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Bridgeway Church
John 13-17 / #18
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Sermon Summary #18

Why the Spirit Inside You is Better than Jesus Beside You John 16:4b-15

Let me be clear right from the start. I stole the title for today's message from the sub-title to J. D. Greear's book, *Jesus Continued: Why the Spirit Inside You is Better than Jesus Beside You*. It's an excellent book that I recommend you read. Even if you don't get around to reading it, I suspect that the sub-title will surely capture your attention. *Is it really true that having the Holy Spirit live inside us forever is actually better than walking and talking in the physical presence of Jesus at our side?*

Something similar to this is found in 1 Peter 1:8. There Peter says that you and I can love Jesus and believe in Jesus and rejoice in Jesus even though we do not "see" Jesus.

Peter and the other apostles and hundreds of men and women who were contemporaries of Jesus and lived in Palestine when he did, had the incredible privilege of seeing the Son of God incarnate. They were eye witnesses of the God-man Christ Jesus. We are not.

But Peter wants you to understand that *this doesn't put you at a disadvantage to him or the others who were physically alive when Jesus walked the earth*. As great and glorious as it would have been to see Jesus, the fact that we didn't does not mean that our faith and love and joy in him are any less genuine or less fervent or less passionate or less pleasing to God. Of course, the day is coming when we will see him perfectly and forever, but at least for now, we are in the same position as were those to whom Peter wrote his letter.

In fact, let me go even further and say something that may strike you as outrageous when you first hear it. I first heard it from a sermon that John Piper preached. I thought he was nuts when he said it, but on deeper reflection, I think he's right.

"The gospels," said Piper, by which he means the written record of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, "the gospels, are better than being there!"

Let's not forget that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people who were alive when Jesus walked the earth saw him with their physical eyes and yet never truly "saw" him in the most meaningful sense of that term. *The "sight" that you and I have been given of the glory of God as revealed in Jesus is immeasurably greater than the physical sight of those who lived in the first century*. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:6 that "the God who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." This is a *spiritual perceiving*, a very real and life-changing, heart-warming revelation of the glory and splendor and beauty of Jesus that many who saw him with their physical eyes never experienced. But you and I do.

How do we gain this "sight"? We gain it from the Holy Spirit speaking to us through the Word of God. When you and I read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we can see the fullness of the revelation of God in Christ. The people who lived when Jesus walked the earth only had momentary, brief encounters with him. They might have heard him speak briefly as he passed through their villages. They might have watched a short snippet, as it were, of his ministry to the poor and sick. And I'm sure it was wonderful. But we have the panorama of God's revelation of Christ in the four gospels. We see and know far more of him through this written record than they could ever have known. Here's how Piper put it:

"The gospels are better than being there. You are taken into the inner circle of the apostolic band where you never could have gone. You go with him through Gethsemane and the trial and the crucifixion and the resurrection and the meetings after the resurrection. You hear whole sermons and long discourses—not in isolated snatches on hillsides but in rich God-inspired contexts that take you deeper than you ever could have

gone as a perplexed peasant in Galilee. You see the whole range of his character and power which nobody on earth saw as fully as you can now see in the gospels: you see his freedom from anxiety with no place to lay his head, his courage in the face of opposition, his unanswerable wisdom, his honoring women, his tenderness with children, his compassion toward lepers, his meekness in suffering, his patience with Peter, his tears over Jerusalem, his blessing those who cursed him, his heart for the nations, his love for the glory of God, his simplicity and devotion, his power to still storms and heal the sick and multiply bread and cast out demons.

Though you do not now see him, yet in another sense you do see him far better than thousands who saw him face to face. You see the glory of God shining in this man's face at every turn in the gospels. And because you see him with the eyes of the heart, you love him and trust him and rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory. This is true Christianity.”

Now, whether or not you agree with Piper isn't important. *What's important is to realize that your historical distance from Jesus in the first century is no impediment or obstacle to your loving him and trusting him and enjoying him.* That's the important thing to remember! And here in John 16 Jesus himself is saying that it is actually better or to our benefit that he **not** be physically present with us or otherwise the Holy Spirit could not be sent to indwell and empower us.

Now, let's be clear about what Jesus means when he says in v. 7 that in order for the Helper, the Holy Spirit, to come he, Jesus, first has to leave. The words *“go away”* in v. 7 do not simply refer to the physical departure of Jesus when he ascended into heaven to the right hand of the Father. He is talking specifically about his impending death. *His going away is primarily a reference to his arrest, his trial, his crucifixion, his resurrection, all of which is then consummated by his ascension into heaven.*

In other words, the reason why the Holy Spirit can't come until Jesus “goes away” isn't because there is some logical objection or physical obstacle why they can't both be present on earth at the same time. No. The reason is that according to God's promise the blessing of the Spirit's indwelling presence in our lives is dependent on Christ making full and final atonement for our sin. It is only after and because our guilt has been taken away and the judgment we deserved has been endured by Jesus that the promise of the Spirit's coming to indwell and empower us can occur.

