

The True Nature of Sin, Righteousness and Judgement

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: 27 June 2021

Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] Good morning, church. Would you turn with me to John chapter 16? That is page 848 in the Pew Bible.

We're going to pick up this morning in the second half of verse 4 of chapter 16 and read through verse 11 for our sermon this morning. As we turn there, let me pray for us.

Let's pray together. God, we do need you, and we need you every hour, and we need you every moment.

God, you are the one who supports and sustains. Lord, it is in you that we live and move and have our being. God, thank you that you don't remain far off, but you indeed reveal yourself to us and you speak to us.

So speak to us now, Father, as we come to your word. Help us by your Holy Spirit to have ears to hear, and help us have eyes to see Jesus exalted and glorious as our true King.

[1 : 02] We pray this in His name. Amen. Amen. All right, John 16, starting in the second half of verse 4. Let me read this for us. Jesus says to the apostles, 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. 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.

So in this part of John's gospel, remember, Jesus has been telling and preparing the apostles for their upcoming mission. And in the first half of John 15, right before this passage we just read, Jesus talks about there, in the first half of 15, He talks about bearing fruit.

[2 : 15] And then in the second half of John 15, He talks about bearing witness. So this would be the mission of the church. Fruit bearing and witness bearing. A life of love in deed and in word.

But remember, all of this would happen in a context of what? In a context of resistance. Jesus says at the end of chapter 15, expect hostility from the world.

But the church would not retreat from the hostile world. Rather, we would live out our distinct fruit bearing, witness bearing life right in the middle of it.

Why? Well, because as we know from John's gospel that we've been studying for the last year, because God loves the world. And God sent His Son to save the world. And God has a purpose of redeeming a people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

But, do you remember that scene from the Lord of the Rings? When Frodo and Sam, along with the rest of sort of their band, are traveling under the mountains through the ancient home of the dwarves, the mines of Moriah.

[3 : 23] Okay, I know I lost maybe like 30% of it. But stick with me on this one. Stick with me. And so they're down in the mountains and they're under and it's dark and it's deep. And then they come to this narrow pass, this sort of narrow stone bridge.

And as they're about to cross and as they're about to make it out through the other side, this ancient evil creature comes out of the darkness. Durin's Bane, the Balrog. And suddenly all seems lost.

But what happens? Well, Gandalf, their sort of great guide and teacher, stands between the fellowship and the monster. He fights the creature. The fellowship gets through. They escape.

But at the last moment, Gandalf is taken by the creature, pulled down into the darkness. And his last words, at least in the first version of the movie are, do you remember? Run, you fools. In the book, he says, fly, you fools. And there's a great debate on the internet all about that. And you can waste a lot of time reading it. But as the characters come out, the other side, into the light of day, they're filled with sorrow.

[4 : 22] Why? Because now they're on their own. Because now they have to complete their mission without their guide, their protector, and their friend.

Now they have to march into the face of hostility all alone. Now sometimes as a church we feel a bit like that, don't we? Jesus has given us a mission, but we stare out at what seems like an impossible task.

Our friends and our neighbors seem so far from believing in Christ. Our love for one another seems to grow so cold at times. Given the obstacles ahead, given the opposition ahead, how will we ever complete the mission before us?

How will we possibly bear fruit? How will we possibly bear witness? Especially when it seems like Jesus, our guide, our protector, our friend, isn't here with us.

We know he's won the great battle, yes. He fought the great evil. We have been saved. We've come out the other side. But now, are we on our own to live out the mission he's given us?

[5 : 38] Well, this is where John 16 comes in. Jesus is assuring us here that his going away is actually a good thing.

Because if he goes away, he will send the helper. Or as some translations say, the advocate. The one we know as the Holy Spirit.

So we're not alone. Think about it. Before Jesus ascended to the Father, his work was not yet complete. But when Jesus ascended on high and took his seat at the right hand of God, enthroned as king forever, then redemption was accomplished once and for all.

Then our mediator had put an anchor in heaven that could never be moved. And at long last, humanity could be reconciled to God. We have a high priest in heaven who intercedes for us.

And at that moment, when the risen King Jesus ascended on high, then the Holy Spirit could come in fullness. That's what Jesus means when he says, unless I go away, the helper will not come to you.

[6 : 45] It's not as if sort of Jesus and the Spirit can't occupy the same space, like they're oil and water or something. No, Jesus is saying that the Spirit can't come in fullness until I go and complete the work.

