

Reading: John 16:1-16

Theme: The Holy Spirit's Presence and Work.

When I was a teenager a favourite television series was "Mission Impossible" where impossible missions were given - told on a tape recorder which would self-destruct after so many seconds! It's now a successful series of films and recently Mission Impossible 7 has been filming in North Yorkshire. Jesus told the disciples about their mission after He went away and it was to carry on His work and teaching and how those they spoke to would maltreat and even kill them. It must have felt like mission impossible! Yet we have the same mission impossible to a world that doesn't want to know our Saviour.

Last time we saw Jesus show the blessing of **1. His absence** as He went away to the Father and we saw some areas of blessing. We move on and see:

2. The Holy Spirit's presence and work.

Thankfully the Lord Jesus did not say that it was good He went away and leave it at that! At this point we move onto another area of blessing that comes to us as a consequence of our Saviour going away - the Holy Spirit's presence and the work - sent by the risen ascended and glorified Saviour (v7b).

If the Lord Jesus had not gone away as He did, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Counsellor could not have been sent in the way He was. We need to be careful we do not misunderstand what the Lord Jesus is saying here. **He is not saying** the Holy Spirit was not in the world or believers before His outpouring at Pentecost. Even in Genesis 1:2 we see the Spirit hovered, moved over the waters and He is mentioned a number of times

throughout the OT. Understand in OT all believers from Adam to the disciples i.e. all those under the OT dispensation, were brought to saving faith by the work and person of the Holy Spirit. Also, He gave gifts, equipped people for service in many ways throughout OT. As people believed and trusted in God through OT ordinances, they were given faith by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Yet when Christ finished the work the Father sent Him to do, on His ascension and glorification, the Holy Spirit could be poured out with great power upon all the nations of the world. The Holy Spirit came at that time to fully apply Christ's saving work and no longer was it through the types and shadows of OT sacrifices. Now the Holy Spirit could apply directly the atoning work of Christ and the gospel message of free and full salvation in through the person and work of the Lord Jesus to people from all nations. Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:33 shows that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, came about as a result of all Jesus had done.

Jesus said that when He had gone to the Father, the Holy Spirit would be sent. He would come in such a way, so that it seemed as if He had never been in the world before. People speak of Pentecost as the birthday of the Church; personally, I feel they are wrong as the Church is the people of God through all ages who have come to Him by faith, and I feel that Adam and Eve were saved and we will be in heaven! Yet at Pentecost, it advanced, came to age in a glorious way as God's Spirit fell in great power and the great and glorious message of the gospel would be proclaimed to all people.

The disciples were not on their own to face a hostile, antagonistic world; nor was their work a mission impossible, for God the Holy Spirit was sent to be with them. Jesus had already told them of Him, but here He teaches of the Holy Spirit and His supernatural work in more detail, of His equipping believers and transform the world through their testimony.

There are a number of things to note here. The Holy Spirit is termed the Comforter, Counsellor and this word is Paraclete - the one who gets alongside to provide that which we need - strength, help, comfort. He is sent by the Son as is emphasised here. The Son, in His ascension and glorification is authorised, has the right to do this which is in accord with the Father's will. So, the Father also sends the Holy Spirit (14:16 & 26) as does the Son (15:26; 16:7). This means the Holy Spirit comes with a double commission and authority to believers. I have touched on these things before, but they are important things to realise and remember as we go on to look at the twofold work or mission of person of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is revealing blessings of His going away - blessing of His absence, but especially the comforting powerful presence and work of the Holy Spirit. His work can be looked at in two main areas:

First area - In the world: these things may be obvious to many, but to some it may not be so and I feel I need to break things down into parts so we can follow the teaching of Jesus. It also helps my understanding and prevents me from imposing my own ideas on what I would like the text to say!

I want my ideas shaped and fashioned by what God's word says.

These verses are not easy to deal with, especially in modern times when people so readily polarise over the person and work of the Holy Spirit. Bishop JC Ryle wrote on these verses *“The difficulty of rightly explaining the wondrous sayings of our Lord in this place is undeniably very great. It may well be doubted whether the full meaning of His words has ever been entirely grasped by man, and whether there is not something at the bottom which has not been completely unfolded.”*

When I read words like that, I want to give up! If men of greater godliness, learning and wisdom have struggled, what hope do I have? The hope I have is the Holy Spirit - these verses speak of and His help and aid. As I've prayed over and thought on these verses, it was with a conscious dependence on the Holy Spirit to help and guide my thoughts in my preparation for preaching.

These verses tell us of the ordinary and continuing work of the Holy Spirit. Yes, there are extraordinary works of the Holy Spirit and we read of many of these in the book of Acts, but the things these verses speak of what are termed the His “ordinary work”; but we are not to consider them as lesser, or of no importance - for they speak of the supernatural, almighty, sovereign works of God the Holy Spirit.

It would seem that v8 is a summary of what is enlarged on in v9-11. Before we look at the specifics, I want us to just open up the summary in v8 and lay before us the basics and go on to see of the specifics next time and how they are all tied

together. There are 3 areas of the work Holy Spirit mentioned in v8, like 3 circles each equally overlapping each other so they have various emphases, yet one common area.