Therefore, it is greatly to our “advantage” that Christ “go away” because in doing so he will suffer for our sins, propitiate or satisfy the wrath of God against us, and in doing so reconcile us to the Father. All this is necessary before he can send the Spirit to take up his residence in our hearts.

The Holy Spirit's Ministry through the Church

Beginning in v. 8 and extending through v. 11 Jesus talks about what the Holy Spirit will do when he comes. But the *mistake* people make when reading this passage is in thinking that *the Holy Spirit does all these things immediately and directly without the use of means or men and women.* In other words, people have this idea of the Spirit moving freely in the air, as it were, exerting his influence of conviction on the hearts and minds of non-Christians concerning the issues of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Now, in one sense I suppose that is true. We should never put restrictions on what the Holy Spirit does. But in another and far more important sense we need to understand that *this ministry of the Spirit is what he does in and through and by means of you and me!*

Look again at v. 7. Jesus says that if he goes he will send the Spirit *“to you,”* that is, to the disciples, and to all Christians in subsequent generations. He doesn't say I will send the Spirit to the “world” of non-believers but to “you, my followers, the soon-to-be-birthing Church of Jesus Christ.” Let's return for just a moment to what Jesus said earlier about the coming of the Helper, the Holy Spirit. Here is what Jesus said in John 14:16-17,

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give **you** another Helper, to be with **you** forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the **world** cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. **You** know him, for he dwells with **you** and will be **in you**” (John 14:16-17).

The Spirit's primary work when he comes is to live in us and to empower us to carry on the work of Jesus in a far more expansive way than anything Jesus could have done while on earth. ***Jesus was only one person, limited to one place in space. But through the Spirit he is present everywhere his people are found. It is through the disciples that Jesus continues his ministry through the Spirit whom he sends to them. It is through our preaching of the gospel and our lives given in love for one another that the Holy Spirit brings conviction to the hearts of people in the world.***

So, my point is that we miss the point of our Lord if we think he is sending the Spirit to do this work of bringing conviction to non-Christians independently of Christians. No. The Spirit accomplishes what is described in vv. 8-11 precisely as he indwells **us**, lives in **us**, empowers **us**, and energizes **us** to bear witness to the person and work of Jesus. ***We, the Church, are the means by which the Spirit does his work in the world.***

Let me ask all of you something. And by "all" I include myself. When you find yourself in close contact with non-Christians, whether at work or in your family or somewhere in the course of daily life, do you find yourself thinking: "Holy Spirit, I'm so glad that you are present to convict this person of his/her sin in rejecting Jesus. I also hope you will convict them concerning their deficient views of that righteousness that makes us acceptable to God. And I suspect that this person doesn't think that real judgment is coming. So let me step out of the way, shut my mouth, and pray that you will work immediately and directly on their hearts. I wouldn't want to gum up matters by saying something or doing something and getting in your way."

Is that what you think Jesus is saying here in John 16? No. The promise isn't that when the Spirit comes he works ***apart from us*** or ***without us*** but that he works ***through us***. We are the witnesses to the glory of Christ and the sin of unbelief, a witness that we are empowered to bear and make known through the indwelling presence of the Spirit.

The Three-fold Work of the Spirit in and through the Church of Jesus Christ

Verses 8-11 identify three things the Spirit will do when he comes to indwell and empower the witness of the Church, us!

We read in v. 8 that he will "convict" the world. This word translated "convict" has been rendered in other ways in other versions of the Bible. Some translate it with the English word "convince," as if to say that the Spirit will persuade the world by arguments and proofs of the true meaning of sin, righteousness, and judgment. But I don't think that is correct. The NIV translates this one word with the phrase: "he will prove the world to be in the wrong."

More than likely, to "convict" means to show someone their sin in order to call them to repentance. It can also carry the sense of "expose" in the sense that a person is awakened to their guilt and shame. The idea is that our presence in the world and our witness to the world through the indwelling presence and power of the Spirit has the goal and effect of ***shaming the world and convincing it/them of its own guilt and calling them to repentance.***

My guess is that many of you have experienced this and you might have felt badly because of it. I have in mind those occasions when your presence at a party cast something of a wet blanket over the atmosphere. Someone may well have said to you: "You know, we were having a good time until you got here. But everyone knows you're a Christian and you refuse to listen to our dirty jokes and you never get drunk and you never try to put moves on a girl/guy to whom you're not married, and you always decline our offer of whatever drug we're into at the time. You make everyone feel guilty. Please leave."

