

Reading: John 16:1-16

Theme: The Spirit's specific working in the world.

What things the Lord Jesus showed the disciples - hard things to take in - He was leaving them; but He also encouraged them and showed the blessing of His physical absence and then the wonderful blessing of the presence of the Holy Spirit's person and work - whose work would go on in a twofold way in two separate areas, yet each area would affect, interact with the other area - these two areas are Holy Spirit's work in the world and in the church.

We are in the area of the Holy Spirit's work in the world. Last time we saw v8 was a summary of His work when He came in the fullness of His power to apply the completed work of Christ to the world. This work is to convict the world of its guilt in regard to sin, righteousness and judgement. As we move on into v9-11 we will see the Lord Jesus opens up on what He said in v8 – then principles given, now details filled out – let's see 3 points:

1. He will convict of sin (v9)

It is not by accident that the Holy Spirit's first work is of convicting, of bringing the world and individuals within the world, to acknowledge their personal guilt of sin. Jesus enlarges on the Spirit's work by speaking of His convicting, convincing ““of” (AV) or “in regard to” sin (NIV) (v8). It is not just regarding the fact of sin, or righteousness or judgement, but the word used in Greek (περι = about, concerning, on account of, because of,”) links us to the cause why the Holy Spirit does this work - because, concerning or in regard to that particular sphere. He does these things in churches too – our church and lives as believers, as and when it is needed - for we are prone to wander and leave the God we love!

Here in v9 Jesus says they will be convicted in regard to, because of sin, because they do not believe in Him. Think about what the world around us would class as sin - open and vile crimes e.g. murder, rape, abuse of children or old people; robbery, violent crime, pushing

drugs etc. Maybe, some would add other things to their list of sin - not caring for animals, or the planet, not being green, being eco-warriors or eco-friendly... I guess we could add many things to the list. Yet if we probe and ask people if they have done sin, they may not like the question, may wriggle, squirm a bit, perhaps own up to some things, even justifying themselves - because no one is perfect!

The world, society does not realise what sin is really like to God. Even we who own Jesus as our Saviour, do not really see the exceeding sinfulness of sin. The world without Christ is blind to God, the things of God and most certainly cannot understand God and Jesus' words and teaching on sin, or understand their personal guilt or their deserving of judgement. They often and rightly say, that they are nice, moral people, are good and kind - we and people would agree with them. Yet God sees past all the surface of their lives to their true state – in sin, lost and condemned. They are ignorant by choice, by their spiritual blindness of this sin and guilt and their personal guilt to this God whose holiness they cannot begin to grasp. The world in its unbelief is contentedly ignorant of its need, going on happily, blissfully happy it does not need saving or rescuing from something that does not bother them.

Yet as the Holy Spirit comes, He deals with them; convicts, convinces them of the personal guilt of their own sin before God. As the apostles witnessed and preached, many were converted - for they were cut to the heart and owned the guilt of their own sin. As we witness, preach, realise that as people are saved, it is not because we were so clever or wise to convince them, but that God the Holy Spirit comes and does His sovereign work and it usually begins with conviction of sin - one's own personal sin and guilt.

All sin has its root in unbelief in a person's heart "*The fool says in his heart there is no God*" (Psalm 14:1) and is so often worked out, lived out in lives. If there is no God, then everything is relative and we can do as we want. Yet as the Holy Spirit works, He convicts of

sin, even this sin of unbelief in Jesus –a startling thought - for if we do not believe on Jesus, we are guilty of doing the chief sin – for if the greatest good, the most right we can do is to believe on the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, then not to believe must therefore be the worst, the greatest sin we can do and it is the crowning sin of all sin!

This convicting work of the Spirit has many forms - convinces a person that they personally have done wrong in God's eyes, even by the standards of men; sin is filthy, making us a stink to God; we are convicted that our lives and innermost beings are the source of our sin and we stop blaming others, realise our own personal guilt and accountability before God. We are shown the guilt of our unbelief - despite having had many blessings and privileges.

