

# John 16:4b-15

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[0:00] Let us pray. Father, thank you for this day. And thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. As I speak, may the words of my mouth and many meditations of our hearts be purified by the Spirit in honoring to you, O Lord, our Maker and our Redeemer. Amen.

You may be seated. As you probably guessed by the scripture reading, the focus of today's sermon is the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

And this is an important topic for us today. It seems that Jesus thought it was an important topic then. This is the fourth time he's come back to it in a single meal with his disciples. And I think it's because the church tends to swing, at least in our day, like a pendulum between one of two extremes or one of two errors.

Either there's a misunderstanding on the one hand, a misunderstanding of the Spirit, primarily in terms of personal charismatic experience. Or on the other hand, there is just missing the person and work of the Spirit altogether.

And in our passage, Jesus speaks to both errors. Churches who miss or minimize the person and work of the Spirit will be astonished to hear Jesus say that it is better for his disciples that he goes.

[1:30] Because then the Holy Spirit will come upon them. And churches who misunderstand the Spirit, primarily in terms of personal charismatic experience, will be astonished to hear Jesus say that the Spirit's ministry, at least in this passage, has to do with the world.

Convicting the world. And has to do with the church. Guiding the church. So would you please join me in John chapter 16, beginning in verse 4.

And if you need to open a Bible again, it's on page 902. John chapter 16, 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. Jesus is saying, I'm going back to the Father.

And none of you asked me, where are you going? Verse 6. But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. This is what psychologists often call anticipatory grief.

[2:34] It's the sorrow and sadness that comes to our hearts when we know that, say, a close friend is going to move away soon. Or we know a family member is on the brink of dying. We know that a great change in our relationship with this person is coming.

And we start to anticipate the loss that that's going to be for us. And so into their grieving hearts, Jesus then speaks words of comfort in verse 7. He says, nevertheless, I tell you the truth.

And here's the great promise. It is to your advantage that I go away. It's going to be better for you. For if I do not go away, the helper will not come to you.

But if I go, I will send him to you. Now, the main point here is pretty clear.

Jesus is saying that it's better for his disciples if he leaves. Because when he leaves, then he'll be able to send the Holy Spirit to them. Now, it doesn't mean that Jesus and the Holy Spirit can't inhabit the same space.

[3:35] There's some weird sort of like, I don't know what, you know, magnetic repulsion between them or something like that. Remember when Jesus says going to the Father, he talks about everything that's involved in returning to the Father.

Which means his death, his resurrection, and then his exaltation at the right hand of the Father. In other words, he talks about everything that he's going to do to save the world. By going back to the

Father through his death and his resurrection and his exaltation, Jesus ushers in a whole new kingdom.

A whole new reality of salvation. A whole new covenant. And we're told in the Old Testament that what will be the defining feature of this new covenant, of this new kingdom, of this new reality, the Holy Spirit will be poured out on all flesh like the world's never seen before.

And so that's why the Spirit can only come after Jesus is gone. Not because they can't inhabit the same space. But because the Spirit is the one who comes to bring the blessings of what Jesus has accomplished through his redemption.

By going to the Father. Does that make sense? So that's why Jesus says, it's a pretty simple point. I gotta go, because then the Spirit will come. Now if that's the main point, then here's the main question.

[4:50] Like, what are you talking about, Jesus? Like, really? Really? Better to not have you around in the flesh? What are you saying?

And the whole rest of the passage is Jesus trying to explain to them why it's better. Like, why it's better for his disciples then, and why it's better for us now. And to answer this question, Jesus highlights just two things that the Spirit will do when he comes.

In verses 8 to 11, he says the Spirit will convict the world. That's the first thing. And then in verses 12 to 15, he says the Spirit will guide the church. That's the second thing.

So convict the world. Look with me at verse 8. Here's the first. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.

Now the word convict carries with it kind of two elements as far as I can tell. The element of awareness. We need to be made aware of something that's wrong in our lives. And then the element of personal responsibility or accountability.

[6:04] We need to be, come to a place of feeling personally responsible for what's wrong in our lives. And so conviction, because it involves awareness and personal responsibility, tends to make us feel a little bit uncomfortable.

As humans, we resist being told that we're wrong. And as humans, we run, we tend to run, from what makes us uncomfortable. And one of the things that this tells us is that sometimes we can mistake a lack of peace in our hearts as a sign of the lack of God's presence or God's pleasure or God's activity.

But actually what we're learning here is that the Spirit does a convicting work. And so sometimes when we have, when we feel uncomfortable in our lives, sometimes it's a sign that, gee, the Holy Spirit is actually at work in us.

Not always, but sometimes. Because God has this way by the Spirit of putting his finger on those aspects of our lives and those aspects of our world that are most resistant to him and out of line with him.

And therefore are most desperately in need of his grace. So in John chapter 16, Jesus gives us three examples of this. Sin, righteousness, and judgment.