"You make everyone feel guilty." Have you ever heard that? I have. Even if you've never heard someone speak those precise words you've felt the energy of it coming in your direction. Now, I'm not suggesting that you go out of your way to be a downer or a party-pooper or that you parade your Christian faith in a self-righteous and holier-than-thou attitude. The mere presence of the Holy Spirit in you will make non-Christians feel uncomfortable. They are "convicted" or made painfully aware of their own sins, perhaps only because they know about you're devotion to Jesus Christ. That is the sort of thing that Jesus is talking about here.

As Gary Burge has noted, "The Spirit is . . . engaged in the prosecution of the world" (450). The Spirit will empower and energize the testimony of Christians, of you and me, taking our words and witness and using them to make a powerful statement, an incisive, articulate, clear and unmistakable indictment of the world. Our testimony incriminates

the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of the unbelieving world around us. Jesus had already forced a division in the world by showing that what it does is evil. In John 7:7 Jesus said this: the world “hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.” Likewise, the Holy Spirit does this through our witness to it and by means of the lives we live.

If this has never happened to you, if you do not testify in such a way that the world is genuinely convicted, it may be because you have so adapted your life and accommodated your beliefs to those of the world that the two are often indistinguishable.

So here Jesus says that the Spirit’s role, working primarily through the Church, is to show the world that it is guilty of (“concerning”) its sin, its righteousness, and its judgment. Let’s look at each of these three in turn.

First, the Holy Spirit, working through the visual lives and verbal witness of Christians like you and me, will expose and convict the world of its “sin”. The reason for this “sin” is that “they do not believe in me” (v. 9).

The “sin” of the world, of which it is convicted, is the failure or refusal to believe in Jesus (v. 9). The world typically does not even perceive it needs life. The convicting work of the Spirit through us is gracious and merciful: it is designed to bring people in the world to recognize their need and in doing so to turn to Jesus.

What is it about Jesus that they don’t believe? (1) That he is God in human flesh. (2) That his words are ultimate and absolute truth. (3) That his life given on the cross is our only hope for reconciliation with God. ***But unbelief is more than simply not embracing certain theological truths about who Jesus is and what he’s done. It is the stubborn and idolatrous refusal to treasure him as altogether beautiful and majestic.***

The problem today is that if you ask virtually anyone in OKC if they “believe” in Jesus, there is a high probability they will say Yes. What we need is a deeper and more robust definition of what saving belief in Jesus really is. For this we turn our attention to 2 Corinthians 4.

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:3-6)

Unbelief is here defined by Paul as the failure to see “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” Therefore, ***belief is a beholding of the beauty of the light of God’s glory revealed in Jesus. Belief is not mere intellectual acknowledgment. It is heartfelt adoration; an awakening of a new sense in the soul in which we relish and revel and rest in all that God is for us in Jesus. To believe Jesus is to treasure him above all else.***

Not to believe is worse than simply saying “I don’t think he is who he claims to be.” It is to deny the undeniable, to prefer something more than the one who is eternally preferable. Unbelief is more than a function of the intellect. It is an expression of one’s will. Not to believe is to willfully repudiate and reject. It is more than simply not being convinced of a claim. It entails willful repudiation.

In other words, ***unbelief is idolatry.*** Some mistakenly think that not to believe leaves a vacuum. It is solely a matter of not embracing a claim intellectually. No. Unbelief in Jesus is not the same as when I say I don’t believe in unicorns or Bigfoot or the Loch Ness monster. ***Unbelief in Jesus is idolatry because it is always a reflection of belief or trust in something other than Jesus. It is the worship of someone other than Jesus. And that is idolatry.***

Second, the Holy Spirit, working through the visual lives and verbal witness of Christians like you and me, will expose and convict the world of its “righteousness” because Jesus goes to the Father (v. 10).

Now what does that mean? How can we speak of the world’s “righteousness”? I think Jesus is saying that the world believes it is “righteous” but the verdict of God is otherwise. Isaiah said it best when he described our “ways” and “all our righteous deeds” as being little more than a “polluted garment” or “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:5-6). The Jewish leaders believed that the temple was the locus of righteousness, but Jesus found it necessary to cleanse and judge it. Their Sabbath observance was considered “righteous” but they then condemned Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath who

had been paralyzed for 38 years (John 5:16). The people slavishly observed the Mosaic commandments, thinking that in doing so they established a righteousness before God that he was obligated to recognize and honor.

