

The Witness of The Spirit (Part 2 of 3)

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[0 : 0 0] Once again, we thank you, O God, that you enabled the Apostle John to remember the words of the Lord Jesus and to write them down for us. And I pray now that you would help us to actually experience the reality of the words we've just heard.

This we pray in Jesus' name and for his glory. Amen. Once more, I invite you to explore with me the space in which Jesus now calls us to follow.

It is not like the space in which the first disciples followed him. They saw him with their own eyes. They heard him with their own ears. They touched him with their own hands.

They were lucky bums indeed. And the space in which we follow is not like the space which we will one day inhabit when we will see him face to face.

The space in which we now follow Jesus is marked by an absence. The absence of his physical presence. Not by his absence, thank God, but by the absence of his physical presence.

[1 : 1 4] It is for living in that space that Jesus began to prepare the first disciples and us on the night before he went to the cross. Let me review the context.

Jesus had gathered the original twelve disciples together for a meal in an upper room somewhere in the downtown core of the city of Jerusalem. Jesus loves to gather disciples in the downtown core of cities.

During the meal, Jesus gets up, wraps a towel around his waist, gets down on his knees, and begins washing his disciples' feet, thereby revealing his understanding of what it means to be Lord, and thereby showing us the posture he wants us to have in the world.

Servants of the serving Lord. After that surprising, humbling act, Jesus goes on to tell his disciples that he would soon leave them.

I'm going to the Father, he says. He had come from the Father, and now he was going back to the Father. And for the rest of the evening, Jesus prepares the first disciples and us to go on living and serving in the absence of his physical presence.

[2 : 3 2] Now, for just a moment, I'm going to invite you to transport yourself. To transport yourself out of this room into the place where you spend the majority of your time.

An office, a classroom, a boardroom, a house, a restaurant, a hospital, a garden, an airport, an airplane. Now, while you're in that place, ask yourself, what do I know to be true about my situation?

What is going on in that place? You listen. You look around. You feel. You touch.

You take in all the data. And you ask, what is happening in that place? In the upper room, in the downtown core of the city, Jesus prepares us disciples to go on living and serving in the absence of his physical presence by helping us understand what is happening in all of those places where we live and serve.

Four things stand out to me from what we read in the Gospel of John. First, I know that the people in my situation are, for the most part, like me, trying to make sense of life.

[4 : 0 5] And trying to do the best they can in light of what they know at the moment. Some are making progress. Some are messing up.

Some 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.

Would you agree? Second, I know that the great enemies of life are at work in my situation.

I know that sin and evil and death are at work in my situation and in your situation. That's why there's so much frustration and confusion and sickness and pain.

That's why there's jealousy and lust and power grabbing and injustice. Sin and evil and death are at work in every place where we live and serve. Jesus never sends anyone into discipleship with rose-colored glasses.

[5 : 0 7] He doesn't want us to be blindsided. There are powers at work moving against Him and His good pleasure. Would you agree? Third, I know that sin, evil, and death do not have the last word in our situations.

Sometimes it appears they do. And sometimes it feels they do. But they do not. Sin, evil, and death have been defeated by Jesus.

They are strong foes, but they are defeated. Because, says Jesus, I go to the Father. His coming from the Father involved a sequence of events.

The virgin conception, the virgin birth, and His growing up in Nazareth. His going to the Father involved a sequence of events. His crucifixion, His resurrection, and His ascension to the throne of the universe.

And through that sequence of events, He has defeated sin and evil and death. He has not abolished them. One day He will. And every passing day makes that one day, one day closer.

[6 : 1 7] Father, He has not abolished these enemies, but He did defeat them. And they no longer occupy the place in our situation that they once did.

Because He has gone to the Father. Because He died on the cross, rose from the grave, and is seated on the throne. The stranglehold of sin is broken. The authority of evil is broken.

And the grip of death is broken. I'm going to unpack that more deeply the first three Sundays of July. Now, if this were not true, discipleship and ministry would be impossible.

