

Reading: John 16:1-16

Theme: The blessing of Christ's absence!

In the upper room that Thursday evening, the Lord Jesus said much to His disciples and here in chapter 16 we have seen the Lord make **1. The remarkable predictions** in v2ff, but He did not leave it coldly at that, but gave **2. Reasons for these predictions** - so they would not be offended, go astray (v1); and they could remember He told them of such things (v4) for them to realise those things were foreseen and could be expected.

Yet those things would have hurt, confused the disciples, especially as Jesus had said on a number of occasions He was going away (13:33; 14:3). It was a dark and gloomy picture Jesus set before His disciples - hatred, trouble, persecution, even death and worst of all, He would not be there with them!

Imagine how we would have felt! It doesn't take much to upset our little lives, get us down, grumbling and want to pack something in. Often, we can get into a rut, something seems so hard, even impossible and we see no way to do it. I feel the disciples were like this. All the comfort and encouragement Jesus had given them was ignored, but He knew their hearts and lives had been filled with grief and sorrow because of the things He had said (v6).

Earlier they had questioned Jesus about where He was going away to - as if He was going out of Israel to another country (13:36, 14:5). Yet Jesus had told them He was going to the Father (14:28), but they failed to grasp this, nor did they question or realise what it would mean for Him or for them for the Lord Jesus to return to the Father who sent Him!

All the disciples saw and felt was the pain and heartache of their Master leaving them to face a hostile, aggressive world on their own and they had great sorrow. Sometimes in our Christian life, all we see is hardship, difficulty, denying ourselves and feel our weakness, proneness to temptation, to falling and we are filled with sorrow, wishing - as did the disciples - that Jesus was physically here and we can go and speak with Him, be with Him.

Like the disciples needed to, we are to pause a moment and learn what the Lord Jesus says here about His going back to the Father who sent Him, for we see as our 3rd main heading:

3. The revealed blessings. (v7ff)

At this point, Jesus starts to open up and reveal the blessings and benefits of His going to the Father. They were concerned for their lives, their missing Him, not having His company, presence, guidance or help. They did not want Him to go away - even to His Father, for they wouldn't see Him any longer.

Yet in His wisdom, love and tenderness, Jesus knew it was the best thing He could do for them. He told them so and did so in an emphatic way - "*I tell you the truth...*" Amplified version says "*I am telling you nothing but the truth*" - He emphasises that He, Himself, was really, truly telling them the truth and it was for their good, it was expedient, for their advantage, benefit, profit that He was going away.

Have we ever paused to consider the benefits of Christ returning to the Father? I suspect if we were honest, we'd like to have been with and seen Jesus and be like the disciples of old - not wanting Him to go away from us. Yet Jesus' words here, are as true and as relevant for us in our day.

It was good, expedient and profitable that He went to the Father. Here we see there is an amazing blessing, benefit and comfort in the physical absence of the Lord Jesus Christ! The Lord Jesus shows the disciples and us, that unless He went away the Comforter, Counsellor, Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, would not come to the people of God. I am going to look at 2 main areas of blessing, benefit that is spoken of here - the 2nd one is obvious, the Holy Spirit's coming and working. The first major blessing is:

A. Christ's absence.

In clear terms, it was better for His disciples and us **not to have** the Lord Jesus actually walking, talking and moving about here with them or us on earth! This point is also applicable to the Ascension, but the Lord Jesus brings it in here to comfort and to encourage His disciples! He had spoken of His departure, of the suffering they would go through and now to encourage and comfort them, He again reminds them of His going to the Father and that it was for their benefit and blessing that He went away!

The disciples must have felt that the personal presence of Christ with them was indispensable. Without His physical presence, they felt the work, the movement He had begun would end. Jesus was rightly the centre of their affections, of their unity. How else could a former traitor to Rome (Matthew), live and work alongside a former nationalist fanatic (Simon)? It was because of Jesus. Who was it that helped them, did great miracles, taught wonderful things? It was Jesus. Without Him there, they and the work would not exist and their brotherhood would soon fail.

Before they met Jesus, they were little people, unknown and insignificant. Now they were known and talked about nationally. All knew they were men of influence and going somewhere because they were Jesus' right-hand men. Yet in the light of all this, Jesus says to them and to all believers "*it profitable that I am going away...*" This caused me to ask the question in what ways was and is it good that Jesus is not here with us physically? Let's try and answer something of this question:

Firstly: Jesus' influence.

Imagine if Jesus was personally still on earth - all the good He could do. He is the world's greatest blessing, yet imagine if He had stayed here on earth and was able to go around the world, especially in our technological age, He could perpetually, constantly be going around the world healing, teaching, bringing peace and even end the coronavirus pandemic, even all suffering!

It would be great if He came to our town or area. Maybe we could get to meet Him and it would be fine, but His influence will be limited because of His physical limitations. Because of that His influence would be diminished as He would be here or there physically.

Having someone great near to us could cause indifference for we knew them so well, we become blind to their greatness and familiarity and it could breed contempt! Physically the Lord Jesus was not a magnificent specimen of humanity - no form or comeliness, He was eventually despised by the people of His own generation, who set Him at nought, as nothing and undesirable.

