

## The Spirit's Ministry in Jesus' Absence

John 16:5-11

Mark Batterson wrote a book about following the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The title of his book sounds a little strange to our ears. He entitled *Wild Goose Chase*. We think of a "wild goose chase" as some pointless or fruitless endeavor. But Batterson points out that Celtic Christians referred to the Holy Spirit as "the wild goose." Much like a wild goose, the Holy Spirit cannot be "tracked or tamed." Much like chasing a wild goose, if you follow the Holy Spirit you will go places you never imagined. They envisioned the Christian life as a life of mystery and adventure and danger.

By contrast, if we're honest we sometimes view the Christian life as safe and boring and static. Mark Batterson is the one who said, "I wonder if churches do to Christians what zoos do to animals" (i.e., making them tame and lethargic when they were created to be a bit wild and dangerous). But what if following Jesus really is like chasing a wild goose? What if we were meant to live a life that is mysterious and adventurous and at least a little bit dangerous? That conviction would change the way we relate to God and would give us a sense of anticipation as we go through our days.

This morning as we continue our study of the Farewell Discourse, we are going to see how Jesus described the ministry of the Holy Spirit in His absence. After Jesus went back to the Father, He would send the disciples the Holy Spirit. In our passage for today - John 16:5-11 - Jesus explains one of the core things the Holy Spirit would do in His absence. He explains how the Holy Spirit would work in the lives of people to show them their true spiritual condition.

Remember that Jesus would shortly give His followers the assignment of making disciples among all the nations. They (and other apostles such as Paul) would be risking life and limb as they went across the known world teaching about Christ. This mission was a lot more like chasing a wild goose than sitting in a cage in the zoo. What Jesus communicates in this passage about the Holy Spirit is relevant only when we keep this mission in mind.

Here at Faith we talk about this mission in terms of helping people come to Faith in Christ and then to experience God in all of life. If we are whole-heartedly pursuing this mission, then we'll find great encouragement in what Jesus tells us in this passage about the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

***The Holy Spirit convicts us of our condition. (16:5-11)*** As we live our lives, Jesus wants know that the Holy Spirit is actively convicting us and others of our true condition. This is something Jesus did while on earth; the Holy Spirit continues this work in His absence. As we read verse 5, remember that when Jesus says He is "going to the Father" that He was going to the cross first. He was leaving His disciples in order to die as their substitute.

5 “But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me,  
‘Where are You going?’ 6 “But because I have said these things to you,  
sorrow has filled your heart.

Technically, Peter had asked, “Lord, where are You going?” in John 13. But Jesus’ point in this passage was that none of the disciples were truly concerned that Jesus was going to the cross. He was about to face an agonizing death, but they were mainly concerned about their own loss (“sorrow has filled your heart”). Their sorrow was legitimate, but they were blind to the sorrow Jesus was about to experience. This illustrates how sorrow can make us self-centered; it doesn’t have to, but it often does.

Jesus points out that His departure actually held great advantage for the disciples:

7 “But 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.

In the old covenant the Holy Spirit would come upon individual people for specific purposes for limited amounts of time. By contrast, God promised that in the new covenant the Spirit would dwell permanently in the life of every believer. Here Jesus tells the disciples that it was to their advantage that He go away because He was going to the cross to establish the new covenant. Sometimes it is called “the new covenant in Christ’s blood.” Only after Jesus “went away” to the cross would the Holy Spirit be sent permanently to the disciples.

What Jesus says about the Holy Spirit’s work in the following verses is vital for us to understand so that we will recognize His work when it happens - both in our lives and in the lives of others.

8 “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

The Spirit “convicts” the world in the sense of “convincing people about their own guilt” in three specific ways. The Spirit doesn’t convict people in order to condemn them. The Spirit convinces people of their guilt in order to expose their need for a Savior. Jesus is describing how the Holy Spirit draws people who are in the world into the Kingdom of God.

First, the Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning **sin** “because they do not believe in Me” (v. 9). By definition, people in “the world” don’t believe in Jesus (in the sense of believing that He is the sinless Son of God who died on the cross for their sins). In order to believe in Jesus, people first need to be convinced of their own sin. That’s exactly what the Holy Spirit does.

This is more than merely believing that “nobody’s perfect.” When the Holy Spirit convicts you of sin, you come to the realization, “By the things I’ve thought and said and done, I have offended God Himself.” This is a personal realization that “I have sinned against God and on my own I have no way to make it better.” You may think that this is a horrible conviction to have, but it’s really not. If a doctor gives you a diagnosis and tells you that there’s no cure, that’s horrible. But if a doctor gives you a diagnosis and then says, but there’s a cure, it’s not so bad. If the diagnosis is sin, there’s good news: Jesus provides the remedy for sin. He died for sin.

Second, the Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning **righteousness** “because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me.” Since Jesus was going to the Father, the Holy Spirit would now take over from Jesus this function of convincing the world concerning righteousness. It’s possible that Jesus is saying that the Spirit would convince people about His/Jesus’ righteousness. But since the term righteousness is parallel to sin in the previous verse, I think it’s better to understand that the Holy Spirit will convince people that their own righteousness (or goodness) is deficient. Jesus spoke about a type of deficient righteousness in Matthew 5:20 when He told His disciples that they needed a righteousness that surpassed that of the scribes and Pharisees. The Pharisees they thought that they were righteous because they meticulously kept the Sabbath laws and faithfully brought their sacrifices to the temple. But Jesus pointed out that their righteousness was deficient because they had no compassion for people who were weighed down by sin and disease.