The work of the Holy Spirit is not vindictive - "*See how rotten you are, you are a pathetic creature...!*" Not at all, it is a gracious and kind work, its purpose is to bring young and old to realise their need, to turn them to the Saviour and stop being ruled and dominated by the world. Have we seen anything of our sin and our guilt before God? Have we turned to the Lord Jesus as our Saviour? It is so important. Moving on we see:

2. He will convict of righteousness. (v10)

The Holy Spirit will convict the world of righteousness because Jesus went to the Father where the disciples then, and we now, cannot see Him. Looking at this verse, I feel this conviction is applied on 2 levels - both of which are interrelated. The first level concerns Jesus' righteousness, the righteousness of God in Him and the other level is that of our own righteousness.

The world, then represented by the Jews, was getting ready to crucify Jesus even as He was speaking and they had said He should die. They placed Him with criminals, outcasts. He was put out of the city as wrong, as unrighteous, as a sinner, He was hung on a tree and viewed

as a curse under their law. The blind world will never see any real lasting or true good in Jesus.

Yet those who feel their sin and guilt with God, begin to view Him as they never have before! They will see someone who is perfectly righteous and holy. Convicted sinners will sometimes feel hopeless because of God's holiness and righteousness - Martin Luther struggled for peace with God and he felt his own sin and his lack of righteousness even more!

On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came in power, Peter pointed the people to Jesus - His exultation in heaven and the fact He was owned by God the Father as righteous. The people Peter preached to, felt their guilt for killing and denying the holy one of God who had gone back to the Father. The work of the Holy Spirit is to convict of Christ's righteousness to a world that is indifferent about and against the Righteous One of heaven.

Yet interacting with that is the conviction of our own righteousness. Yes, you heard me correctly, **our own righteousness** I did not say our own **un**righteousness. Our unrighteousness is brought home to us as our sin is exposed to our gaze. What is more devastating, is to have our righteousness exposed - all that we boasted of as our good points, that which we think would give us favour with God! As Jesus' righteousness is shown us - all His perfections, all His glory at the Father's right hand, we begin to see our own righteousnesses as dirty and shameful at best! Jesus quoted or alluded to Isaiah often and here it is felt Jesus is referring to Isaiah 64:6 where all our righteousnesses are compared to filthy rags in God's sight. Hebrew uses some expressive words for sin, unrighteousness. One word for filthy is linked to excreta (dirty nappy), but this word is more graphic "menstruous cloths" - in OT such were **ceremonially** defiling, unhygienic and separated a woman from public worship. It is devastating when Christ's perfect righteousness shows all our righteousnesses as filthy rags.

This is what the work of the Holy Spirit involves. The apostles, nor we, could convince anyone of such. People will feel that they are never as bad as that! Only the Holy Spirit can take and apply these things to the hearts of people and convict people like us of our guilt concerning our filthy righteousness.

Amazingly, the Holy Spirit uses ordinary people, young people to bring this message to the lives of others. The world can never see Jesus, yet by faith **we** have seen of Jesus - His righteousness and holiness. This means we are to show the reality of the Lord Jesus in our lives as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit, so that we are make an imprint, an impact on this world. We will make an impact by not living or behaving like the world, but by living and being like Jesus in the world! Our Saviour Jesus is to be our example, our model and pattern for our way of living, reacting and behaving. While that would seem a mission impossible, we are not on our own, for the Holy Spirit is with us and He will take from what is of Jesus and make it known to us.

This verse teaches us much; also, it challenges us as we may be all that people will ever see of Jesus. Will our lives challenge them by its righteousness because we follow Christ? The Spirit also deals with the world as we learn:

3. He will convict of judgement (v11)

As the Holy Spirit carries out His work, there will be a sense of judgement, condemnation. Not only in a general sense in the world. but in a personal sense – that our individual guilt deserves judgement. Jesus also says that this will occur because of the prince of this world now stands condemned, judged.

We can grasp the first part of the verse quite easily because of sin, because God is righteous and there will need to be judgement on mankind. This should strike fear into the hearts of those who could

face God in their sin, even in their own 'righteousness'. Until God the Spirit convicts a person personally of the reality of this, then people go on unaware to the forthcoming disaster - like the Titanic, going on at full speed into the waiting disaster - unaware of any danger, but enjoying and distracted by the wonderful things around them.

