

The Spirit and the world

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Preacher: Bill Salier

[0 : 00] I wonder if you've ever heard someone say something and you've thought, surely you can't mean that. I remember the first time, my parents didn't punish me a lot because I was a good boy, but occasionally they did.

And at one point my father said to me, this is going to hurt me more than it's going to hurt you. And I thought, really? Is that true? And I don't think it was true because it did hurt.

But and so sometimes we are told apparently bad things and we ask ourselves, is it really a good thing?

Take this medicine. It will be good for you. And when you taste it, it tastes terrible. Then you really doubt. Is it really that good? I wonder if the disciples had that feeling often during the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus said so many things that seem so counterintuitive. So unusual that I wonder whether the disciples regularly caught themselves saying to themselves, really?

[1 : 03] Is this really true? Is this did he really mean that? The statement that really gets me is when Jesus is speaking to the disciples in Matthew chapter five in the Beatitudes.

And he says, blessed are you when you are persecuted. And I'm sure at that point, the disciples must have thought, really? Do you really mean that? And of course, the Lord Jesus always means what he says.

But sometimes it is hard to accept what he is thinking. We need to think twice about it. I think the disciples probably had another moment in this passage.

It's interesting, isn't it? In chapter 16, verse seven, Jesus says, very truly, I tell you, it is for your good that I'm going away.

The disciples had just spent three years with Jesus. Can you imagine what that would have been like? Three years with the Lord. Seeing all those wonderful miracles, hearing all that wonderful teaching, being able to ask Jesus what he meant in his public things afterwards, spending time with the Lord, eating with him, just those casual conversations.

[2 : 15] Who knows what that would have been like, but it would have been wonderful. And now Jesus is saying he is going. It's a very disturbing night. He's talking about a little while, you will see me no more, and then you'll see me.

And it's all very confusing. They do know that Jesus is going away, though. And now he tells them that it is actually better for them if he goes. I wonder if they really thought, do you really mean that? How can this possibly be? It's an interesting passage. Jesus acknowledges their grief. You are filled with grief, he says in verse six, because I've said these things.

He's read the mood of the room, the sadness the disciples are feeling. As I say, they've understood that Jesus is going away. Now, we've already been told back in chapter 14, Jesus is returning to the one who sent him.

For Jesus, this is a good thing. He's going home. He's going home to the father. That means his mission is completed. It is done, as we've just said. And this sets up this conversation.

[3 : 22] The disciples, I think, are seeing this as a bad thing. They don't want to lose Jesus. But they're also not looking and seeing the situation that Jesus is outlining.

They think they are losing Jesus. They're not really thinking about what this means for Jesus himself and his mission. As Jesus goes, this is the next stage of the work that he has come to do. It's bringing it to completion. This is a good thing for Jesus. And eventually, of course, as he goes on to say, it's a good thing for the disciples and it's a good thing for us. Jesus' point is, they should not grieve at his going away.

It will not be a loss for them. In fact, it will be better for them. All right. How can this be? How can this be? Well, Jesus goes on in verse 7.

Unless I go away, the advocate, the counselor, the Holy Spirit will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

[4 : 25] So this is the reason they should not grieve. Because when Jesus goes, the Spirit will come. The Spirit will come and be present with them. The Spirit will come and empower them.

Jesus going away marks the transition to the next stage in the plan of God, where the Spirit will come and reproduce the ministry of Jesus in the disciples for the world, as we'll see.

And it is going to be a great thing for the disciples and a great thing for us. We live in that era now.

We live in that stage when the Spirit has come and dwelt with us as well.

Jesus talked about the Spirit as another paraclete, as another counselor, as another advocate, who will reproduce his ministry. And now he's saying there's going to be a better state of affairs.

The departure of Jesus is not an absence for the disciples, but it's a movement into a time when Jesus will be permanently present with the disciples by his Spirit.

[5 : 30] Maybe not physically, but even more wonderfully, the Spirit will indwell them. And they will know the presence of the Spirit, the Father and the Son with them. And they are going to be caught up, as we'll see in chapter 7, into the life of God.