Christ's physical absence gives us the blessing, benefit of reverence. Yes, one day we will see His glorified humanity - it will cause us, at the one and same time an overwhelming pleasure, ecstasy and an awesome terror, but if we had His actual bodily presence now, would we be impressed to any great degree?

Because Christ is absent physically, His influence is the greater, for we do not focus on the here and now, on the physical, on the need or desire for the actual bodily presence of Jesus. The physical presence and influence of Christ would lead to a parochial and temporary comfort - when He is with us it would be wonderful, but when He moved on ... Or if Jesus remained in just one place, all believers would congregate there and not be salt and light the world over. Now believers are in the physical body of Christ i.e. the Church and we are to be His mouth and hands to tell of Him and to show His love.

As it is, by His Spirit, Christ's influence and presence is with all His people throughout the whole world at the same time. Where 2 or 3 are gathered in His name, He is there in their, our midst even now. That is His real and true promise - He is here now in His person and Being. We may not recognise it or feel it, but that is the reality and truth. As are the times when we meet around the Lord's table and remember Him as precious, for He draws near in that also. It is a means of grace, as is our meeting together to worship Him and hear His word - I pray we are looking forward to be able to do that again.

These things help us to grow in knowledge and love of Him. If Jesus was on earth, His bodily presence would have hindered that growth in grace. Yes, we would have seen Him and loved Him, but we would have been tied to our senses, to being thrilled

when we saw Him, downcast when He went away or spoke of it - the disciples were like this! It is better for us - we are told we are more blessed in 20:29 – Jesus’ words to Thomas.

If Jesus was still on earth, people would follow Him about the world - He drew crowds while He was on earth and they were excited, hopeful - although not always following for the right reasons and that could occur again.

Now He is physically absent, we have an unrestricted spiritual relationship. We can draw near to God anywhere, any place and any time. We can know His comfort, help and presence even in the dark troublesome times. If Christ were on earth, we would want Him to be with us there and then, but due to real physical confines, He could not be physically there at all times e.g. Lazarus’ illness and death - even though Jesus knew about it, He was not there. Now He has gone to His Father, He is able to be with us, to never leave us or forsake us and is able to help and keep us, His children, in whatever situation we are in. He is able to draw near to us and help us.

Consider prayer - if Jesus were on earth, we may have had to go and actually speak to Him, but because He has ascended on high, we have a great High Priest seated in the heavens - a position of power, authority and ability, yet He is touched with the feeling of our infirmities and all His children can go to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Christ was on earth, if He had not returned to His Father by the glorious route of Calvary, what temporal blessings we would have known - great and marvellous, but we would have no hope of eternal life and eternal blessings. We are not to just view

Jesus' going away as an incredible ascension to His jubilant coronation, but His going away involved, of necessity, the cross, His death, His being made sin, being the bearer of our sin and its deserved wrath of God. He became the propitiation for our sin and so made an atonement.

For the disciples to have Jesus always with them was wonderful, but they would have died one day and died without their sin being atoned for; died under the wrath of God. This is why it was good, profitable, expedient for us all, that Jesus went to the Father, in the way planned in the council in eternity - He was the substitute for us sinners to bring us to God.

To have Jesus' physical presence remain on earth, as great as that would be, is exactly what the devil wanted in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness - when he offered Him all the kingdoms of the world, as if the devil said *"Be content with that, see the good You'll do, the blessings the world will have by Your company. Avoid the cross and all it will involve."* As we know, Jesus rejected it from the devil and even rejected it when His dearest friends were breaking their hearts because He was going away, even by such an agonising way!

Without Jesus going away, our knowledge of God and His grace would be minimal, partial. The Spirit's coming fully opened up the plan of grace and salvation, He magnified the fame and the name of our God and Saviour. Then full salvation, so rich and free could be proclaimed to all the nations

It's right we all question if we know this risen, ascended and glorified Saviour as our own Saviour. Perhaps you see the Son of God only as a man and set Him as nothing; but I urge you to look again and see the Lord God, God the Son in full true

humanity, who went, by the way of the cross, to His Father after He had accomplished all that is necessary to rescue you and me from our sin, its guilt and condemnation.

One day Jesus will return to this earth in all His glorified, exalted, almighty being - manhood and deity both working fully and harmoniously in one person. For His people it will be glorious, but for those who have never believed on Him it will be their worst day ever. We are to think on these things as unbelievers and believers alike. We are to realise that as Christians we face a hostile world, but there are blessings, benefits to encourage us - the Lord Jesus has returned to His and our Father; He is not limited in power, influence, ability or regarding His presence with us and in addition to that He has sent the Holy Spirit, Who is with His people and is still fulfilling the role and work He was sent to do - in both the world and in the Church. Next time we will go on to take a look at the **presence and the work of the Holy Spirit**. Until then I pray we would know by experience His gentle and gracious working in all our lives - to either bring us trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, or if He has done so, to continue to help us go on in our love and lives as we live out this glorious relationship with Jesus day by day.