For you and I are simply no match for sin, evil, and death. You and I and all the other you's and I's on this planet are no match for these foes.

But Jesus is. Only Jesus is. And He has defeated them. Sin, evil, and death, as strong as they may be, are not as strong as Jesus.

[7 : 1 8] They do not have the last word in any of our situations. Would you agree? And fourth, and most importantly, I know that we are not alone in any of our situations.

This is the major fact that Jesus wants us to get a hold of. We are never alone, anywhere, anytime. There is a presence in the absence. There is a presence in the absence of Jesus' physical presence.

There is a person. Bigger, stronger, wiser, more loving, more just than any other person or powers in the situation. The paraclete is there.

That's what Jesus calls him. The paraclete, the one called alongside. Another paraclete, as Jesus says. Another of the same kind called in alongside. Just like Jesus.

So much like Jesus that the presence of the paraclete is the presence of Jesus. In every situation, the paraclete is there. Would you agree? I go to the Father.

[8 : 24] I go to the Father. And when I go, I will send the paraclete, the Holy Spirit, to be with you and in you. And not just there. At work there.

On the job there. Very much on the job. And this is the truth. I want to emphasize today and next Sunday. He is at work not only in us in our situations.

He is at work in every other person in our situations. The paraclete is at work in Jesus' disciples. Hallelujah.

And he is at work in those who are not yet Jesus' disciples. Double hallelujah. The paraclete is at work in you and in me.

We are surrounded by his presence. We are indwelt by his presence. He is bringing to remembrance all the things that Jesus said. He is teaching us. He is leading us into the truth. He is disclosing what is to come.

[9 : 28] Making Jesus and his Father real to us. And the paraclete is doing this not only when we meet in the sanctuary or for Bible study. He is out there in the places where we live and work.

Where we spend the majority of our time. And not only in us out there. But in the world out there.

The paraclete quite apart from us. Is at work out there in the world. On behalf of the world. Now it's important for us to remember.

What John who records Jesus' words. Means by the word world. The actual word is the word cosmos. And cosmos in John's vocabulary does not return to the material world.

It doesn't refer to the earth, the sky and the sea. Rather cosmos refers to human society organizing itself without God.

[10 : 30] World or cosmos is human existence. Human society resisting God. Rejecting God. Rebelling against God. Do you know any place like that?

World. Our situation. The context in which we are called to bear witness. The context in which we are called to testify that Jesus is Lord of the world.

He is mighty to save. And to testify in such a way that the world chooses to no longer be world. To no longer be human society organizing itself without God.

But how? How in heaven's name can we witness to Jesus. And have that witness break through to the world. In many parts of the world the doors are literally closed to witness.

In our part of the world unbelief seems invincible. The values and presuppositions of a secular age appear to be impenetrable. So how do we break through?

[11 : 36] Answer. We do not. We do not break through. We cannot break through. But the paraclete can and he does.

And that's what Jesus wants us to get. He wants us to realize this about every situation. That the paraclete is there and he can break through. Listen again.

John 15 verse 26. When the paraclete comes he will bear witness of me. Yes we bear witness.

But what Jesus emphasizes is that even if we do not the Holy Spirit does. Listen. John 16 verse 8.

He says. And he when he comes he will convict the world. He the spirit of truth. He will convict human society that it's wrong about organizing itself without God.

[12 : 33] Like a prosecuting attorney. He will break through the resistance. The rebelling and the rejection. And convict the world. Not in the sense of securing a conviction before a judge.

But in the sense of driving home personal conviction. Conviction in an individual's heart and mind. In any situation. Office. Home. School. School.

The paraclete is at work. And he's working to bring about a whole new way of thinking and feeling about Jesus. He will witness of me.

Says Jesus. In such a way. As to bring about the conviction that leads to the decision to no longer be world. What a mystery. And what a relief.

We are not the ones who must break through to the world. This is the work of the paraclete. The Holy Spirit.

[13 : 30] The third person of the Trinity. He is the great evangelist. Yes we are to bear our witness. But our witness only works because the paraclete is bearing his witness.

