

The Spirit who can change hearts

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[0 : 00] We're going to be reading from the Gospel of John, chapter 16, if you'd like to turn there. We're going to be starting from the middle of verse 4, which is the start of the paragraph there. And just a bit of context, we're going to be reading Jesus' words to his disciples the night before he's crucified.

John, chapter 16, starting halfway through verse 4. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.

But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, where are you going? But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth.

It is to your advantage that I go away. For if I do not go away, the helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

Concerning sin, because they do not believe in me.

[1 : 06] Concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you will see me no longer.

Concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. For he will not speak on his own authority.

But whatever he hears, he will speak. And he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me. For he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

All that the Father has is mine. Therefore, I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. Okay.

Voices have died down. Why don't we make a start? My name is Dave. I'm one of the pastors here. If you don't know me, thanks for being with us. I'm going to pray before we look at God's word.

[2 : 07] Would you pray with me? Lord God, you are not silent, but you speak.

You are not distant, but you are with us. And so we ask that you would speak to each of our hearts this morning. Lord, I pray that you would give each of us ears to hear you, minds to understand and hearts that actually cherish what you say.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, when we are stuck in our sin or paralyzed by discouragement or feeling inadequate to do any good, when our heart is more in love with what the world has to offer rather than the joy and the peace that Jesus has to offer, what hope do we have that we can change?

I reckon surely if Jesus was standing right in front of us, in the flesh, he could set us free from our sin.

His presence would renew us, encourage us, put us back on our feet. His power would be visible, and desire for him would trump whatever the world has to offer.

[3 : 45] Surely if he was right here, that would help us, that would change us. But the surprising thing that our Lord says to us this morning in our passage is that it is to your advantage.

It is better for you that I go away. How can that possibly be better? When a family member doesn't want to believe in Jesus, when they make you feel stupid, perhaps even ashamed, for believing what Jesus says, how can it be better that Jesus isn't here?

When Christians and churches argue and distance themselves from one another over small differences, how can it be better that Jesus isn't here? When you've got me and Rob and David to stand up here and preach, how is it not better that Jesus isn't here preaching?

When we want all of Glendale and all university students and all of Myanmar and PNG and Pillard to hear the good news and believe and have eternal life, how is it not better that Jesus isn't here?

During the days of the Reformation, when Martin Luther was making a stand for the gospel that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, by God's word alone, but those with all the power in this world were hunting him down to kill him, how is it not better that Jesus wasn't here at that time?

[5 : 33] When in the early days of the church and Roman emperors who had all the power sometimes systematically attacked the Christians, burning rare copies of the Bible, killing church leaders, and sometimes ordering an empire-wide, everyone in the empire had to sacrifice the Roman gods or be executed.

How is it not better at that time for the church when it was just starting for Jesus not to be here, to protect it? Or when the church began initially, it was just 120 people, less people than in this room, and ordinary people, alone and fearful in Jerusalem, and yet they're tasked to take the good news to the whole world.

How is it not better that Jesus wasn't here? How is it not better? How is it not better? How is it not better that Jesus wasn't here? Let's find out.

Let's listen to John 16. In John 16, we're in the upper room, and in about 24 hours, Jesus will be dead.

So like a commander, he's preparing his troops for the battle to come. Up to this point, he's been with them, absorbing all the hostility upon himself, with the disciples tucked safely behind him.

[7 : 10] But he warns us, this hostility won't stop once he's gone, it's just going to be redirected to his people. Don't be surprised. Hold your ground.

Keep telling people the truth. But the people of this world aren't only lacking information about God. If they were, every single person who met Jesus would have believed. But that didn't happen. What is the real problem? What's the real obstacle?

John 3, verse 19 tells us, and this is the judgment. The light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

How do you like it when in the dark someone turns the light on? It's really annoying, isn't it? How will Jesus' disciples have any success in bringing people who love darkness into the light of knowing God?

