching at Regent College. Regent College, like Cary College, attracts people from all over the world. But I'll tell you, I was not ready for Hafshin to show up.

He was born in Iran and raised in a strict Muslim family, a Shiite Muslim family. Early on, he loved the disciplines of Islam, eagerly giving himself to the daily prayers and fastings.

[19 : 17] And by the time he reached high school, his elders treated him as a master student of Quran. Hafshin loved to study and debate the Quran.

During high school, he, like many other Iranian young men, became more and more disturbed by the injustice in the world. He, like many other Middle Eastern young men, was especially disturbed by all of the immorality being filtrated into Iran through satellite television.

We need to understand that, by the way, that the Muslim world reacts to the West chiefly because of this, because of the immorality that we just soak that world with.

So, like other men his age, in his world, Hafshin joined Hezbollah. Because of his brilliant mind and his zealous heart, Hafshin quickly moved to positions of leadership.

So much so, that he was asked to leave Iran and go to Afghanistan to be trained for leadership in Al-Qaeda. He was going to be trained in how to bring down the immoral West.

[20 : 28] Now, the route to Afghanistan went through Indonesia, though someone, after the first service, said it was actually Malaysia. But I still think it was Indonesia. And he was stopped at the airport in Jakarta.

He was arrested for carrying false passports. He had 26 of them. And Hafshin was then thrown into jail. He says that for days and weeks he cried out to Allah, Why am I here?

I have followed you faithfully all my life. I'm willing to die for you. Why have you deserted me? No answer. For days and weeks no answer. Then one day, as he was walking back and forth in his cell, he said that he had an experience of an overwhelming sense of guilt.

He had never experienced guilt before. He had experienced shame, but not guilt. And he said that he saw for all of his zeal for morality, he himself was a profoundly immoral man.

At one point, he became aware of a presence in the jail cell right there with him. A holy presence as he described it. A presence he had never known before, but a presence which surprisingly was not strange.

[21 : 45] He moved into the corner of the cell and said to the presence, Who are you? And he heard the words, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

Hapsheen was stunned, shaken, humbled, afraid in a way he had never been afraid before. He said now he knew fear. And he responded to the presence saying, what does that mean?

I am the way, the truth, and the life. What does that mean? And the presence said to him in Arabic, I am Jesus. I know I didn't believe it the first time I heard it either.

But I and others have pressed him on this and come to the conclusion that he's right. I am Jesus. Hapsheen fell to his knees and then to his face.

And he said he felt clean all over inside. He felt a clean he had never known before. He felt alive in a way he had never been alive before.

[22 : 50] And he was no longer afraid. Hapsheen was subsequently released from prison, another story that would take too long to tell, and is now pastoring a Persian evangelical congregation in North Vancouver, where I've had the privilege of preaching.

You ought to visit them and watch Hapsheen and his other Iranian friends worship Jesus. By the way, if you want to hear his testimony, go to Haven Today.

Haven Today. And simply scroll down to God so loved a terrorist. So, as we leave this sanctuary in a little while and return to the places where we live and work, we know at least four great facts.

First, people are like us seeking life. Maybe in the wrong ways, in the wrong places, but they are seeking and searching.

Two, sin, evil, and death are at work. But keep your cool. For three, sin, evil, and death are defeated.

[24 : 03] They do not have the last word. And four, the spirit of him who did the defeating is at work. We are to pray. We are to speak the truth in love.

We are to work the works of Jesus from the posture of the great servant who washes feet. And in the midst of it all, the paraclete works. With us and in us and apart from us.

And in the midst of it all, the paraclete works. With us and in us and apart from us, ahead of us, bearing his own testimony to who Jesus is.

Jesus. So I offer again the definition of evangelism I gave you last week, which another friend of mine, Jody Hoffman, who is a systems engineer, proposes.

Evangelism is listening in on a conversation the Holy Spirit is having with another human being. I'm convinced the Holy Spirit is having that conversation with every person in our city.

[25 : 17] I ride the subway every day. And I stand in the subway and I watch faces and I try to listen and try to watch the eyes and just watch people's faces to see what that conversation might be.

Evangelism is listening in on a conversation the Holy Spirit is having with a human being. And entering the conversation, if and only the Spirit or the human being invites us in.

Let us pray. Living God, will you help us?

Will you help us understand this space in which we are living? Will you make our ears and eyes and minds and hearts sensitive to the moving and presence of your Spirit?

And will you grant us the joy of entering into the conversation you're having with the people around us, the joy of being able to say, it's Jesus who is after you.

[26 : 38] It is Jesus who loves you. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.