

### (3) The Spirit of conviction

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 17 June 2007

Preacher: Simon Dowdy

[ 0 : 0 0 ] This morning's reading is John chapter 16 verses 1 to 11 and this can be found on page 1088 of the Bibles on the Chairs.

John chapter 16 beginning at verse 1. I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.

They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father nor me.

But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. 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.

[ 1 : 0 5 ] 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.

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.

Well, a very warm welcome to you. Now, a couple of weeks ago we had a plumber round at home doing some work on the boiler. We thought that would be safer to have it done in June rather than sort of February.

And we got talking with him about the claims of Jesus Christ. And at one level he seemed interested. But having sort of pushed him, his bottom line really was very much that all faiths are right and all faiths are wrong.

[ 2 : 0 9 ] As he said. It doesn't matter what you believe, he told me, as long as it makes you feel good. I asked him if he had ever investigated the claims of Jesus Christ for himself. He said he would like to do so.

But we put it off until he retires. I actually think he is about my age. So that comes sometime in the distance. Now, I guess that many of us have had conversations like that.

And if you're anything like me, you're left thinking, well, how will they ever come to the point of actually putting their trust in Jesus Christ? Or perhaps you've thought, well, if only Jesus himself were here to explain things to him, perhaps then they might believe.

But obviously Jesus isn't here. Which leaves us asking, how will someone like that ever really grasp the implications of Jesus' teaching for themselves?

Well, this passage in John's Gospel gives us the answer. We're continuing our series on the work of the Holy Spirit, which we started a few weeks ago, where we are looking really at Jesus' core teaching, if you like, on who the Spirit is and the work that he does.

[ 3 : 18 ] And here in John chapter 16, do open the Bibles to page 1084, if you've closed them. Here in John chapter 16, we're just a few hours before Jesus' arrest, his trial and his crucifixion.

He's been telling his disciples that having been with them for three years, he's now going to leave them. And if you look at verse 6, you see they are full of grief at that prospect.

And so he says to them in verse 7, I'll tell you the truth, it is for your good that I'm going away. And the reason it's for their good is because of the work the Spirit will do when he comes.

It is he who will convict the world of the truth about Jesus. Now, if you take up the outline you were given as you came in, you'll see our first point is the problem of hatred.

This passage focuses on the work of the Spirit in the world. Indeed, I think it's the only New Testament passage which tells us what the Spirit is doing generally in the world.

[ 4 : 28 ] As we said in the first talk in this series, no way does the Bible speak of the Spirit being at work, revealing God, for example, in other religions. In the first talk in this series, no way does the Bible speak of the Spirit.

I've been playing quite a bit of squash. I've been winning one or two games. And I think I'd even sort of begun to think actually I was quite reasonable on the squash course. Until that is, I challenged a man who had quite a good reputation for being relatively decent as a squash player himself.

But since he was 30 years older than I was, I considered I might have the advantage over him. Well, that was all shattered when at the start of the second game, he suggested I start with a five-point lead.

I knew at that moment I was thoroughly beaten and humiliated. I've been well and truly convicted, if you like, that actually I wasn't a particularly good squash player at all.

Or similarly here we see in John chapter 16 that the work of the Spirit is to convict. It is to shame. It is to accuse. And notice in verse 8, it is to convict the world.

[ 6 : 06 ] Now when John writes about the world, he does not mean the world kind of geographically in the sense of the globe like that. Rather, he means the world in the sense of men and women who are by nature hostile to God.

Just turn back a page because you get a flavour of that hostility. In chapter 15, verse 18, where Jesus says, If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

Or verse 24, now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. For this is to fulfil what is written in their law, they hated me without reason.

The world naturally hates God. That says Jesus is what all of us are by nature like. We may be religious, we may not be religious, but by nature we hate God.

And therefore, when Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, comes to the world, it is of course no surprise that men and women by nature hate him too. I put John 1, verse 10 on the outline, where we see that he was in the world, speaking of Jesus, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him.