And that is our experience as well. Participation in eternal life, in a new way of existing by the power of God.

Now, Jesus goes on to speak about what this looks like for the world and for the disciples in the rest of the passage. But he is adamant that this is a good thing.

This is a good thing, the next stage, as I said, in God's plan. So he then goes on in two paragraphs to talk about what the Spirit will do in the world after he has gone.

And then what the Spirit will do for the disciples after he has gone. It looks like perhaps it's a negative work in the world, but I actually want to say it's a negative slash positive work in the world.

[6 : 35] We'll talk about that. And then a very positive work in the church. It is good that Jesus goes. Why is it good for the world?

What is the Spirit going to do for the world? Well, Jesus outlines this for us in verses 8 to 11. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin, righteousness and judgment.

He will convict the world of these things. The word there, convict or prove the world to be wrong, is a legal word. It's used in a law court.

It's the sense of bringing a legal conviction against someone. And so the image I think that Jesus is giving us is the Spirit like a prosecuting lawyer in a courtroom.

The world is in the dock, charged, and the Spirit is bringing the evidence and the charges against the world in order to prove its guilt in a court of law.

[7 : 39] The whole of John's gospel, one of the themes that runs through it is kind of like a trial where Jesus is constantly on trial before the Jewish authorities. And in the midst of that trial, Jesus turns the tables and puts the Jewish authorities on trial as well.

Who do you really say that I am? Are you guilty of being against me or are you for me? That kind of thing. And this trial is going to continue beyond Jesus' ministry.

It's going to continue in the power of the Spirit. The world might not recognize this is happening, but this is the spiritual reality as the Spirit works. The world is convicted and is proved wrong in respect to three things.

The Spirit proves the world wrong with respect to sin, righteousness, and judgment. So I guess what Jesus is saying here is when the gospel is preached, then this is the conviction that is being brought about.

The people of the world, the people that don't know Jesus, that are opposed to him, they are going to be proved wrong in regard to sin and to righteousness and judgment.

[8 : 56] They have wrong ideas about these things. They are guilty before God because of these things. Firstly, the world will be proved wrong about sin, Jesus says, because people do not believe in me.

And this is a very good supplement to our catechism question, which kind of gave a definition of sin again in terms of rebellion against God. And Jesus localizes that and say, if you want to know that you are rebellious against God, ask what you think of me.

If you reject me, you are showing also your rebellion against God at that point. Sin is defined here for us as not believing, not trusting, not following in Jesus.

And this may seem a little bit specific and local, but it makes perfect sense when we read the rest of the gospel. The Jewish people showed their opposition to the plans of God by their opposition to the person of his son.

And people today will do the same thing. Now, of course, that sin, that primary rejection of God results in a whole bunch of things we call sins.

[10:10] The terrible things that people do to one another, the lying and the cheating and the stealing and so on. But they are all symptoms of the bigger disease. The biggest disease, of course, is the rejection of God and his son.

And then that plays itself out in so many different ways. Our world does not like to hear that it is sinful. In fact, the word itself is probably offensive to many.

But if we try and help people see that they are sinful, you can imagine the reaction that you get. But we need to be convicted of our sin in order to turn to Christ.

Jesus provides the remedy for our sin. But if you don't know that you've got a problem, you are not going to look for the remedy. It is hard to admit our own responsibility.

Sin is not a natural category for us. We will always find an excuse. It's my background. It's not my fault. It's someone else. We will try and deflect attention away from ourselves.

[11:19] Sorry seems to be the hardest word to say, especially to God. And that plays out in our relationships as well. It is often hard to admit that we are wrong to others.

But the work of the spirit will be to help us to see that we are wrong with respect to God. In rejecting his son. In not living his way. In rejecting God and his word.

This may seem like a harsh thing. But it is actually the grace of God at work. The grace of God is at work in revealing our sinful condition.