[8 : 27] Jesus is saying, get ready to take all the hits, stand firm, continue offering the world what it doesn't want.

In the TV series, *Blackadder Goes Forth*, Rowan Atkinson plays Captain Blackadder, and he's in the trenches during World War II, and in one scene, the army general pays a visit to the trenches before the troops go over the top and advance towards the enemies with their machine guns.

And the general asks the soldier, Baldrick, are you looking forward to the big push? to which Baldrick replies, no, sir, I'm absolutely terrified.

The general laughs, ah, the healthy humour of the honest Tommy, don't worry, my boy, if you should falter, remember I am right behind you. To which Rowan Atkinson says, yes, about 35 miles behind you.

The disciples are filled with sorrow in their heart.

[9 : 55] And it seems reasonable, doesn't it? Our King is leaving us. Have you ever felt disillusioned with the local church?

discouraged from not seeing any fruit? Perhaps you've even experienced the sting of hostile friends and families who are trying to turn off the light.

But is it right for the apostles then and for us now to be filled with sorrow? Is it right? Jesus doesn't think so. He draws the disciples' attention to the fact that none of you ask me where I'm going.

Why should they be focused on that? And didn't Peter just hours before ask that very question?

I think when Peter asked it, he wasn't focused on the actual answer. But like a child who expects to spend the day with their dad and their dad is called in to work for an emergency and the child asks the dad, where are you going?

[11 : 14] It's an expression of feeling abandoned. Why are you leaving me? The disciples aren't focused on where Jesus is going.

They're focused on the hardships that his leaving will mean for them. So why should they and why should we be focused on where Jesus is going?

Sometimes I can get into this self-pitying headspace where woe is me. All I can think about is the negative impacts on me and Emma has to put up with me.

I don't know if you've experienced this, but what do I need at that point in time to put my attention to? What's going to refresh my perspective and give me new strength?

I need to remember why Jesus left. I need to remember where he is and how he's giving me, he's giving us all we need to face the circumstances that we're in.

[12:29] Our king is not 35 miles behind us. The king we serve, he went alone into the battle that won the war.

He took upon himself the full force of the hatred of the world. He let Satan have his hour over him. He took our sin and he ran straight towards the wrath and judgment of God.

He did it for us. Without him leaving, I would still love the darkness. But now he is raised to the Father's side in all authority and he's raised us with him.

we no longer belong to the world but we are the eternal children of God. And you and I right here and now have all the authority of heaven at work to help us in every single moment that we face. That's not reason for sorrow, that's reason for rejoicing. But even at this late hour, the apostles still don't get what Jesus is about to do for them.

[13:54] They have the truth sitting right across from them but the truth hasn't gripped their hearts yet. Jesus is going to win the decisive battle but even when he's gone, it's still better for the church that he isn't here.

while we represent him on earth. So why is it better? Verse 7, have a look. For if I do not go away, the helper will not come to you but if I go, I will send him to you.

We're not told why the Holy Spirit can't be sent until Jesus is gone. It could be because it's only once Christ gets the victory that the Holy Spirit can apply that victory into our hearts but whatever the reason, Jesus says it's better that he leaves and the Spirit comes and he explains why.

He doesn't leave it at that. He helps us understand why. The Spirit's going to do two things. Notice the Spirit's two names. They tell us what his two works will be.

In verses 8 to 11 he's the helper which doesn't mean he's a personal assistant. The word doesn't have an exact translation for English but it's more like a legal prosecutor who argues for the truth convicting unbelieving hostile hearts of the truth of Christ.

[15:27] And in verses 12 to 15 he's called the Spirit of Truth because he guides Christ's people into all truth by speaking on behalf of Christ and about Christ.

So let's take a closer look at each of these. First the prosecutor. Verse 8 Now these verses are difficult.

When I first read them I was so confused. I was like what is going on? But once we look at them it's really encouraging.