There is a judgement for us all - as individuals we will have to give account to God. For unbelievers it will be the great Assizes and eternal condemnation will be pronounced; for believers there will be the judging of our building work on the foundation of the Lord Jesus. As believers are not excused from living a godly life - by simply saying that we are saved and have no worries! Yes, we will be saved, but we are urged, called upon to build with gold, silver, precious stones and not any old wood, hay stubble. While we will be saved and there will be no diminishing of our joy, yet we are to see how much more we could have had and should have done for so lovely a Saviour.

When the Spirit shows us, we are going to be judged, even though in our unbelief we are condemned already (John 3:18). It is a solemn thought, that in this meeting, or watching online, are those who are saved and justified by grace alone, also those who are lost and condemned now at this moment. Have we realised anything of our state before God? If we are not a believer – we are as dead men and women walking, with the sword of God's judgement held back from us by a very fine thread - our next two heartbeats!

For many people what I've said about the Holy Spirit, is totally different to what they would say - for they would emphasise that He is here to make us joyful, happy, give us constant highs in the Christian life, to be there to cause us to do all sorts of things **we say** are right; to give us a range of spectacular gifts. They would disagree that He makes people feel dirty, rotten, helpless, feel sinful and under judgement. They would ignore this passage which presents the

Spirit's primary work in the world! Even as God's people, we lapse into coldness, sin and indifference. Yet the Holy Spirit will do such a gracious work in us as He shows us again our Saviour, His love, yet also our sin, our failure to live holy lives, as well as reminding us of the judgement our Jesus took in our place, but we may be living as if He did nothing for us. Remember He is the HOLY Spirit and we are to live holy lives.

The Lord Jesus goes on to say the Holy Spirit will convict of judgement **because** the prince of this world is judged, literally "*has been judged*" and here Jesus is speaking of the post-Pentecost work of the Spirit. The world is governed by the devil, he holds sway in peoples' hearts and lives. Yet the world in its blindness follows him, owns him and his upside-down ways as the true and God's ways as the false. In His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus triumphed, took principalities and powers, nailed them to His cross and triumphed openly over them. In doing so He condemned the devil and his demons, showed their time was short and their doom sealed.

Mankind was in the grip of a strongman, the devil, but One mightier has come and wrenched off the prison doors, has proclaim freedom to the captives and sounded the warning that Satan's tottering rule was ending - the end of the beginning had come and it was a matter of time before it was all ended. All who are on the devil's side are also warned that their leader is helpless, hopeless and unable to delay that hour of condemnation and judgement. As such, they too will suffer the same judgement as the devil and his demons.

Judgement will come upon a world that keeps on clinging to the advice, ways of the devil in condemning and hating Jesus. The devil was exposed by Jesus' triumph at the cross. Those who follow the devil are doubly exposed. Again, this is a gracious conviction, to bring those ones to see and feel their need of the Saviour - as the One who took our sin and its guilt, who will give us His righteousness and turn away our judgement from us and onto Himself.

As the Holy Spirit does this convicting work, He does so to point us to the Lord Jesus. Yes, He will come and expose our guilt in regard to sin, righteousness and judgement, but He then shows us Jesus and says only He can remove our sin, give us Jesus' righteousness and remove eternal judgement from us. He points us to Jesus as the One, the only One who we need and who can do us eternal and true good. In our conversion experience, something of these things will be present. For some it may be predominantly our sin is felt, for others our righteousness is seen as nothing, for others it is the fear of hell and judgement – or all three could be present. The Holy Spirit will treat us as individuals. For young people brought up and sheltered from sin and sinful influences, there may not be a great crisis as could occur in someone from an immoral, wicked background, but the same Holy Spirit will be at work and the same miracle of God's power and grace is needed to save us whether we are moral or immoral sinners.

Salvation is a great sovereign work of God. We are not to ignore, diminish the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. If you are someone who has never known anything of His work in this way, then can do so even today. How ever we are converted, be thankful for such a Saviour who sent such an almighty, gentle but powerful One as the Holy Spirit to do such a work, to enable us in our mission impossible as we too seek to spread the gospel as we tell of our Saviour Jesus.