

**“The Lord’s Point Man”**

**John 16:5-16**

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**Text Comment**

- v.5 We now begin the fourth of the five Holy Spirit passages in the Upper Room Discourse.
- v.7 The thought is what biblical scholars call “eschatological.” That is, there is a next step to be taken in the history of salvation and the progress of the kingdom of God, and the Lord is looking forward to that next step and, if they understood it, the disciples would be too. Until the Spirit comes the nations cannot be reached, until the nations are reached the Lord cannot return and until he returns the life of the new heavens and the new earth cannot begin. Notice now the *world* as the object of the Spirit’s ministry in v. 8.
- v.8 Remember we said that “world” was a very important word in the Upper Room discourse, occurring more than 40x. And here the two great ideas are brought together: the Holy Spirit and the world. This is, interestingly, the only place in the NT where the Holy Spirit is said to work in and for the world. There are other places where we are shown the Spirit working in the world, but most of the time in the NT the Spirit’s work is in and for believers.
- v.11 Vv. 8-11 are very difficult because they are so compressed. But the idea seems clear enough. The Holy Spirit will convince the world – at least the elect world, that part of the world to be saved – that it is sinful in its neglect of Jesus Christ, that its pretended righteousness is as filthy rags before God, and that its slavish obedience to the Devil – a point the Lord had made emphatically in chapter 8 if you remember – has been exposed for the folly it is by the triumph of the Lord Jesus Christ and his resurrection from the dead.
- v.12 This verse begins the last of the five Holy Spirit passages, but, obviously it is something of a contrivance to divide this from the verses about the Spirit immediately before it. Still, there seems to be a new beginning in the thought.
- v.15 There is no disunity in the Godhead, but perfect harmony and mutual interest.

You might have thought that I would turn from our studies in John’s Gospel, in the middle of the Upper Room Discourse, to focus instead, on this Palm Sunday, on some text having to do with the passion of our Savior. I had imagined doing just that myself. However, the more I looked at the next text before us in John, the more it seemed right to remain where we were and take up the next text in order. It is a text about the Holy Spirit, indeed, but, as we will see, it is about the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing the world face to face with Jesus Christ, its only Savior.

When we took up the first of the five Holy Spirit passages in the Upper Room Discourse, at 14:16, we took note of this important word “Counselor”, the Greek word, “paraclete.” We said

that it meant counselor in the sense of legal assistant or advocate, someone who helps another in court, often as a witness. We noted that this special term for the Holy Spirit occurs in all the five passages that mention the Holy Spirit in this discourse except the last, but the last follows immediately upon the fourth, -- the “he” in v. 13 looks back to “Counselor” in v. 7, which is its antecedent. So “Counselor” is really the designation of the Holy Spirit in all of them.

The King James Version, you remember, translated “paraclete” as “Comforter.” But that seems too soft a word. In the sixteenth century English, however, the word “comforter” did not mean what it means today. It was an English word fashioned after a Latin word, *conforto*, which meant “to strengthen or to encourage.” That Latin word was stronger than the English word “comfort” is now and the early English word made from it was accordingly stronger too. I came across a reference to an entry in the Chronicles of the Monastery of St. Edmunds – an English monastery in the middle ages – which mentions that a certain schoolmaster “fortified or strengthened the boys with a stick!” The chronicles are in Latin and that word “fortified” is the word *conforto*. You *comfort* a young man by laying a cane across his backside. Now, that’s comfort! [comfortavit pueros baculo; A.E. Bailey, *The Gospel in Hymns*, 241] And that is more the idea of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the paraclete, that we are given in these verses. It is comfort of the old, strong kind. It is bracing a person with the truth, making him face it, hear it, feel it. That is the idea.

Remember, the Lord has already said that he would send to his disciples “*another* Counselor”, that is, one like himself. The Lord was a man who forced the truth on people, whether they liked it or not, whether they welcomed it or not. He was a controversial figure, hated as he was loved, precisely because he forced people to make a decision about him and because he drove the truth directly at the conscience. And now we hear that the Holy Spirit will be like him in that way. But here is the difference, the Holy Spirit will bear his witness to Christ *to the whole world* which the Lord Jesus explicitly did not do while in the world as man. Remember how in the Gospels the Lord Jesus said, “I have been sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But the Holy Spirit will be sent by the Father and the Son to the world.