Now, it's been fun to sort of watch the construction happening around our church for the past few years, hasn't it? We used to be, if you're new, we used to be in the middle of a parking lot. But now our church is located right in the middle of a community, which is pretty awesome.

But here's the thing about a project as big as this one that's happening around us. A project that big cannot start until the financing is in place, right? Until the funds have been secured.

But once the funds are secured, then the construction crews can show up. Otherwise, you're going to have a lot of disgruntled construction workers waiting for their paychecks, right?

Think of it like this. When Jesus died and rose again and ascended on high, he secured the funds to redeem everyone who would turn interest in him.

[7 : 49] So now the Holy Spirit, the helper, the advocate, the builder, can come in fullness and start building the church. When Jesus ascended, the work was complete and the Spirit could come.

And now that the Spirit is here, what exactly does it mean? And that brings us really to the heart of the text before us today.

The heart of the text today is the Holy Spirit's ministry to the world. As we seek to bear witness to the world, we're not alone. God, the Holy Spirit, is ultimately the one doing the work.

He is the great evangelist. He's the one who changes hearts and brings true conversion. Jesus says he will convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment.

That is, the Holy Spirit will shine a searching light upon human hearts. That's what the word convict means here.

[8 : 54] A light will be shown into our hearts. And what will be exposed is sin, righteousness, and judgment. In other words, the Holy Spirit is going to expose the problem and the solution and then the resolution.

What's really wrong with us? What can make it right? And how it's all going to turn out? So let's look at each of these things briefly. First, verse 9, The Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning sin because they do not believe in me.

You know, before we can understand the cure, we have to understand the problem, right? If I have a broken arm, getting a manicure isn't going to help much, right? It might make my broken arm look nice, but the arm is still going to be broken.

You know, it's much the same with our spiritual state. Until we understand the problem, we can't really get the cure. But what is the problem?

Well, the Bible calls the problem sin. But here's the thing. Most people, I think, would readily admit that they aren't perfect, that they make mistakes, that they even act selfishly at times.

[10:08] But that isn't what the Bible means by sin. Is sin merely breaking some rules from time to time? Is sin sort of not always being our best selves?

Well, no. That's not the heart of it. At bottom, the reality of sin isn't merely breaking rules or not being perfect. The reality of sin is relational.

It's personal. Notice, Jesus doesn't say, the Holy Spirit will convict you of sin because you didn't keep the rules. The Holy Spirit will convict you of sin, Jesus says, because they did not believe in me.

Now, God's laws are good. God's laws are perfect. They are how life works best. And we should delight to keep them. But at the core, when the Holy Spirit shines his light into our hearts, what we see is something very grave.

We see that we've lived our whole life personally ignoring or even rejecting the God who made us and the God who sustains us, the one in whom we live and move and have our being.

[11:27] Basically, we've lived our whole life saying, God, I don't think I need you and I don't want you. But imagine the situation that puts us in. It's only the strong branches of God's mercy that upholds us each second.

And yet every day that goes by, we keep sawing the branch, acting as if we can live without him. And what if God were to give us what we want and actually release us?

Jesus says in Matthew's gospel, to be fully removed from God's presence would be like exclusion or darkness or even fire. Exclusion from all that's good, darkness in our own vanity and selfishness, and even fire, fire of turmoil and shame.

Friends, I wonder, have you ever felt the gravity of your state before God in your sin? Have you ever felt the lostness, the danger of not being right with God, your creator?

If you've not felt a sense of that, then pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to awaken you to the reality of the spiritual problem so that you can find the cure.

[13:01] And if you have started to feel that sense of conviction of sin, then don't run away from it. Don't shut it down. If your arm is broken, the worst thing you can do is to keep telling yourself, it's fine, it's okay, I'll just think about something else.

No, don't ignore the problem. Because if you're feeling the conviction of sin, then that's the work of the Holy Spirit in your life. But what's the solution?

What's the solution? That brings us to the next verse. First, the Holy Spirit convicts us of the true nature of sin. Next, in verse 10, the Holy Spirit convicts us concerning righteousness, Jesus says, because I go to the Father and you will see me no longer.

Okay, so what is the natural human response to our spiritual problem, to sin, especially when we see how grave it really is? Well, typically, I think we try, in response to that, to sort of bolster our own sense of righteousness.

We catch a glimpse of how lost we are, of the danger of our spiritual state, of our deep flaws, and then we respond to it by trying to outweigh it with some good deeds, right? With righteousness. I think most of us operate with a very flawed notion that spiritually speaking, there's a scale.