[7:21] Three examples. And I love the way that one commentator put it, Dale Bruner. He said, in other words, the Spirit tells us what is wrong with the world, what is right with the world, and who is in charge of the world.

I thought that was a wonderful summary. First, sin. The Spirit shows us what is wrong with the world. Jesus says that the Spirit will convict the world, in verse 9, concerning righteousness, or sorry, concerning sin, because they do not believe in me.

Now, if I were to drop a list of all the things that Canadians thought were wrong in the world, or if you were to drop your own list, it would probably be a very long list. And at the top would probably be Americans right now.

And a few other things that us Americans may be responsible for, like climate change, and immigration policies, and a bunch of other things.

Gender equality, and racism, and the opiate crisis. Housing affordability, we could go down the list, but I would doubt that many would put near the top of that list, lack of belief in Jesus is one of the great problems our nation has.

[8:36] But what Jesus is telling us is that the Holy Spirit wants us to know that this is the world's greatest sin. Our refusal to think that

Jesus is really all that important.

And our resistance to believing that he is worthy of all our trust and devotion. He is worthy of all of our affection and adoration. He is worthy of all of our obedience and love.

See, we might be willing to consider him a prophet, yes, but the creator of the world, no. Maybe some would be willing to listen to him as a wise teacher, yes, but the light of the world, no.

Some may find him somebody that's good to quote. He's an interesting soundbite, but not the bread of life. He might be a noble martyr, but he's not the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world.

And so from Canada to China to Russia to South Africa, Jesus is saying that the Spirit's job is to show the world that its greatest sin is not believing in Jesus and giving their lives over to Jesus.

[9:43] I tell you the truth, says Jesus, it's to your advantage that I go away because when the Spirit comes, he's really going to show you what's really wrong with the world. First, sin.

But there's second one, righteousness. If that's what's wrong with the world, what's right with the world? And Jesus says that the Spirit will convict the world, in verse 10, concerning righteousness. Because I go to the Father. Remember what we talked about maybe four or five minutes ago, what going to the Father means. It means Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation at the right hand of the Father.

It means the whole sweep of Jesus' mighty saving work on behalf of the world, which is about setting the world right again. And so what the Holy Spirit does is he shows us that through the saving work of Jesus on the cross, Jesus takes away the unrighteousness of the world's sin.

And he pays the just penalty for God's wrath on the world's sin. And in doing so, Jesus creates a new relationship between the world and God despite its sin.

[10:51] In other words, the Spirit's job is to show the world the beauty of the great exchange that is happening on the cross. As Jesus takes the world's unrighteousness upon his shoulders, and he gives the world a cloak of righteousness that comes from his shoulders.

I tell you the truth, says Jesus. It is to your advantage that I go away, because when the Spirit comes, the Spirit's not only going to show the world what is most deeply wrong with the world, but the Spirit is going to show the world how God is making it righteous and right again.

And third, judgment. What is wrong? What is right? And finally, who in the world is in charge? The Spirit shows the world who has won, and therefore who is in charge.

Jesus says in verse 11 that when the Spirit convicts the world, he will convict the world concerning judgment, note this, because the ruler of this world is judged.

That's a little detail that we can pass by quickly and go, what in the world does that mean? But the ruler of this world for John is Satan. The ruler of this world for John is the devil, the evil one.

[12:02] And the conviction behind this claim is that the world is the way it is. And the news headlines that we read every morning are the way they are, not simply because of economic factors or political factors or sociological factors or ecological factors, but because of spiritual forces at work in the world as well.

The world, in other words, is caught up in a great spiritual battle between good and evil, between justice and injustice, between unholiness and holiness.

And it all too often looks like the world is in the hand of evil and that evil is winning the day. And Jesus tells us in John 16 that it is the job of the Spirit to show us who has really won the victory and to show us, despite all the appearances to the contrary, that Jesus is in charge.

Jesus is alive. Jesus has risen from the dead. Jesus reigns over all the earth. And Jesus now and forever is in charge.

And the reason for that is because the great showdown between God and the devil happened at the cross of Jesus Christ. And the verdict of that great battle was declared at the tomb of Jesus Christ.

[13:22] And the verdict is God has won. Jesus has demolished sin. Jesus has defeated death. And Jesus has dethroned Satan. And so Jesus says, I tell you the truth.

It is to your advantage that I go away. Because when the Spirit comes, he's going to convict the world not only about what is wrong and what is right, but he is going to let the world know that I am

the king.

And if we have a king who has nail-scarred hands out of love for the world, then what good news it is for the world that he is the one who is in charge.

That's the first point that Jesus wants us to know about the Holy Spirit. Before we go on to the second point, I just want to, it's worth considering a question.

What sort of posture does this work of the Spirit in our lives, what sort of posture does this work of the Spirit in the world encourage disciples of Jesus to have toward the world?

[14:22] So what sort of posture should we have towards the world? Some could come away from this picture of what the Holy Spirit does in the world with quite a triumphalistic vision.

We're better than you. But that's not what I think this is about. Some could come away with this quite a judgmental vision. Look how bad and wicked you are as the world.