[ 7 : 29 ] The world naturally hates Jesus. And notice there's a sort of irrationality about it in verse 24. They hated me without reason. The world naturally hates Jesus.

And we'll never appreciate the power of the Spirit and the work the Spirit has come to do until we have really grasped that. Otherwise, we may, for example, think that it may be the force of persuasive arguments that will convince people to become Christians.

Perhaps, for example, the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, there is good evidence for the resurrection. But however persuasive the evidence, and it is persuasive, nonetheless, the evidence alone is not enough to convince people to follow Christ.

Until we have grasped that, we'll never really appreciate the power of the Spirit to convict. Or we may be tempted to trust in the power of personal friendship.

You sometimes hear Christians saying something like this, well, I can't invite so-and-so along to come and hear the claims of Jesus yet, because I don't know them well enough. As if the sort of strength of the personal friendship will make it easier for someone to become a Christian and to believe in Jesus.

[ 8 : 49 ] But of course, if by nature, men and women hate Jesus, if they rejected Him as they did, even when they saw Him face to face, then no friendship, no human friendship, however strong, is going to overcome that hurdle.

And until we've grasped that, we'll never appreciate the power of the Spirit to expose our guilt. Others talk about the journey of faith, the idea that everyone is on a sort of spiritual journey towards enlightenment, and then eventually they'll discover the truth for themselves.

But of course, that kind of thinking places the whole emphasis on our own discovery and ignores the fact that by nature we hate God, and that by nature we are not interested in the truth.

Now, it's hard teaching, isn't it, for us to grasp, as Jesus teaches us this, but it's only once we're convinced that by nature men and women naturally hate God, that our confidence then to convict people of the truth about God will cease to be in our own human efforts, but actually will be in the Spirit.

Well, that brings us to our second point, the power to convict. Because in verses 8 to 11 here, Jesus explains three ways in which the Spirit will work, in which the Holy Spirit will work, to convict the world.

[ 10 : 21 ] And we're going to have a look at them one by one. First of all, the Spirit will convict the world of sin. Have a look at verse 9. In regard to sin, because men do not believe in me.

Now, I think it's fair to say, isn't it, that our culture doesn't really take the idea of sin very seriously. We either think it's the kind of thing which hits the front page of the tabloids, and while shocking, nonetheless does not describe most of us most of the time, or we just think sin is a bit of fun, perhaps things which actually we quite enjoy doing, but which the Church disapproves of.

But no, when we come to the Bible, sin is this natural rejection of Jesus Christ that we've been thinking about already this lunchtime. Jesus reveals God fully. He does what God does. He says what God says.

Jesus says that if you've seen me, if you've seen Jesus, you've seen God the Father. And therefore, it is clearly a dreadful thing to ignore Jesus. At the heart of sin is this rejection of Jesus Christ.

As Jesus himself says in John 3.18 on the outline, Whoever believes in him, that's Jesus speaking of himself, is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

[ 11 : 44 ] The great sin, if you like, of humanity is this refusal to believe in Jesus as God, and the rejection of Jesus as the Lord of our lives.

Now, we may acknowledge him in our heads, but in terms of day-to-day life, he is irrelevant. But while that guilty verdict then stands, the Spirit's work is to convict us of our guilt before God.

His work is to show us the seriousness of not believing in Jesus. And I guess many of us here this lunchtime will remember that moment when we first grasped the seriousness of sin and that we are guilty before God.

And many of us will want to give thanks for the Spirit's work powerfully in us, convicting us of our sin. So the Spirit will convict the world of sin. Secondly, the Spirit will convict the world of righteousness.

Have a look at verse 10. In regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father where you can see me no longer. In other words, the Spirit will convict us of the inadequacy of our own righteousness.

[ 12 : 58 ] Because, of course, all of us naturally have a totally wrong view, a totally distorted view of what is right and what is wrong. And we assume, don't we, that on the whole, God is pleased with us. We convince ourselves we are good people.

