

“The Work of the Holy Spirit”

John 16:5-33

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We continue this week with our study of Jesus’ final instructions to His eleven disciples. It was the night of His arrest. At this time, they may have left the Upper Room and were walking to the Garden of Gethsemane. They didn’t realize that within hours, Jesus would be suspended on the cross, bringing an end to His earthly, human body. Yet, His concern was for His disciples - to prepare them for what would soon take place.

In this lesson, Jesus:

- Predicted His departure
- Explained the Holy Spirit’s ministry
- Pronounced that sorrow will turn to joy
- Encouraged prayer to the Father
- Proclaimed His Victory!

The passage opens with these words from Jesus: “But now I am going away to Him who sent me, and not one of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ Yet, because I have spoken these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.” (16:5,6) Were they afraid they would have to fight the world without Him, even though He previously promised He would not leave them as orphans? Some commentators feel they were so focused on themselves that confusion and sorrow dominated their thoughts.

Have you ever wondered what it would be like if Jesus was still on earth? Having risen from the grave, He would have a glorified body that could pass through closed doors, suddenly appear anywhere, such as the bedside of a loved one or sitting on the couch with you as you watch TV. Perhaps He would appear on talk shows where He would clarify doctrinal disputes, unite political parties, denounce abortion and confirm there are only two genders.

Do you remember the “WWJD” bracelets? WWJD stood for, “What Would Jesus Do?” The bracelets were to remind those who wore them to consider what Jesus would do in whatever situation they would encounter. Wouldn’t it be better if Jesus were here so we could ask Him directly? We can. Although He no longer physically walks this earth, He is still present with us by His Spirit whom God chose to send us.

Growing up, did your parents ever say, “This is for your own good”? In our house, those words usually preceded something like a vaccination, or having to wear glasses, but mostly we heard those words before a well-deserved punishment. Mom would also say, “Now this is for your own good” just before she put Mercurochrome on our cuts to prevent infection. Mercurochrome burned and left brownish-red stains on skin and clothing! It’s amazing we didn’t get mercury poisoning from how much she used! We could have literally severed an arm and Mom would have slapped some of that stuff on the bloody nub and sent us back outside to play, but... not before she blew on it, which only added more germs!

Jesus told His disciples it was for their benefit that He leave them because if

He didn't, the Holy Spirit, whom He called, the Counselor, in verse 7 and the Spirit of Truth, in verse 13 would not come.

When Jesus was on earth, He was confined by the limitations of His earthly body. His human nature meant He could not be everywhere at once. But there are no limitations with His Spirit. And if Christ had remained bodily with us on earth, our faith and spiritual maturity may have limited the depth of our reliance on God the Father. There would be a great temptation to walk by sight, and not by faith. But for Jesus' disciples, forty days after His **visible** presence departed, His **invisible** presence appeared at Pentecost.

Jesus then taught them about the ministry of the Holy Spirit: "When He comes, He will convict the world about sin, righteousness, and judgment. About sin, because they do not believe in Me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see Me; and about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged." (16:8-11)

The Greek word used here for *convict* means both to *convict* and to *convince*. The Spirit convicts and convinces the world of its greatest sin – the unbelief in Jesus Christ. To unbelievers, the Holy Spirit is the counsel for the prosecution but to those who believe in Jesus, He is our "advocate" or "helper".

Jesus Christ said:

- "Whoever believes in [Me] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." (John 3:18)
- "If I had not come and spoken to [the world] they would not be guilty of sin. Now they have no excuse for their sin. If I had not done the works among them that no one else has done, they would not be guilty of sin." (John 15:22)
- "The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him." (John 3:36)

The Spirit Will Convict About Sin

Sin is a departure from God's holy, perfect standard of what is right in word, action and thought. Conviction of the Spirit is like a doctor when he touches on a sore spot and says, "This is where the problem is." "The Spirit calls sin a sin because He wants us to confess it and be cleansed." (Pastor Adrian Rogers)

People don't go to hell just because of swearing or stealing or adultery, or drinking, but for rejecting Jesus. They could quit all their sinful habits and still be lost without Him. It is the unbelief and rejection of Jesus for which the world will be convicted - *guilty*.

The Spirit Will Convict About Righteousness

A second area of the Spirit's ministry is to convict the world about righteousness - a term the Old Testament often calls, "holiness." God's holiness is the only perfect standard to which all thoughts and actions are judged. "When the Spirit holds that "divine straight edge" of God's righteousness up to our life, we see how crooked and how far short we fall from the perfect righteousness of Christ!" (preceptaustin.org)

Jesus' ascension to heaven demonstrated He fulfilled the Father's will and proved Himself righteous, exposing the **lack** of righteousness in the world that rejected Him. "[God] is going to judge the world in righteousness by the Man He has appointed. He has provided proof of this to everyone by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:31)

"The work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians convicts unsaved people because their message radiates Christ." (Kenneth Gengel) For example, have you experienced something like this? You're speaking with someone and they curse or tell an off-color joke but then they catch themselves and apologize in some way. Perhaps they're somewhat ashamed or embarrassed because they've seen righteous behavior in your life. That is a conviction of the Holy Spirit.