[14:18] On the one side are our bad deeds, and on the other side are our good deeds. And the whole goal of life is to try to make our good deeds outweigh the bad deeds, and then we'll be okay. But when you stop and think about it, that is a very foolish notion, isn't it?

Imagine that I've spent the last 20 years cheating on my taxes. That's not true. I think I have faithfully paid my taxes for the last 20 years, but imagine I haven't.

But finally, I get caught, and I get dragged before a judge. And here's my defense. Well, judge, I know I've cheated on my taxes for the last 20 years, and I've stole thousands that I owe.

But you know, I've been a really nice guy that whole time. I've done a lot of good things. I even gave some of that money, not all of it, I gave a little bit of it to charity.

Doesn't that outweigh the bad? Well, we know the answer, right? No. No. The wrong is still there. Look, if you rob a bank, you're not going to be acquitted because later that same day you helped someone cross a street.

[15:32] There's not a scale. You see, as the Holy Spirit convicts us concerning the reality of our sin, He also convicts us of the emptiness of our righteousness.

Because there's only one who is truly righteous. There was only one who never sinned. There was only one who always loved God with all His heart, soul, mind, and strength.

There was only one who always loved His neighbor as Himself. There's only one who can enter into the very presence of God without fear of being cast out or condemned.

And that one is the Lord Jesus Christ. What does Jesus say? The Holy Spirit convicts us concerning our righteousness because He says, I go to the Father and you'll see me no longer.

When you come before God, what solution will you offer for the problem of your sin? Your righteousness? No.

[16:42] That solution will get you nowhere. But just think, what if there was a righteousness that could be yours? A righteousness so great that it would cover your many sins.

A righteousness so great that it could heal your alienation from God. What if you could get a righteousness like that? When Jesus says, I go to the Father, He not only exposes the sham, the emptiness of our righteousness, but He provides the answer.

He takes His perfect righteousness and presents it to the Father on our behalf. Now, how could that be?

How could Christ's righteousness be credited to me? Because when we trust in Christ, that is, when we give up attempting to be right with God through our own effort, and when we rest in Christ alone for a right standing with God, when we trust in Him, we're united to Him.

And what's true of Him is now true of us. Even though we are sinners, we are now counted as righteous in Him.

[17:57] When I was in elementary school, my family lived in upstate New York, and this was the time when the Buffalo Bills went to four consecutive Super Bowls.

Some of you may remember that. So, naturally, we were all Buffalo Bills fans, right? Because they were crushing it. They had Jim Kelly and the no-huddle offense. They were hot stuff.

But if you're a football fan, you remember what happened in each of those four Super Bowls? They lost every single one, four in a row.

But the first one was the roughest in my child memory. Because the Bills lost that Super Bowl in the final seconds of the game. The score was 20 to 19.

The New York Giants were up by one. The Bills kicker took the field 47 yards. The snap came. The kick went up. And then at the last second, it goes wide right.

[19:00] And they lose. Now, if you're a Bills fan, I'm sorry to make you relive that terrible day. But imagine, what if?

What if Scott Norwood, who will forever live in infamy, what if Scott Norwood made the kick? Well, that one perfect kick would make the whole team Super Bowl champions.

And not just the team, all the coaches and executives and all the suits too. But not just the players and not just the coaches and not just the executives, but the whole city of Buffalo.

And not just the whole city of Buffalo, but every Bills fan across the state and across the country.

One perfect kick and they'd all be Super Bowl champions. Because of what one guy did.

Because of what he did, it would be credited to them all. Now, friends, you can stand on the 50-yard line and you can keep kicking and kicking and kicking, but it's never going to be enough.

[20:11] Or you can trust in the one who's already won. And his righteousness can be counted to you. The solution can never be found in going to the Father with our own righteousness.

The solution can only be found and going to the Father, trusting in the righteousness of the one who's already there for you, the Lord Jesus. But lastly, the Holy Spirit will not only convict concerning sin and righteousness, but also judgment.

Verse 11, look at that. The Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning judgment because the ruler of this world is judged. Let's ask ourselves for a second, whose judgment matters most at the end of the day?

When Jesus was crucified by the Jewish and Roman authorities, they thought they had rendered the final verdict. They had judged Jesus, they had found him wanting, and they put an end to him. Is that how all this ends? If you're going to give your life to the crucified, resurrected, and ascended Jesus who you can't see, are you actually, at the end of the day, casting your lot with the losing side?