We don't have time to go through all the detail of the verses so let me just highlight the overall flow of what's being said here. When the Spirit's work is mentioned in the New Testament it's nearly always in Christians, among Christians.

But here the Spirit will be working in the unbelieving world. So picture an average Australian happy in their materialistic self-centered lifestyle.

[16:51] not interested in God because they're convinced the universe created itself and yet self-assured that they are a good person.

So much so that there's not even slight fear that God's judgment might be coming. What hope of change is there in a heart like that?

if we really polish our church services and our ministries is that going to change? From culture to culture the expression of this is going to change.

From person to person the expression of this unbelief is going to change. But what is universal is that humanly speaking it is impossible that a single heart is changed.

And that's why these verses are such good news. It's the only reason we're here this morning.

There's only one power that gives us any hope. The Holy Spirit convicting a person's heart of the truth.

[18:06] Notice that this conviction is all centred on Jesus and what he has done. about sin because they do not believe in me.

If Jesus is the exact measure of what is right and good but someone just disregards Jesus, how can a person even see their own sin clearly?

They've already disregarded the measure of what's good. The Spirit must show someone their sin. Otherwise we're blind to it.

Whenever you see your sin that is God's grace. About righteousness because I go to the Father and you see me no longer.

If you ask someone today are you a good person? I think most people would say yeah, I'm pretty good. But what's the measure they're using to evaluate their own righteousness?

[19 : 20] While Jesus was on earth, his righteousness exposed every false measure of righteousness. righteousness. But since Jesus goes to the Father, he is vindicated as being the only true righteous one.

Even though the world condemned him, he is righteous. And when he says we see him no longer, he's referring to his death.

He's leaving. he's going to die in order to give us true righteousness. The Holy Spirit alone can expose a person's false sense of goodness and also convict a person of Jesus' true righteousness. About judgment. Because the ruler of this world is judged. Despite the world deciding that Jesus should die, what really happened on the cross was that Jesus judged the ruler of this world, Satan, and all who belong to him by believing lies.

The cross of Jesus tells the world that they stand under God's judgment. judgment. A person needs to be convicted of their wrong assessment of Jesus and convicted that they are in danger of God's judgment.

[21 : 02] This is good news. What hope is there that unbelieving, hostile hearts can change? What hope is there is that the spirit smashes through unbelief and presses the truth into someone's heart?

If you believe in Jesus this morning, you didn't just need information to make an informed choice. You needed the spirit to break you down, to get into your heart, to smash through our unbelief, expose your sin, expose your false measure of goodness, expose that you're in danger of the judgment of God and then show you Christ and how good he is and that he's able to save us. Praise God for the spirit's work in our hearts. It is a miracle if you believe. But by what means does the spirit usually do this heart convicting work?

The primary instrument he uses is the witness of Christ's people. Notice that although the spirit works in the world, that the spirit is given to you, to the disciples.

And at the end of the previous chapter, the hostile world will be taken on by the spirit bearing witness and the church, the disciples bearing witness. They're united in doing that. The spirit works through the witness of the church.

[22 : 40] As we live for the truth, as we speak the truth, if the spirit takes that and works it in a person's heart, how can our witness fail to achieve everything that God wants it to achieve?

You and I can't get to a person's heart. I don't believe I can, preaching this morning.

I can't get to a person's heart. But that's not my job. That's not our job. That's not a burden we should carry. That's the spirit's job. But the spirit does use us, his local church, as his primary instrument.

And that's why the second work of the Holy Spirit in verses 12 to 15 is just as critical and exactly what we need. The apostles couldn't handle all that they were hearing from Jesus.

It wasn't sinking in. Partly that's because Jesus hadn't died and risen yet. But it's also probably because like us all, grasping the truth is not a one-time event.

[24 : 00] It's an ongoing process. So this is what the spirit does for us. Look at verse 14. In an even better way, the church does have Christ speaking to us, but speaking by the spirit into our hearts so that we actually believe what we hear.

like the son only speaking with the authority of the father, so the spirit will only speak with the authority of the son.