Non-Christians in OKC today are deluded and deceived into thinking that the so-called “righteousness” of their lives is adequate to put them in good standing with God. They don’t commit adultery. They pay their taxes. They have never committed murder. The world has been lulled by Satan into a false sense of security. They think their “righteousness” is enough. They believe that so long as they avoid overtly scandalous sins that harm other people, their lives are “good enough” for acceptance by whatever “god” there may be.

But the Holy Spirit convicts the world that its so-called “righteousness” is far from it; that it is in fact filthy rags, and is in fact far short of what God requires. Paul described Christian conversion in these terms:

“he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

Paul’s own personal testimony is very similar. He describes himself in this way:

“as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith” (Phil. 3:6-6).

While Jesus was on the earth he performed this task. His life and words and ministry exposed the so-called “righteousness” of the people. By the light of his own life and ministry he exposed the darkness in which the world was living (John 3:19-21; 7:7; 15:22,24). But now he is going to the Father and won’t be present in person to do this any longer. So when the Holy Spirit comes he will continue this ministry through the testimony and lives of the followers of Jesus. Jesus will no longer be present to discharge the task, so it now falls on us, through his Spirit, to do it.

Third, the Holy Spirit, working through the visual lives and verbal witness of Christians like you and me, will expose and convict the world of its “judgment” because “the ruler of this world is judged” (v. 11).

The first thing to remember here is that *the world does not believe there is judgement to come*. Or if they do believe it, they’re convinced that God will grade on the curve. Virtually everyone in the world is a universalist. They are persuaded that everyone who dies, regardless of their relationship to Jesus, will be in heaven, “up there, looking down on us.” A few might suggest that the worst and most perverted of sinners will be judged, but if there is one thing in which virtually all non-Christians are united it is the belief that so long as they are sincere and don’t hurt others, they will never enter into judgment.

But Jesus says that the Holy Spirit, through God’s people, convicts the world of its impending judgment because the prince of the world, Satan, whose children they are, already stands judged and condemned by the death and resurrection of Jesus. If you’re wondering why Jesus mentions the judgment of Satan, it is because *“the whole world lies in the power of the evil one”* (1 John 5:19). The systems of this world and its values and the behavior of those who occupy it are under the influence and authority of Satan himself. But in the death and resurrection of Jesus Satan is exposed, judged, and sentenced to eternal damnation.

The “world” is made up of Satan’s children. If you think that is a harsh judgment, may I remind you that Jesus is the one who made it. Jesus was speaking to the religious leaders who trusted in their own “righteousness” and said: “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires” (John 8:44). Thus, if Satan stands condemned by the cross, so too will those who align with him against Christ and his kingdom.

The Spirit's Future Revelatory Role in Glorifying Jesus

Jesus has already spoken of what the Spirit would do when he came on the Day of Pentecost. In John 14:26 he said that the Spirit would work to bring to **remembrance** things Jesus said and did. But here the Spirit is said to provide **additional** truths by revelation, truths not yet disclosed but soon to come.

But this revelatory work of the Spirit has limitations or boundaries. Notice, for example, that the Spirit is dependent on Jesus for everything he says (16:13). "He will not speak on his own authority" but will only reveal what is given to him by the Son and the Father. Furthermore, nothing he says will deviate from what Jesus has already made known. Furthermore, any new revelations the Spirit brings will focus on bringing attention to Jesus (16:15).

The "things that are to come" may refer to the trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but this doesn't make sense as the Spirit won't even be given until Pentecost, well after the events of Christ's death. He surely at least has in mind what will transpire in consequence of his death and resurrection. But we cannot deny that there is also reference here to how the Spirit will operate in prophetic ministry, as well as disclosing the future of God's kingdom on earth. Jesus may also have in mind the revelatory truths found in a book like Revelation.

Many would restrict this truth about the Spirit's work to the immediate company of the apostles and those who would write the books of the NT. It most assuredly does apply directly to them. In fact, the writings of the NT (and the biblical canon as a whole) are the ultimate and final standard by which all claims to new revelation must be judged. If a "word" or "alleged truth" that someone claims to have received from the Spirit does not perfectly align with the written Word of the Bible, it isn't from God.

Conclusion

As we conclude, let's not forget the primary point of the Spirit's presence with us. It isn't so that we can stand by idly and silently and trust that whatever work needs to be done in the hearts of non-Christian men and women of the world will be done by the Holy Spirit alone. No, and again No. The Spirit has come to indwell and empower you and me to bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And it is through that witness, both visible and vocal, that the world is convicted of its sin, its false conception of what real righteousness is, and of the reality and certainty of the judgment that will come upon all who do not know and trust and treasure and prize Jesus above all.