[21 : 40] The most religiously astute and the most politically powerful forces in the first century both condemned Jesus.

And today, friends, many will render the same verdict. Jesus may have been a good man, but he wasn't God. Jesus may have been a good teacher, but we don't need a Savior.

But whose judgment matters at the end of the day? The work of the Holy Spirit is to convict us also concerning judgment. The emptiness, at times, of human judgment and the reality and supremacy of God's judgment.

You see, when you see the reality and gravity of your sin and when you see the sort of emptiness of your own righteousness, the last convicting work is to drive you to care more about the coming judgment of God than the passing judgments of this world.

I recently watched some of the new animated version of Pilgrim's Progress. And at the beginning of the story, Christian, who's the pilgrim, starts to feel the load of his sin.

[22 : 59] And he starts to despair of his own righteousness. And then, evangelist, one of the characters, comes and says, run, Christian, run to the wicked gate, and there you'll find the solution to your burden.

There you can be free. But as Christian sets out, even before he gets to the gate, he meets a whole cast of characters, doesn't he? Obstinate and pliable and worldly wise men and morality, and they all, in their own way, render human judgments on Christian and on the good news he's heard.

Some try to minimize his sin. It's not that bad, Christian. Some try to convince him to maximize his own righteousness. Some say the whole thing's foolish.

He should just turn back and find pleasure in his old life. But whose judgment matters? Jesus says the Holy Spirit convicts us concerning judgment because the ruler of this world is judged.

The cross looked like the human defeat of Jesus. But in reality, it was the heavenly defeat of Satan, the ruler of this world, and all of his lies.

[24 : 17] The cross of Christ exposes Satan's lie that our sin isn't that bad. But in light of the cross, don't you see, if our sin isn't that bad, why would Jesus have to die for us?

The cross exposes Satan's lie that we can build our own righteousness. But if we could build our own righteousness, what was Jesus doing hanging on that tree? The cross exposes Satan's lie that God doesn't really care about you anyway and you're on your own.

But friends, look at the cross. The Father giving his only Son, the Son willingly laying down his life, for you and for me, so that we can be reconciled to God.

The cross was Satan's defeat. Of course, to the world, the cross seems like foolishness. But when the Holy Spirit does his work, we see that our worldly judgments were empty and vain.

God's judgment is the only thing that matters. and God's judgment has won the day. It's won the day in the beauty of the cross. So friends, is the Holy Spirit shining his light into your heart today?

[25 : 43] Do you have a growing sense of the real nature and gravity of your sin? Do you have a growing sense of your need for a righteousness that's not your own?

Do you have a growing realization of the passing whim of the world's judgment? This is the loving work of God, the Holy Spirit, taking you by the hand and bringing you to the ascended and living Christ who died for you that you might live.

So trust in Christ. Reach out to him in faith and embrace Christ with all that you are. And brothers and sisters, as we, the church, look out at our mission, our mission of witness bearing, let's not lose heart.

I know the task seems impossible at times. I know the work seems overwhelming, but the Holy Spirit is here, Jesus says. We're not alone.

So pray and plan and love and share and don't be afraid and don't be discouraged when you engage in spiritual conversations with your neighbors or coworkers.

[26 : 56] Remember the work of the Holy Spirit. He goes before you. You don't need to change people's hearts. That's his job and he's much better at it than you.

You simply need to love and pray and listen and speak the good news as faithfully as you can.

And that should give us freedom and joy in the mission before us. We're like sailors raising our sails to the wind.

We're not anxious or worried about how hard we're going to have to row to make it to port, right?

No. We lift our sails. We watch the wind fill the canvases.

The sails get taut. The ropes tighten. And through no power of our own the ship heads out to sea.

Brothers and sisters, do you feel the wind at your back as we go on this mission?

[27 : 58] God's building his kingdom. So let's lift our sails. Let's bear witness to our loving king and let's see where God will take us.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit.

Lord, too often we think we're alone when your very personal presence, God, is with us, in us, and among us. thank you for uniting us with yourself through Christ by your Spirit.

Help us to be joyful and free as we share the good news of Christ crucified, risen, and ascended.

And God, we pray especially this morning for those in whom your Holy Spirit is doing his convicting work.

would you soften their hearts? Would you give them a real sense of these spiritual realities? And would you draw women and men to yourself without number?

[29 : 08] Pour saving faith upon the lost, we pray, God. Redeem your people today. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's stand.