I've never done anyone any harm, we say. I'm not like so-and-so. Or I'm involved in the community. Or I just sort of get on with living my life. And we convince ourselves that we are good.

Because, of course, there are always other people who are worse than we are. Perhaps we think to ourselves, well, at least I don't treat the people who work for me like he does, or like she does.

Or, well, at least I don't go to lap dance clubs. Or at least I don't fiddle my expenses. Or, well, not too much anyway. And in our self-righteousness, we can begin to think, actually, we are okay with God.

Well, can you see in verse 10, the Spirit's job is to convict us of the foolishness of that kind of thinking. And the inadequacy of our own righteousness, that we are not righteous.

[ 14 : 01 ] And that by nature, God is not pleased with us. It's what Jesus did when he was on earth, but now that he's going, the Spirit will do it. And again, many of us here this last time will remember when we first became aware of that.

And we will want to give thanks for the Spirit's work convicting us of our lack of righteousness. So the Spirit will convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and finally, of judgment.

Have a look at verse 11. And in regard to judgment, because of the prince of this world, now stands condemned. condemned. Now back in John chapter 12, verse 31, Jesus said, speaking of his death, now is the time for judgment on this world.

Now the prince of this world will be driven out. At that moment, at the moment of Jesus' death, the fate of the devil, who is the prince of this world, was sealed. His hold over people was broken and defeated.

He stands condemned as to all those who reject Jesus. And it's now only a matter of time before Jesus' enemies are held to account.

[ 15 : 17 ] Now again, we have to say, don't we, that that is something that many people simply dismiss out of hands as scaremongering. God won't judge, they say. He's a loving God, and he is a loving God.

But he's also a holy God. He is a just God. He will exercise his just, right, fair justice on the final day.

And God, in his great love, has sent his spirit to convict the world of that. So then, the spirit's job, what is he going to do? He's going to convict the world of its sin, the seriousness of living in God's world and ignoring Jesus, of our lack of righteousness that none of us are right with God by nature and of the reality of judgment.

It's not, of course, that the spirit delights to see people squirming, so to speak, in guilt, but God loves us and he wants to show us our needs of Jesus' rescue and to turn to him.

So can we see why Jesus says in verse 7 that it's so much better that he's going and so much better that the spirit is coming so that he can convict the world. It's funny, isn't it?

[ 16 : 32 ] The world often prides itself on putting God in the dock. Witness the runaway success in the top 10 list of books, the runaway success of Richard Dawkins, The God Delusion.

But, of course, the spirit's job is to put us in the dock. Perhaps you've had a conversation with a friend about some aspect of Jesus' teaching.

Perhaps at one level you've been thrilled to have had the opportunity to talk about Jesus, but another level felt pretty inadequate. And you thought to yourself, well, if only a Rico Tice or if only a C.S. Lewis could suddenly appear, surely they'd do a much better job of explaining things than I ever could.

Well, take heart, says Jesus. There is someone far more able to convince and convict than a C.S. Lewis or Rico Tice or whoever it is you happen to choose out of thin air.

The spirit. He is Jesus' public prosecutor, so to speak. It shows, doesn't it, how even someone like our plumber might come to put their trust in Jesus as the spirit convicts him.

[ 17 : 48 ] Or perhaps you'll hear this lunchtime looking in on the claims of Jesus Christ. And we're always delighted when there are one or two like that here on a Tuesday. And perhaps it's been the case that over the last few weeks as we've been looking at Mark's Gospel on Tuesday lunchtime, perhaps, although in the past you've been rather sceptical, actually as you've found yourself coming face to face with Jesus and with his teaching, perhaps you've found yourself strangely challenged, strangely moved by what you've heard, convinced even.

Perhaps you've felt some inner conviction about your own moral state before God or begun to feel the urgent need to make a decision to follow Jesus.

And it may, of course, be at that point that you'll tend to be suspicious of those feelings, not to take the whole thing too seriously, to say, well, it's all in the mind. Well, the last thing I want you to do is to encourage you to be gullible.