The common area of the Holy Spirit's work **in the world is to convict it** -says NIV, ESV and NASB; the KJV says "reprove" in its margin "convince" (as does RSV). The Greek word is difficult to translate using only one word in English. In the NT it is used 18X and translated in KJV as reprove (6), rebuke (5), tell one's fault (1), convict (1) and convince (4). The NIV translates it as expose, show one's fault, rebuke, prove guilty, convict, convince and refute.

One scholar, (Don Carson) suggests that the use of the Bible makes of it, it means "*to bring someone to acknowledge their personal guilt.*" Archbishop Trench, who was a Bible language expert, says it implies "*rebuke with good effect*" that is "*to bring sin home to the conscience.*" The Greek word used (ελεγχω) indicates that the Holy Spirit will rebuke, reprove, drive home the truth that people have done wrong, fall short of God's standards. The Holy Spirit will convince them of that personally, they are responsible for it and will convict them concerning their own guilt. This is His great work in the world - to bring someone to acknowledge their personal guilt concerning sin, righteousness and judgement.

None of the apostles could do this on their own - they needed the work of the Holy Spirit. Neither can we do this work of conviction of guilt. We are to remember all the world is dead in trespasses and sin, has darkened minds, hearts and understandings concerning the things of God. We cannot, nor could the apostles, so proclaim our message with any amount

of passion, force, reasoning or tenderness to cause a person to see their state before God.

No amount of moving preaching, fine words and oratory can change a hostile persecutor like Saul of Tarsus or a gentle religious woman like Lydia and make them a Christian. Some preachers think they can do so by their fine words, by generating emotional responses, or manipulating the meeting by psychological means. They start off by assuming they can bring anyone to Jesus at any time by moving them to have the right emotional reaction or by using rational arguments. Yet no person can produce new life in anyone else. For all men and women, boys and girls are spiritually dead and blind to God; they need more than an emotionally charged or rationalised invitation. They need the work of the Holy Spirit to convict, convince, reprove them of their own sin, judgement and righteousness; to give them new life and faith.

Some people refuse to preach the gospel as a free offer to whosoever will believe, because they say it's not right to do so unless they see, recognise the work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. Personally, I feel a balance is in between - preach the gospel, make gospel promises, commands and invitations known and the God who ordained the preaching of His word, can, through the foolishness of preaching, by the power of the Holy Spirit, take that word and use it in a person's life.

We need the Holy Spirit to do this work. I like the NIV's translation which catches the force of the Greek "*He will convict the world of guilt*" as it emphasises that the guilt of people will be exposed, made known, convict concerning sin,

righteousness and judgement. There will be this public exposure of guilt before God and the Lord Jesus and will be done in 3 areas specifically - concerning sin, righteousness and judgement. We will look at these terms as they occur in v9-11 next week.

The disciples were facing a hostile, aggressive, indifferent world - the ones they went to initially were those who had Jesus killed. Yet they are assured of the blessing of the Holy Spirit's presence and work - He would bring about within the Jewish world initially, then within the Gentile world, the conviction of the guilt individuals have before God. He, the Holy Spirit would deal with those who opposed Christ and bring them to own their guilt. Take a look at Acts 2 - v23 their sin is shown, in v22 & 33 Jesus' righteousness, v34 judgement. The result was v37 - the people cried out what they should do and 3,000 were converted!

Sadly, many today will preach, saying something like - we are not complete, we need to be fulfilled, know joy, have meaning for our lives. These things are true, are part of the wonder of salvation, but primarily the good news of the gospel has first of all, bad news! It tells us we are sinners, guilty and condemned before God and can do or say nothing to help ourselves. Then it points us to God and His provision of Jesus - who can save us from our sins and their consequences. Have we realised something of our own personal guilt before this holy God? If so then the Holy Spirit has worked in us, or is working in us to bring us to Christ.

The Holy Spirit is at first the Special Prosecutor - doing His primary task in the world as in v8. Yet when that work is done,

He changes places and He acts as our Advocate and points us guilty ones to our only hope - our sin and its guilt can be dealt with by the righteousness of God revealed in the Lord Jesus, that He bore the judgement we deserved and paid the price for our sin.

The work of the Holy Spirit in convicting of sin, righteousness and judgement can always be distinguished from the accusations of the devil. The devil will bring us low, break our hearts and keep us there, always looking back at our failures and faults. The Holy Spirit will break our hearts bring us low and then point us to Christ, to all He has accomplished for us and of our glorious hope and comfort in Him.

Perhaps I've overemphasised this point, but in a generation of easy believism, raise your hand, say these words and you are a Christian; I feel that many could be deluded as to an experience, or an emotional thing they had and they are blindly going to hell, for, sadly, there may never have been a true work of God the Holy Spirit in their lives. I would ask us all to honestly question our own experiences in the light of this verse. Do we know anything about the conviction of our own sin, an exposure of our own personal guilt before God? Without this, we will not see Jesus as the Saviour we need and He could be to us just an emotional top up, a psychological crutch or someone to meet our desires and wants.

We are not to despise the convicting, rebuking, correcting work of God the Holy Spirit. This is a vital part of His work in the world, in people as individuals. Next week, God willing, we will move on and look at v9-11 in more detail.