And then in showing us or pointing us to the work of the son to remove it. We need to be made aware of our true condition. So that we can go for our true remedy.

It's a bit like going to the doctor. You're feeling, you know, a little bit uneasy. You go to the doctor and he diagnoses your condition. And you realize that it's a bad condition.

[12:19] But at least there's some remedy that can be done. Don't like hearing the good news. But we don't blame a doctor for that. We are grateful to the doctor for revealing the disease that is assailing us.

And then pointing us to the remedy. And the spirit works a little bit like that. It may feel like bad news. But there is good news buried in it because the solution is very close to hand.

One John reflects on this in his first chapter. He says, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sin, he is faithful and just.

And will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Now, John is speaking to Christian people there. He realizes sin is an ongoing problem. And we need to take this to heart as well.

The spirit will continue to work in us to expose our sin as well and the remedy. And we turn. But, of course, that's the same dynamic for the world around us.

[13:21] That as the gospel is preached, its sin is exposed. There is a conviction brought against that it is proved to be wrong about sin because it's rejected Jesus and lived a way that is not pleasing to God.

But thanks be to God that he has provided the work of the son to remove it and we can point people to it. The spirit convicts the world to see its need for Christ and life in its name.

And the conviction of sin is an action of love, a reflection of grace and truth, a wake-up call.

Secondly, the spirit convicts the world concerning righteousness.

And this is most likely a lack of righteousness. It's connected to the idea of sin. Jesus, through the gospel, has pointed out the inadequacy of the righteousness of the Jewish people.

They are sinful, lacking in righteousness. They are in need of cleansing. And, in fact, in their righteousness, the Jewish people hand over Jesus to the Romans.

[14:28] And the Romans, in their righteousness as well, put Jesus to death. They think that they are performing a righteous action. The Jewish people think that they are trying a blasphemer.

The Romans think that they are getting rid of an enemy of the state, an enemy of the gods. That action on the cross shows that they had a wrong idea about righteousness.

They crucified an innocent man. They thought it was a righteous action doing the will of God or their gods, executing a person who was leading the people astray.

But Jesus rose from the dead. He showed that death could not hold him. He showed that he was the righteous one, or God showed, rather, that Jesus was the righteous one by saying he did not deserve to die and, in fact, he could live.

And the cross reverses. Jesus is vindicated. He was an innocent man. The resurrection shows that. He was truly the righteous one. And it was the unrighteousness of the world around him that was exposed.

[15 : 37] The cross exposes that. Our world gets right and wrong all mixed up. It calls black white. It calls white black.

We know that from so many things in the culture around us. The spirit gives the world an opportunity to see what it has been doing by exposing the idea of righteousness by pointing to the righteous one.

And once again, in that, the world gets an opportunity to make things right, to turn to the righteous one, to have their value system turned upside down, to take on the values of the kingdom, to understand what is truly right and what is truly wrong.

And again, as the people of God, we sit in that position as well. The spirit helps us to understand what is truly right, what is truly wrong, and to embrace the right that is the way of God.

Thirdly, the spirit convicts the world about judgment, verse 11, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. Similar point.

[16 : 49] The world makes false judgments. The world makes false judgments about Jesus. The world makes false judgments about God.

In John chapter 7, verse 24, Jesus tells his accusers at one point, make a right judgment about me. Stop judging by appearances. We make judgments about appearances all the time.

It's a rebuke for their spiritual blindness and for their wrong assessment of spiritual things. The worldly person in their judgment says that there is no spiritual world, or there's an alternate spiritual world, or the Christian faith is damaging for you.

Lots of different things. These are failed judgments. They are rooted to false judgments about sin and righteousness, Jesus says. And if the ruler of the world is judged, then how much more?

The world he rules itself. He's talking about Satan, of course. Satan is defeated and judged on the cross. How does the spirit do this work?

[18 : 05] How does the spirit convict of sin and righteousness and judgment? Well, the spirit is at work through the preaching of the gospel of the son. The preaching about Jesus exposes sin and righteousness and judgment.