Now, in these two separate statements concerning the work of the Holy Spirit, we are given two separate accounts of the Holy Spirit’s ministry to the world on behalf of Jesus Christ. There are two different ways in which the Holy Spirit brings the world to Christ and Christ to the world.

**I. In the first place, the Spirit empowers the witness of the church to Jesus and his salvation and drives that truth home to the conscience of the world.**

Clearly, we are to see the immediate fulfillment of this promise of the work of the Holy Spirit to convict the world in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment on the Day of Pentecost itself, which is a day and an event that stands for all that will happen in history from that day until the second coming of Jesus Christ. Pentecost is the debut, the curtain up of this next epoch in the history of salvation and the first step on the Gospel’s course of conquest through the world. Remember how in John 7:38 we heard the Lord say before this that when the Holy Spirit was given “streams of living water would flow from the bellies of those who believe in Jesus.” That is, Christians would become the means of God’s saving grace to the world. We cannot be grace

and salvation to the world by ourselves. We cannot persuade, we cannot change the heart, but the Holy Spirit can do all this and will *through us*. That is the wonderful thing.

Look at Acts chapters 1 & 2 and see how it is the fulfillment of this very prophecy the Lord is making here in the Upper Room. In Acts 1:8 the Lord tells his disciples again what he told them here and at the end of Chapter 15: "...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." The Spirit's witness will make them powerful witnesses on behalf of Jesus Christ.

And that is then precisely what happened. Through the preaching of Peter the great crowd of people they were convinced of their sin and their unrighteousness and of the victory of God in Christ over the powers of evil. And, because of the Holy Spirit's witness in the hearts of those who heard – and remember, in Acts 2:5 we are reminded that that great crowd included people from every nation under heaven; the *world* in other words – 3000 of them were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And they believed in Jesus, repented of their sins, and were baptized. By a single sermon on a single day, once the Holy Spirit began his world convicting work, it is likely the church of God grew more than it had through the three years of the Lord's ministry! No wonder the Lord should say that it is better that he depart so that the Holy Spirit might come. And think! Many of the folk converted to Christ that day were the same people who had crucified him just several weeks before! People who had been his implacable enemies came to Christ in faith and love in large numbers that day and the days that followed. There is no human explanation for this. To be sure, the apostles proclaimed the message about Jesus Christ to them in their own languages – an astonishing miracle – but Jesus had performed much more astonishing miracles before their very eyes and they had only hated him the more for it. But, when the Holy Spirit added his omnipotent witness in their hearts, when he drove the truth home like an arrow into their consciences, their unbelief, their rebellion, their stubborn refusal to face facts vanished in an instant and they found themselves face to face with God.

And all that from a single sermon. And, let's be entirely honest. It wasn't such a sermon that we think today would have been that powerful. If I preached that sermon over to you right now, you would not think it such a sermon as would save 3,000 souls all by itself. Richard Cecil, the Great Awakening preacher, who heard and preached some sermons of terrible power during those great days in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, once wrote, about Peter's sermon:

"I once said to myself, in the foolishness of my heart: 'What sort of sermon must that have been which was preached by Peter when three thousand souls were converted at once?' What sort of sermon? Such as other sermons. There is nothing to be found in it extraordinary. The effect was not produced by eloquence, but by the mighty power of God present with the Word." [In Tyler and Bonar, *Life of Nettleton*, vii]