In other words, there is no more truth about God to be found that is outside of Jesus. It's all in Jesus. The spirit places the entire spotlight on Christ.

Christ. He wants Christ to get all the glory in our hearts, in the world. He wants us to know him, believe him, and love him.

The spirit took what the apostles saw as they lived with Jesus through his earthly ministry the whole way through. He took what the apostles saw and then he made them believe it and taught them the implications of all that they saw, how to live the Christian way.

[25 : 42] So this work of the spirit is first for the apostles. Then through the teaching of the apostles, the spirit works all truth into the hearts of the entire church down through the ages, from

generation to generation.

We only know about Christ because of the New Testament, because of God's word showing us the Old Testament, the promises being fulfilled.

We only know that through the apostles' testimony. testimony. Through the word of God, the spirit speaks into our hearts.

And there's so many encouraging implications of this. You and I don't need to go searching for God's voice in our gut feelings.

We don't need to go searching for God's voice in a random lyric playing on the radio. We search for God's voice in the truth of God's word.

[26 : 55] Whenever you read it, whenever you hear truthful teaching, when your friend speaks it to you, you are hearing the spirit speak. God's word is not this static textbook that we dissect and analyze.

God's word is alive and active because the spirit is at work speaking through the word to glorify Christ. God is speaking.

Now some truths will grip us in a penny drop moment. We'll just say, oh wow, I never saw that before. But I think other truths are just bit by bit by bit by bit, like a stream cutting away the rock.

The spirit is at work speaking to our hearts, helping us understand Christ. We are not left alone to understand Christ, to believe Christ, to live for him.

The spirit is among us and in us, speaking. Now I don't think this should make us lazy and passive. I think this actually gives us confidence that any effort we put in at small group discussion, in Grace Kids, over the dinner table, one to ones, in all our conversations with one another, any effort that we put in to help one another know Christ better, this gives us confidence that the spirit is taking that and working it in our hearts.

[28 : 36] it's not useless, he's powerfully at work. So let's return to our original question, how can it possibly be better that Jesus leaves his people?

Even though we sometimes feel abandoned, our Lord has not left us as orphans in this world. It is better that Jesus left because the spirit is here changing hearts, convicting the world and guiding the church into truth.

Remember how the church began. Just a handful of ordinary people in one city behind closed doors, probably afraid for their own lives, intimidated by the task going to the whole world.

But when the spirit came, Peter, who had once disowned Christ publicly, this time he goes out into the world and he says, let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.

And what happened? Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart. And said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, brothers, what shall we do? And Peter said to them, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[30 : 20] For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord God calls to himself. So those who received his word were baptized and there were added that day about 3,000 souls and they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Instead of seeing Jesus with our eyes and hearing him with our ears, better than that, we have the Spirit speaking the truth with convicting force into our hearts.

That family member who humanly speaking has no chance of seeing their sin and crying out for a saviour, when you feel threatened and fearful and alone in your conversations with them, remember the Spirit can change hearts.

So pray. while ever as a church and as families and in our own minds we are constantly seeking God's voice through his word, then we can have every confidence the Spirit will change our hearts to be more and more satisfied by the truth.

It's better for us because the Spirit is here changing our hearts. Will you pray with me? Father, left to ourselves we would not only not understand the gospel, we would not be attracted to you.

[32 : 21] We would want to keep living for ourselves. Father, we praise your mercy for sending Jesus to die for us and sending your Spirit to change our hearts, to break through our unbelief.

We are only here this morning because of your mercy alone. Help us as a church praise your mercy alone.

Father, help us as a church to seek after your voice. Thank you that you're with us. Thank you that you have not left us. Keep speaking to us, Lord, and give us hearts that listen.
In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen.
[33 : 35] Amen. Amen.