It exposes people's sin. It exposes their lack of righteousness. It also exposes the certainty of their judgment. And then it points in love to the solution. The message of the cross does this.

This is a message, of course, that is carried by the Christian community. Initially, of course, the disciples. They were told to testify. We thought about that last week.

We also share in that testimony. We preach the gospel. We live out the gospel. And in that, we are proclaiming to the world around us.

And the spirit is using that to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. And hopefully for many, in the power of the spirit, opening up a space in which the good news of the gospel can come flooding in.

[19 : 11] And people can have an opportunity to repent, to be in the right, to be forgiven for sin, to be clothed with the righteousness of Christ. And to be assured that they will escape the judgment of God.

So the spirit has this work in the world. It feels like a negative work, proving the world wrong. But it's actually a positive work. Because it's only in understanding, as we've said, that we are in the wrong, that we have any opportunity to be put into the right.

The spirit does this work of grace in and through us. And in doing so, he carries on the ministry of Jesus. Jesus' ministry was a ministry of exposing sin and righteousness and judgment in the people of Israel.

The spirit, now through the people of God, magnifies that ministry, extends that ministry, even to the ends of the earth. It's reached as far as Malaysia. It's even reached as far as Australia.

As the gospel has gone out, that message of sin, righteousness and judgment, pointing to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The spirit will also have a ministry to the disciples.

[20 : 26] And we understand through them also to the believers. Jesus says this in verse 12 and 13. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.

But when he, the spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. This is the third time Jesus refers to the spirit as the spirit of truth.

And this is a kind of a way of saying the truthful spirit, the spirit who tells the truth. And that only makes sense because he's standing in, of course, for Jesus, who said, I am the way, the truth and the life.

Jesus, the spirit continues the truth bearing, the truth telling ministry of Jesus beyond. The spirit, he says, Jesus will guide the disciples into all truth.

The verb means assist someone in acquiring information or knowledge, in acquiring understanding. We could maybe just nuance the translation a little bit and say when the spirit comes, he will guide you in all truth.

[21 : 35] The idea being that sometimes this verse is read as the spirit will guide you into new truth. When what Jesus means is he will guide you in the truth that you already know.

He will, if you want to use the word, use the preposition into, we might say he will guide you into, deeper into the truth. Rather than into new truth.

And we'll see why in just a moment. What that's saying is that as we come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we are now in the realm where truth lives.

And we explore and we go deeper into that truth that we understand. The point is that we get not so much a new truth, but a guidance into a truth that is already established by Jesus.

The disciples had heard much that Jesus had said. They're going to be reminded of those things and they're going to be taken deeper into those truths. Jesus says all truth.

[22 : 39] And this is an unlimited possibilities for us. We should, we, and there is a guidance into that truth. We don't grasp it all, all at once.

But it's a growing and a learning and an understanding that builds up and builds up and builds up. Someone described the Gospel of John as a kind of a puddle that a child can splash in and a pool that an elephant can swim in.

So at one level, as soon as we understand the message of the Gospel, we understand it all. If you want to live, come to Jesus. Any child can understand that. But you will have the experience, and I hope this has been the case through these sermons, as you hear, that the more you hear the Scriptures, the more you realise there is to know and to understand, the deeper there is to go.

And that's the work of the Spirit, to take us deeper into the truth that is there. We have that experience often of returning to a familiar passage and seeing a new truth.

That is the work of the Spirit within us. What we are to do is to keep a firm hold on the truth that is revealed to us. Where is it revealed? Well, for us, it's in the Scriptures.

[23 : 50] For the disciples, it was the word of Jesus. They're responsible for the Scriptures. We keep a firm hold on the truth revealed in the Scripture. And we are taken, as we say, deeper into this.

The Spirit speaks only what he hears from Jesus, Jesus tells us. He will not speak on his own, verse 13. He will only speak what he hears, and he will tell you what is to come.