One of my favorite scholars is Leslie Newbigin. He was a British Anglican. Who spent most of his adult life in India. Particularly among Hindus in South India.

If you've ever spent time in dialogue with the Hindu worldview. You know what a challenge those years must have been. Let me read Newbigin's insight into Jesus' statement that the paraclete will bear witness.

I'm reading from his book. The light has come. If you can buy only one book on the Gospel of John. By Leslie Newbigin. The light has come. It is important to note what is not said.

It is not said that the Spirit will help the disciple to bear witness. Now that's true. Jesus does say that in another place. But not here. It is not said that the Spirit will help the disciple to bear witness.

[14 : 41] That would make the action of disciples primary. And that of the Spirit auxiliary. What is said is that the Spirit will bear witness.

And that secondarily the disciples are witnesses. The Gospel repeatedly affirms that it is not the work of men and women. But of God to bring people to the knowledge of Jesus as he truly is.

To know Jesus as Lord can never be the work of flesh and blood. It is always a miracle of God's grace. And never the direct result of even the most impressive proclamation. For no one comes to Jesus unless the Father draws him.

What is promised here is that the contradiction of the world. Which is set up by the presence in it of a community. Which in the name of Jesus is hated and rejected and persecuted.

Will be the occasion for the mighty Spirit. Who is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of truth. To perform his own miracle in the hearts and conscience of people.

[15 : 40] So that they are brought to recognize Jesus as the one he is. The promise to the community of the disciples. Is not that they will have the Spirit at their disposal.

To help them in their work of proclamation. That is a true statement. Acts 1.8 says that. But not here. The promise to the community. Is not that they will have the Spirit at their disposal. To help them in their work of proclamation.

That misunderstanding has profoundly distorted the missionary action of the church. And provided the occasion for a kind of missionary triumphalism. Of which we ought to be ashamed. The Spirit is not the church's auxiliary.

The promise is that the mighty Spirit of God will bear his own witness. To the crucified Jesus as Lord and giver of life.

Do you see how this transforms our situations? Long before we say or do anything. The paraclete is already on the job.

[16 : 42] He is always already on the job. Out there doing his thing quite apart from us. We tend to think that evangelism happens only when we show up.

Not so. The great evangelist is there ahead of us. Would you agree? The privilege we are given is that of joining him in his already well on its way task.

We are not the ones who bring conviction of faith. He will. The paraclete will. The Spirit will. And is this not what we see being worked out in the New Testament document we call the Acts?

Many people call Acts the Acts of the Apostles. In one sense that is correct. But in another sense it is profoundly misleading. For what Luke, the author of Acts, is relaying is not the human actions of Jesus' apostles.

But the supra-human action of Jesus' Spirit. The document should be called the Acts of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit, not the Apostle Peter, who brought about conviction on the day of Pentecost.

[17 : 59] It is the Spirit and not the Apostles who begins the first missionary movement into the city of Jerusalem. It is the Spirit who leads Stephen to break out of the confines of Judaism and to reach the Greeks.

It is the Spirit who brings in the Samaritans and the Ethiopian eunuch and the Gentile God-fearers like Cornelius. And it is the Spirit who breaks into the middle of a worship service.

Imagine that. Right in the middle of a worship service. And tells the church to send Paul and Barnabas into Asia Minor. So long before any of us move to share the good news of Jesus Christ, the Spirit is already on the move.

Long before we come on the scene, the Spirit is already there. And in his own way, he is bearing witness to Jesus. He is making Jesus real and attractive. So a friend of mine named Jody Hoffman, he is a systems engineer for TRW, defines evangelism this way.

He had heard me speak about this in another context. And in the parking lot afterwards, Jody says, Hey, Daryl, try this on. Evangelism is listening in on a conversation the Holy Spirit is having with a person.

[19 : 22] Isn't that good? Evangelism is listening in on a conversation the Holy Spirit is having with a person.