But I don't think that's what this is about. Some could even come away with a bit of a paternalistic vision. Things would be better if we were in charge. But I don't think that's what this is about.

Rather, I think the ministry of the Spirit, as Jesus describes it in John chapter 16, should promote in the church, on the one hand, a sober posture toward the world, and on the other hand, a hopeful posture towards the world.

Sober, because we shouldn't expect the world to always be getting it right. There are some things wrong. And yet hopeful, because the Spirit is at work in the world.

[15:26] The Spirit's not only at work in the church. The Spirit's not only at work through the ministry of the church. Yes, He is. But the Spirit is at work in the world to bring conviction and to bring people to the Lord Jesus.

And so it frees us up from having to be the triumphalistic or the judgmental or the paternalistic ones. And we can adopt a posture of humble, gentle confidence in the work of the Holy Spirit in the world. We don't have to despair. We don't have to be hostile. We don't have to be antagonistic. Because there's hope for the world. So Jesus says to us, when the Holy Spirit comes, the first thing He will do is He will convict the world.

And that's why it's better that I go. And the second point is this. When the Spirit comes, the Spirit will guide the church as it lives in the world. And that's why it's better that I go.

If you join me in verse 13, He says, when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth.

[16:34] For He will not speak on His own authority. But whatever He speaks, 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.

It's actually a fairly simple focus to the Spirit's ministry here. It's to lead the church into the fullness of the truth about Jesus. So that the truth of Jesus guides the church's life and mission in every generation.

So that Jesus is glorified. That's what the Spirit's on about. And how does the Holy Spirit does this? Well, once again, it's pretty simple in this passage and focused as well. The Spirit takes, the Spirit listens to what Jesus is speaking and He speaks that to the church.

Into the hearts and minds and lives and circumstances of the church. And interestingly, we discover that what Jesus is speaking, that the Holy Spirit then speaks into the church, is actually Jesus is listening to what the Father is speaking to Him.

[17:50] And He only ever speaks when He hears the Father speaking to Him about the Father's heart for the world. And so what we discover is that there's a cascading effect of glory. It's the Father speaking of His grace and His glory and His goodness to the Son.

And it's the Son speaking of His glory and His grace and His goodness to the Spirit. And it's the Spirit speaking of His glory and His grace and His goodness to the church. And so we see that each member of the Holy Trinity honors the other members in the way that they minister to us and redeem us.

God knows that our grace absorption rate is slow and small. So He gives us the Spirit to guide us into the riches of Christ over time.

Day by day and step by step and circumstance by circumstance, prayer by prayer, verse by verse, until we are over time filled up with all the fullness of God.

And now there's a really practical question, I think, in the last few minutes I want to consider is like, what does this work of the Spirit look like in our lives? What's the fulfillment of this? How is this coming true in our lives?

[19:06] And I think there's two things that we see is that the first fulfillment of this work of the Spirit was actually through the original apostles that Jesus was speaking to here. Because it is the original apostles that wrote the books of the New Testament.

The Spirit guided the original disciples and apostles Jesus is speaking to on this night into all the truth about Him. So that the biographies they wrote about Him, the letters they wrote to churches about Him, the prayers they prayed, the hymns they wrote, the visions they saw, the sermons they gave, everything that we have in the 27 books in the New Testament was guided by the Spirit so that it would be written down what all the truth about Jesus is.

And I think there's a second fulfillment of that that is not just then and there but is ongoing in our lives. The same Spirit who guided the writing of the New Testament through the apostles now guides the writing of the New Testament on the church's heart today.

We need the Word of God written into our hearts and minds. We need the truth of Jesus to come alive in us and fan into flame our faith.

We need the grace of the Lord Jesus and all its facets to cleanse our hearts and minds and keep us in the knowledge and love of God. We need to have the Spirit use the Word of God like a sword and wield it against our hearts to bring conviction and then to bring us true comfort.

[20:43] And this is a wonderful place to end because this is precisely what Lent is all about. See, the season of Lent actually stands under the ministry of the Holy Spirit because the ministry of the Holy Spirit is a ministry of comfort, I mean of conviction and then of guiding us into the truth.

It's 40 days of the Spirit showing us where our hearts need to be changed and transformed by Him and then 40 days of the Spirit saying, let me do just that. Exposing the darkness and forgiving our sins and removing the hardness of heart and healing the wounds and stilling the storms and at the end of it all, we'll know that we experience the Holy Spirit in our lives this Lent.

if we come away more enthralled with who Jesus is. If we come away more captured by His beauty and grateful for His glory and reliant on His grace because we know that at the end of the day what the Holy Spirit is all about is glorifying Jesus and speaking into our lives what He's heard from Jesus about the Father and making sure that our hearts are alive with the grace that Jesus came to bring.

So it is wonderful at the beginning of Lent to be invited not just to prayer and fasting and self-examination but to be invited under the shepherding and the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit.

Come Holy Spirit Come In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit Amen