It's an interesting passage. The Spirit doesn't speak off the top of his head. The Spirit doesn't innovate. The Spirit is like that perfect person who only speaks what they are told and repeats it and does it completely accurately.

And there's an interesting line of revelation. Jesus himself says he only says what the Father has told him to say. Jesus then passes that on to the Spirit, and the Spirit passes that on to the disciples.

It's like a chain of communication from Father to Son to Spirit. Jesus reveals the Father, and as the Spirit reveals Jesus, the Father is revealed. It's all of a piece, as you would imagine, with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit working together.

[25 : 03] And he unfolds for the disciples the implications of his teaching. This is not a promise initially to us directly.

This is a promise initially to those disciples. We benefit from this promise by the words of Scripture that the disciples respond to. We are not responsible for inspiration.

And also, the Spirit does not inspire us to new truth. The Spirit rather illuminates the truth that is already there for us in the words of the Scriptures. This will be the ministry of the Spirit to us there. The Spirit leads us into all truth, not different and new paths, but the old paths, the truth that is in Jesus. And that's what it means when Jesus says he will tell us what is coming.

This is not a prediction about the future so much, but what the Spirit is going to do is help us to understand what is coming. What's coming? Well, the kingdom's coming.

[26 : 09] Judgment is coming. The kingdom of justice and peace is coming. The one who is king, judge, and saviour is coming. The Spirit guides the disciples to understand this.

And as the disciples do this, they will also help us through their word to understand what is coming. We know what is coming, the kingdom of God, but we will understand it and we will take it on board and it will affect our present life as the Spirit works in us.

In verse 14, Jesus makes another important point about the Spirit. He will glorify me. The Spirit's ministry is what is sometimes called a spotlight ministry.

The Spirit shines a spotlight on the Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit doesn't shine a light on himself. The Spirit instead shines a light on the Son, on the Son of God.

He gives glory to God. He gives glory to Jesus. Some people talk about the Spirit as being self-effacing. He doesn't like talking about himself, but he does like talking about Jesus.

[27 : 28] And so this is a very important point for us to kind of think about as he testifies to bring Christ glory. So we have those two ministries to the world.

The ministry of bringing about this conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment. And this ministry of guiding the people of God through the word of the disciples into the truth that is known.

What can we say about these things? How does this kind of respond for us today? Well, the first reflection is that we now live in a better time to be. I don't know what you think about our times, but our times in the plan of God, this is a great time to be because this is the age when the Spirit indwells the people of God.

The departure of Jesus means that his presence is not tied to a single place or time. What a wonderful privilege for the disciples to spend those three years in the first century with Jesus in time and in space.

But now because Jesus has gone and the Spirit has come, we all are indwelt by the Spirit. We have the abiding presence of God with us.

[28 : 47] We have the Spirit who is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of Christ dwelling within us and amongst us, assuring us that we are the people of God and all the wonderful benefit that comes at that point.

This means we look forward and up. We don't need to look backwards. Sometimes I catch myself thinking, wouldn't it have been wonderful to have lived when Jesus lived at that time and to have been a disciple?

And I'm sure that's true. But I need to hear this passage and understand that I still have the abiding presence of Jesus now. By his Spirit, Jesus is with me. And that is an absolute assurance that no matter what is going on in this world, Christ is with us.

Following Jesus is to live in the Spirit. In fact, the Spirit going magnifies Jesus' presence amongst the people of God, where all the people of God are indwelt by the Spirit and caught up in the life of the Father.

This is important because in our times, talk about the Spirit can either be underemphasized or overemphasized, depending on church traditions. Some people say, in my church, in the Anglican Church in Sydney, we don't talk enough about the Spirit.

[30 : 03] And we often accuse other churches of being so focused on the Spirit they forget about everything else. One can often be a reaction to the other. But Jesus' teaching here helps us to see that the Spirit should neither be assumed nor exaggerated.

We should not just assume the Spirit. We should thank God for the Spirit and all that that makes possible and seek to live the life of the Spirit as the New Testament tells us, to follow the Spirit's leading into the truth of Jesus and live the way that he would have us live.