Jesus assures the disciples that the Holy Spirit would continue this work of convicting people concerning righteousness. Years later the Spirit did this work in Paul’s life, for example. After coming to Christ, Paul looked back and admitted that the righteousness he had based on the Law was insufficient; he considered it rubbish in light of the righteousness that he had in Christ.

I think in our day people commonly have a type of righteousness based on comparison. People say, “I may not be perfect, but at least I’m not a hypocrite. . . or a murderer.” On the Adolph Hitler/Mother Teresa scale of righteousness it’s better to be closer to Mother Teresa. But the Spirit makes people see that the issue really isn’t our standing in relation to other people; the issue is our standing before God. The Spirit show us that because of our sin, none of us has righteousness before God.

The Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning **judgment**. The Spirit convinces people that their judgments concerning spiritual realities are fundamentally wrong. Once again Paul’s experience illustrates this point. Before Christ his judgment was that Jesus and His followers were God’s enemies (who should be put to death). But the Spirit convicted him that just the opposite was true: Jesus was the Son of God and His followers were friends of God.

Jesus says that the Spirit convicts the world concerning judgment “because the ruler of this world has been judged.” Here Jesus anticipates how Satan would be defeated by His death on the cross. In 12:31 Jesus said that by His own death “the ruler of this

world” would be “cast out.” Whereas the cross looked like a judgment on Jesus (“He is being judged for His sin. . .”), it was in reality the defeat of Satan. Because of Jesus’ death on the cross, Satan’s days of influence in this world are numbered.

***The Holy Spirit does this deep work of convicting people of their true condition.***

There are at least two reasons why it’s vital that you and I understand this work of the Spirit. First, this knowledge will help you understand what the Holy Spirit is doing in your life. If you’re not yet a believer in Christ, this passage tells you up front what God wants to do in your life. The Holy Spirit doesn’t want to convict you on sin, righteousness, and judgment to condemn you. If that’s all God wanted to do He never would have sent His one and only Son Jesus to die on the cross for your sin. No, the Holy Spirit wants to convict you so that you see your need for Jesus. Once you see your true condition, you’ll be ready for the life that Jesus offers. You simply have to accept His payment for your sin; you can never earn it or deserve it. You simply receive it by faith.

I’m tempted to say, “I dare you to invite the Holy Spirit to show you your true condition,” but my mother taught me not to dare people. So I’ll just challenge you to take the risk and invite the Holy Spirit to do what only he can do. When I first started hanging around a group of believers when I was a sophomore in college, I had no idea about the deep things God was doing in my life. Eventually the Holy Spirit made it very obvious that I was sinful, that my righteousness was deficient, and that I had misjudged spiritual truth. I was sort of a smart kid and I had all sorts of arrogant views about God and heaven and hell and all sorts of things. I thank God that the Holy Spirit showed me my true condition. I have to say that the Holy Spirit has continued to show me these things for the past thirty years.

Second, this knowledge of the Holy Spirit’s work should fill us with anticipation about what He is doing in the lives of others, in the lives of the people we care deeply about. If you’re a believer and you care deeply about others, you will naturally want them to experience the life you’ve experienced in Christ. But sometimes we have so very little faith that our friends will come to Christ because we feel like it’s up to us to make something happen. But as we talked about last week, we’re merely called to be witnesses - faithfully and transparently sharing our experience with Christ. As we are witnesses, we need to know that the Holy Spirit is the One doing the deep work of showing people their true condition.

George Hunter III makes the point that in the western world today, the typical church tends to ignore two populations year after year: 1) those who aren’t refined enough to feel comfortable with us, and 2) those too “out of control” for church people to feel comfortable with them. To me that suggests that churches tend to think in very human, sociological terms instead of dreaming about what the Holy Spirit might be doing in their city. But one thing that’s clear from reading the gospels is that the most unlikely of people tend to respond to the good news about Christ - sinners and tax-collectors, lepers, those who were blind, etc.

I really think that this is a matter of faith for us. We need to believe that the Holy Spirit still does this same work in the lives of people today. Too often we assume that our experience will be the opposite of what this passage teaches. We assume that the Holy Spirit probably wouldn't do anything very mysterious or adventurous or dangerous in and through us. We are living in the days of fulfillment that Jesus was teaching about! We need to believe that the Holy Spirit still does this work of showing people their true condition in our day and in our city and in the lives of the people we know and love.

Believing that the Holy Spirit is still doing this deep work in the lives of the most unlikely people, can restore a sense of mystery and adventure to our lives. We will enter into honest relationships with people who need Christ - not because we're "supposed to" or because we "have to" but because we're chasing the Wild Goose, we're following the promptings of the Holy Spirit. When we do that, our lives are no longer predictable and not necessarily safe.

When we come to the the Lord's Table we are to remember what Jesus accomplished by His death on the cross. Through His death on the cross, Jesus inaugurated a new covenant/relationship with God. One of the things the Holy Spirit does in the new covenant is this deep work of convicting people concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment. As we eat the bread and drink the cup, let's consider how we can live in light of the Spirit's work in people's lives.