And only speaking if the Spirit or the person asks you to. That is what's going on in the space where we spend most of our time.

As we and other people in our situation try to make sense of our lives, the Spirit is having conversations with us and with them.

And when we listen carefully, we can sometimes hear this conversation and sometimes are given the privilege of joining it.

Now, we see this mystery worked out throughout the larger biblical story. For instance, in the story of Abraham and a king named Abimelech, Abraham, out of fear, had said of his wife Sarah, She is my sister.

[20 : 32] And so Abimelech took Sarah into his harem. But the text says, Genesis 20, God came to Abimelech in a dream at night and said to him, You are a dead man because of this woman you've taken for she's married.

How many other kings are hearing just such a word? Some, like Abimelech, hear it and respond.

Others ignore it. But the Spirit was there having a conversation with that king. Or the story of Joseph in his dealings with Pharaoh of Egypt.

The text says, Genesis 41, that Pharaoh experienced a number of puzzling dreams over a period of time. The dreams troubled his spirit. He did not know why he was dreaming or what the dreams meant.

But then someone mentioned this boy named Joseph who was helpful in recognizing what dreams meant, and recognizing this conversation the Holy Spirit is having. And Joseph says to Pharaoh, God has told to Pharaoh what he was about to do.

[21 : 40] God is speaking to Pharaoh. How many other Pharaohs has God spoken to? How many other leaders of the world is God speaking to right now who are having restless nights and puzzling dreams?

Or the story of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. The text says, Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, and in his spirit was trouble, and his sleep left him.

Daniel is brought in to try to help the king. He recognizes that the Spirit of God is having a conversation with Nebuchadnezzar, and Daniel says to the king, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has made known to Nebuchadnezzar what is to come.

How wonderful! God wants that pagan secular leader to know what's coming down in the world. And so he's speaking to Nebuchadnezzar. The Spirit enters into a conversation with him, and Daniel gets the privilege of joining and interpreting it.

One more example. The story of Pilate's wife. Pilate is wrestling with what to do with Jesus. The fact that Pilate wrestles is indication that the Spirit of God is work.

[22 : 54] You realize that? Anytime anyone gets agitated with Jesus, it's because the Spirit's speaking. Matthew tells us that as Pilate wrestles, his wife sends word to him, Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for today I suffered greatly a dream because of him.

Matthew 27, 19. The Spirit was bearing witness in the heart and mind of Pilate's wife, a righteous man, and both she and Pilate knew they were being spoken to by someone bigger than either of them.

So long before any of us bears witness in our situation, the Spirit is already there bearing his.

Sometimes he asks us to speak into the conversation. Sometimes he does not. Either way, he is on the job.

Now, I think, if we listen carefully, we can hear the conversation the Spirit's having with our time in so much of the contemporary music.

[24 : 07] You listen to the music, and there is this deep groaning. There is this deep longing for someone outside ourselves to help us.

Why? Because the Spirit is speaking, opening people up to that more. Consider Celine Dion and her song, Call the Man.

Close the door. Shut the world away. All the fights gone out from this wounded heart across the floor, dreams and shadows play like wind-blown refugees.

Call the man who deals in love beyond repair. He can heal the world of hearts in need of care. Shine a light ahead when the next step is unclear. Call the man. He's needed here.

Needed in the chaos and confusion from the plains to City Hall. Needed where the proud who walk the wire are set to fall. Call the man who deals in once upon a time. Maybe he can mend this broken heart of mine.

[25 : 12] Shine a light ahead. Now the future isn't clear. Call the man. He's needed here. Call the man. He's needed here. He's needed here. He's needed here. Call the man. He's needed here. Right here.

Right now. Knowingly or unknowingly, the song is responding to the witness of the Spirit to the man. He, the paraclete, says Jesus, will bear witness of me.

In the world, organizing itself without God, the Spirit will bear witness to Jesus. We'll take this deeper next Sunday.

Let us pray. O blessed paraclete, give us ears to hear your witness in our hearts and ears to hear your witness in the hearts of people in the places where we live.

we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.