And so, it has often been observed in Christian history. Some preachers of great power, through whose sermons great multitudes of people have come to believe in Christ, were orators of exhilarating imagination and power. But many others were not. Have you ever taken up a

volume of John Wesley's sermons? I defy you to take an unabridged Wesley sermon and read it this Sunday afternoon without nodding off to sleep somewhere in the middle and, perhaps nearer the front than the back of the sermon. Historians read Wesley's sermons and scratch their heads over the amazing grip with which they latched on to the minds and hearts of those who heard them. Compare a sermon of Wesley and a sermon of Spurgeon on the same text and you will think Wesley's sermon is not to be compared with Spurgeon's. But why, then, Wesley's unparalleled success in convicting and converting sinners to Christ? Well that is the lesson that every preacher must learn for himself. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord." [From Whyte, *Thirteen Appreciations*, 368-369]

See how the Lord put the two things together in John 15:26-27. "The Holy Spirit will testify about me and you must also testify." And it was the Holy Spirit's bearing witness in the heart and through the Word preached by the apostles that made their witness powerful to turn the world upside down. It used to be said of the New England preacher, Thomas Hooker, that those who heard him "felt that he could have picked up a king and put him in his pocket!" That is the authority that the Holy Spirit can add to the message of perfectly ordinary men who are bearing witness to Jesus Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of sinners.

And that is what the Spirit is all about – bringing men to Christ. "He will testify *about me*." And, again in 16:14, "He will bring glory *to me* by taking what is mine and making it known to you." There is a very interesting fact about *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford*. In the unabridged edition edited by Andrew Bonar there are 365 letters. And long ago it was noticed that in all of those letters there is but one single reference to the Holy Spirit. It is in Letter 325. In all those letters the Holy Spirit is mentioned just once. But those letters together constitute one of the most remarkable displays of faith in Jesus Christ and love for Christ and the praise of Christ in all of Christian literature. You see, the Holy Spirit had done his chosen work in Samuel Rutherford and done it surpassingly well. A man full of the Holy Spirit is a man who is full of Christ and testifies about him!

J.I. Packer likens the ministry of the Holy Spirit, as the Lord Jesus explained it here, to a floodlight such as you might find illuminating a beautiful building or monument at night.

"I remember walking to church one winter evening to preach on the words 'he shall glorify me,' seeing the building floodlit as I turned a corner, and realizing that this was exactly the illustration my message needed. When floodlighting is well-done, the floodlights are so placed that you do not see them; you are not in fact supposed to see where the light is coming from; what you are meant to see is just the building on which the floodlights are trained. The intended effect is to make it visible when otherwise it would not be seen for the darkness, and to maximize its dignity by throwing all its details into relief so that you see it properly. This perfectly illustrates the Spirit's...role. He is, so to speak, the hidden floodlight shining on the Saviour." [*Keep in Step with the Spirit*, 66]

The Spirit is not telling us to look at *Him*. He is telling us to look at Christ, to come to Christ, to believe in Christ, to follow Christ. He is, Dr. Packer says, the spiritual "matchmaker" whose role it is to bring us and Christ together and see to it that we stay together.

And the rest of the NT confirms this. As we already heard in chapter 3 of this gospel and as we are taught in many other places, it is the Spirit that works new life in us, grants us faith in Christ, and causes us to grow in that faith. It is the Spirit that overcomes the darkness and rebellion in our hearts and gives us both true understanding of our sin and of Christ's salvation and a willingness to come to Christ to be saved. No one has ever become a Christian, no one has ever begun to follow Jesus Christ except as the result of the work of the Holy Spirit in him or her. The Holy Spirit is the indispensable precondition of salvation in Christ. That is the first thing.

But there is a second way in which the Holy Spirit has a ministry to the world on behalf of Jesus Christ. In this ministry also he works *for* the world *in and with* the disciples.

## **II. I mean that it would be by the Holy Spirit that the apostles would lay the foundation of the Christian church in Holy Scripture.**

Now it is possible to see in vv. 13-15 a reference to the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination in the heart and mind of every Christian. Surely, there is a sense in which it is true that the Holy Spirit guides every believer into the truth and in which the Holy Spirit makes known to every Christian what is Christ's. However, here it seems that the emphasis falls especially on that greater ministry the Holy Spirit performed through the apostles for the sake of the world and all succeeding generations of Christians.