But at the same time, we need to understand that the Spirit's ministry is to draw attention to Jesus and to spotlight him.

And so we should also be faithful to the work of the Spirit in our speech and action by focusing our attention on the Lord Jesus. And this applies to the second point I want to think about, which is just,

I've called it, testing the spirits.

Many voices in the Christian world today claim to be speaking from the Spirit. And they often claim to be bringing new teaching, new directions, that the Spirit of God is now taking us this way or that way.

[31 : 18] And often it's a way that the world kind of approves for one reason or another. How do we tell if a church is genuinely following the Spirit's leading?

Well, Jesus gives us a very clear fundamental principle here at this point. We test what they're saying against what we already know of Jesus and his teaching.

The Spirit is not an innovator. He does not go off on his own. The Spirit speaks what he is told to speak. The Spirit is putting a spotlight on the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is magnifying the message of Christ. He's talking about sin and righteousness and judgment, pointing people to the glory of Christ and the kingdom that's come, the word of the apostles and scripture.

All of these we should be using to test the spirits. Sometimes it's very tempting when someone comes to you and says, God told me or the Spirit told me, to think that therefore it must be true.

[32 : 21] But in 1 John chapter 4, we're told that you must test every spirit to see whether it is in fact the Spirit of God. And here Jesus gives us the principles to equip that.

Final reflection, God's mission and us. What the Spirit is doing in convicting the world of sin and righteousness and judgment is really carrying on the ministry of Jesus, which is the mission of God. What's that mission? God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son in word and sign, and in order that whoever believes in him might not perish but have everlasting life.

Here Jesus helps us to see that one of the essential elements of that mission is the message which convicts the world of sin and righteousness and judgment.

And then comes the offer, the offer of the world, or at the same time as we offer the world the death of the Lord Jesus, those things are exposed.

[33 : 27] And both the cure and the problem are offered at the same time. One of the implications of what we're reading here is that this will be, it reminds us again of our mission.

As the Spirit testifies to the world, we are invited to participate with the same gospel. As we speak and as we live, we will be highlighting the world's unrighteousness, challenging the world about sin and judgment, offering the world the remedy that comes in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church becomes an extension of the love of God in the power of the Spirit and his mission to the world and we need to think, how can we participate? And I know you as a church are very much doing that.

So what we need to do then is to both hear and respond to the word of God this morning. Jesus has said that it is for your good that I'm going away.

He said that to the original disciples, but we can hear that as a word for us as well. It was good that Jesus went away because that meant his mission was completed and the next phase, the phase of the Spirit, the giving of the Spirit could come.

[34 : 44] And not only was that for our good, but that was also good for the disciples, for the world, sorry, around us. As we are led into all truth and as we proclaim that truth, this will be of benefit to the world that absolutely needs to hear that truth.

So as we finish and as we think about this, let's thank God for the ministry of the Spirit to the world because we were once maybe part of that world and the Lord woke us up and brought us out of that.

Let's thank God for the ministry of the disciples. They were led into all truth and we benefit from the truth that they were now led into. And it is, we thank God for the Spirit for his ministry to us and all of that means in the Christian life.

But at this point, being able to be taken deeper into the truth of Jesus itself. All of this combines to help us to know Jesus better and points us to his kingdom that we may point others to that kingdom as well.

Let's pray and ask that the Lord will help us to do that. Father, we thank you for the treasures that are in your word. We thank you for this particular treasure that we've examined this morning.

[36 : 05] Thank you that Jesus did go and thank you that he sent his Spirit. Thank you that all believers are indwelt by his Spirit. Thank you for the work of the Spirit in the world to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment.

And in that conviction stands the possibility of salvation. Thank you that the Spirit led the original disciples into all truth and through their record in the scriptures, we too can be led and live in that truth.

Father, we pray that you'll be helpless to be faithful to the teaching that we've heard this morning, to be grateful, to hear and to respond and to take your word to a world that desperately needs to hear it.

We pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.