But there is another explanation for that growing inner conviction. It could be that the Spirit himself is convicting you of sin, of righteousness, of judgment, and calling you to put your trust in Jesus for yourself.

Now, I guess the obvious question to ask is, well, how will such conviction come about? Well, this promise about the convicting work of the Spirit happens in the context of the work of the Spirit in the apostles.

[ 19 : 23 ] You will remember that if you were here for the first two talks in this series. And in particular, we've seen that the Spirit will oversee the writing of the New Testament as the apostles come to write it.

He ensured that what they wrote was the very words of Jesus. It's there in our reading in verse 13 of chapter 16. As Jesus says, when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you, that's the apostles, into all truth.

He will not speak on his own. He will speak only what he hears. And he will tell you what is yet to come. It means the New Testament, together with the Old Testament, is the very words of God.

And those are the words that the Spirit will use to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgments. It's certainly what John expects to happen as we read his book.

Have a look at John 20, which I put there on the outline. As John says at the end of his book, these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

[ 20 : 37 ] I was at a breakfast meeting sometime again in the city, and someone quoted the words of St. Francis of Assisi. Go and preach the gospel. Use words if you have to.

But if we believe Jesus' teaching in John 16, that must be wrong, mustn't it? It's the Bible, the words of the apostles, in the New Testament, together with the Old Testament, that the Spirit will use to bring about that conviction of the truth.

So the problem of hatred, the power to convict, and I want us to finish this lunchtime by looking at how this worked out in practice in the early church.

So just turn on, will you, a few pages to page 1093 and to Acts chapter 2. Now you'll see from the heading at the top there of Acts chapter 2 that this is the day of Pentecost, the day when the Spirit came, when the Spirit first came to the early church.

Acts 2, page 1093. Now the crowds have gathered in Jerusalem for a Jewish festival and the apostle Peter stands up and explains to the crowds what has happened.

[ 21 : 57 ] He says in verse 16, it's just what the prophet Joel said would happen 700 years earlier. Verse 17, in the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people, your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

Even on my servants, both men and women, I'll pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophesy. What happens next? Well, just skimming down, the apostle Peter then preaches a sermon.

He explains the message of Jesus to the crowds who have gathered and the conclusion of the sermon is there in verse 36. as he says, verse 36, therefore, let all Israel be assured of this.

God has made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ. He's explained that Jesus is God's King, that he's been raised from the dead.

He's explained that he now rules the world from heaven and that he will return on the judgment day. What happens? Verse 37, people are convicted.

[ 23 : 13 ] They are cut to the heart. As they asked Peter and the other apostles, brothers, what shall we do? And Peter's reply, repent and be baptized every one of you for the forgiveness of sins.

And verse 41, about 3,000 people were added to the number of Christian believers that day. God's sake. Now can you see, it's just what Jesus said would happen in John 16 when the Spirit would come.

Here we see him convicting the world of their sin, their lack of righteousness and the judgment to come. And what does the Spirit use to bring about that conviction? Why, the words of the apostles.

You see, this teaching of Jesus in John 16, I take it, gives us great confidence in a hostile world, in a hostile office and in a hostile family for some of us.

Confident that the Spirit's powerful work is to convict the world of its rejection of Jesus Christ and the reality of judgment. Confidence despite our weaknesses.

[ 24 : 28 ] Confidence to talk to people about the claims of Jesus. Confidence to invite colleagues and friends to hear the claims of Jesus. Confidence perhaps to invite colleagues and friends to read the Bible for themselves.

Something like John's Gospel, one of the first-hand eyewitness accounts. Trusting that the Spirit will use God's words, the Bible, to bring about that deep conviction of the truth.

Well, as we sit, let's pray. when he comes, he will convict the world.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this work of the Spirit convicting the world of the reality of sin, of our unrighteousness, of the coming judgments.

Thank you that many of us here this lunchtime can be grateful of that work in our own lives and we pray that you would help us to go on trusting this work of the Spirit confident that this is the work he does in the world.

[ 25 : 41 ] And we ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.