"I have more to say to you than you can now bear, but when he, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into *all truth*..."

"He will tell you what is *yet to come*..."

These statements suggest that we are talking about that once-for-all revelation of Christ, the explanation of his life and work, the definitive account of salvation that the Holy Spirit taught the apostles and which they, in turn, enshrined forever in the books we know as the New Testament. We already read in a similar statement, in 14:26, that when the Holy Spirit came, he would remind the disciples of all that Jesus had told them *while he was with them*. That, surely, is a statement that applies directly and only to the apostles. And so is the statement in 15:27 to the effect that their testimony would be the testimony of those who had been with Jesus *from the beginning*. The Lord has in view the Holy Spirit's ministry directly to these men who would become the apostles of the NT church.

What, after all, is an apostle. Here is Charles Hodge's definition.

"What then were the apostles? It is plain from the divine record that they were men immediately commissioned by Christ to make a full and authoritative revelation of his religion; to organize the church; to furnish it with officers and laws, and to start it on its career of conquest through the world." "The apostles, the twelve, stand out just as conspicuous as an isolated body in the history of the church, without predecessors, and without successors, as Christ himself does. They disappear from history. The title, the thing itself, the gifts, the functions, all ceased when John, the last of the twelve, ascended to heaven." [*What is Presbyterianism?* 53, 60]

What is clear here and everywhere is that the Lord Jesus *is* the great revelation of God and salvation. The Spirit will take from what is Christ's and give it to the apostles so that they can, in turn, give it to the world. Christ himself is God's final and ultimate revelation, he is, as we saw at the very beginning of the Gospel *the Word*, and those who know him know the father we have heard on more than one occasion. *This final expression of God's will, this final disclosure of God himself* is what the Holy Spirit will perfectly convey to the apostles so that they can write it down that it may be disseminated to the world. And once those books were written they were copied times without number and handed down to successive generations and have been received, age after age, as both "in their witness and their teaching the crystallised and perpetuated ministry of the apostolic band." [J. Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, 313]

And for whom do we have to thank for that, for the fact that we can hold in our hands today the witness of the apostles? And for whom do we have to thank for our conviction, firm and well-grounded as it is, that everything we read in this book is true, absolutely true? It is the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who gave us the Bible. The men who wrote it, Peter tells us in his second letter, "were carried along by the Holy Spirit." And by giving us the Bible and its last 27 books in particular, the Holy Spirit has given to the rising generations the gift of the knowledge of Jesus Christ. He must, of course, also drive that truth into the human heart or the knowledge, the truth that is found in the Bible will be of no effect. But first he gave us the truth about Christ and God and ourselves and salvation and the world to come, by giving it to the apostles and by superintending their account of that truth in their writings.

Listen to this from Amy Carmichael, the celebrated missionary to India.

"The amazing thing is that everyone who reads the Bible has the same joyful thing to say about it. In every land, in every language, it is the same tale: where that Book is read, not with the eyes only, but with the mind and heart, the life is changed. Sorrowful people are comforted, sinful people are transformed, peoples who were in the dark walk in the light. Is it not wonderful to think that this Book, which is such a mighty power if it gets a chance to work in an honest heart, is in our hands today? And we can read it freely, no man making us afraid." [*Thou givest...Thou gather*, 7]

And why does that book have that mighty power and that wonderful effect? Because in that book Jesus Christ is revealed to us. And how is that? Because the Holy Spirit saw to it that its authors should be men who had the whole, the entire truth about Christ communicated to their minds and hearts, everything remembered rightly, everything put down accurately, everything that need to be known rightly understood and then preserved forever. We have the Holy Spirit to thank for our knowledge of Jesus Christ from first to last. But, we have Christ to thank for our salvation, and *that*, that supremely, is what the Holy Spirit wants us to know and never to forget.

"I have never seen the Lord Jesus Christ," said one very wise man, "but he has written me a letter." And, he might have added, the secretary to whom the Lord Christ dictated that letter and who both wrote it down and then read it to me was none other than God himself, the Holy Spirit.