Empowered by the Spirit of God, the believer is a living example to the world – the way we live, how we talk, our priorities, etc. "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

The Spirit Will Convict About Judgment

A third area of the Holy Spirit's ministry is to reveal that through Christ's death and resurrection, Satan has already been judged and condemned. While Satan is temporarily the ruler of the world, the Spirit warns of his future final reckoning between him and God. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Word says: "Jesus disarmed the rulers and authorities [of spiritual darkness] and triumphed over them through the cross." (Col 2:15) and "... only by dying did [Jesus] break the power of the devil, who had the power of death." (Hebrews 2:14b)

The Holy Spirit's ministry is to convict and convince the world to see the nature of sin, the need of righteousness, and the certainty of judgment. He is the Advocate for God and raises God up as the standard of what is perfect and holy.

Even after the three years they spent with Jesus, there were still things He could not tell His disciples. He said, "I still have many things to tell you, but you can't bear them now." (16:12) He told them only as much as they could handle. Scholars believe it was because the disciples did not yet have the indwelling Holy Spirit and also that God teaches truths *as we need to know them*.

For example, when teaching a child math, you don't start by teaching them "every non-constant single-variable polynomial with complex coefficients has at least one complex root"! You start gradually, working up to more advanced math. I was always nervous about my math exams knowing my chances of passing were only 40-40! Even Paul told the Corinthian church there was a time he had to feed them milk, not solid food, for they weren't ready for it.

"God reveals as much as we can understand and there's no end to His revelation. He did not stop speaking when the last book of the Bible was written. He is still revealing His truth to men. (William Barclay) So too, is God's revelation a gradual process. He teaches us what we are able to learn at the time.

Another work of the Holy Spirit is that He guides us: “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come.” (John 16:13)

Sometimes, I am directionally challenged. Once I got lost walking in my sister’s neighborhood and had to call her to “guide me home.” No disrespect to the working of the Spirit, but His work has been likened to being like our spiritual GPS. When we get turned around and confused, He “recalculates” and guides us when we take a wrong turn, helps us avoid dangerous construction zones or dead-end streets, shows us another route and gets us moving in the right direction. Additionally, when it comes to correctly understanding God’s truth, the Holy Spirit leads us to understand Scripture.

As One Person of the Trinity, whatever the Spirit hears the Godhead speak, He will speak. The Spirit **cannot** have a different message from the Father’s and the Son’s. The Triune Godhead are inter-dependent, always in harmony and in agreement with one another.

Another ministry of the Spirit is to glorify the Son, thus glorifying the Father. Jesus said, “He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and declare it to you. Everything the Father has is Mine.” (16:5) This expresses Jesus’ deity and oneness with His Father. He is the Son of God and the things of the Father are also the Son’s. “All the gifts of the Spirit, all the preaching and all the writing of the apostles, the tongues, and miracles, were to glorify Christ.” (Matthew Henry)

In continuing His discourse, Jesus told His disciples something they couldn’t understand. “In a little while, you will no longer see me; again, in a little while, you will see me.” (16:16) These words were specifically meant for His eleven disciples and referred to His imminent death, burial and resurrection. They asked each another, “What does He mean? We don’t understand.” (16:17,18) Jesus had told them before that He was leaving, but they were still in the dark. Perhaps they were confused still expecting Jesus would be a military Messiah King and He still had to get rid of the Romans.

In the flesh, Jesus’ earthly body and human life **would** go away. Yet, on His resurrection day, in His glorified body, with the marks of His crucifixion still visible, His disciples would see Him again - alive! “In 40 days, on the Day of Pentecost, the reality of His words would transform their lives.” (Jeff Swaney) Through His upcoming death, resurrection, post resurrection, ascension, and with understanding given by the Holy Spirit, the words He spoke **would** become clear.

Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice. You will become sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy.” (16:20) Jesus was preparing His Eleven for profound grief when they would witness Him suffer and die. Yet, there would also be great joy. Here, the Greek word for “joy” means *joy that follows great sorrow*. Jesus likened the sorrow they would feel when He died and the joy they would feel when He was alive, to the experience of a mother at childbirth. It’s been said that childbirth is one of the hardest pains to bear, but the easiest to forget.

A birthing coach told a newly pregnant woman that labor pains would be like “slight pressure.” The woman’s more experienced friend said, “Slight pressure? Sure - just like a tornado might be called a gentle air current!” You’ve heard of mid wives but do you know why there are no “mid husbands?” The following statements from women who gave birth with their loving husband in attendance, gives us a clue:

- During their baby's delivery, a wife saw her husband with his face pressed up against the television in the hospital room. When asked what he was doing he told her he couldn't hear his program over her screaming.
- In the last few minutes of childbirth, a husband asked his wife, "Do you think you can hold off pushing until I go grab some breakfast?"

A new dad summed up childbirth: "Women do this more than once?!" Yes! Because the pain a mother experiences is followed by overwhelming joy for the birth of her child. The mother may not literally lose all memory of childbirth pain, but the joy of her newborn outweighs memories of the pain. Well, except when you give birth to a 10-pound 6 ounce bouncing baby boy like I did!

What causes a mother anguish, then gives her joy? Her baby. What would cause the disciples' sorrow, then joy? Jesus! "God does not replace sorrow with joy but transforms our sorrow into joy." (William Barclay)

Jesus told His disciples, "You have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will rob you of your joy." (16:22) On that very Friday, Jesus would be taken from them. However, to quote a song by the gospel artist, Carman, "Sunday's On the Way!" "Jesus showed them the wounds in His hands and His side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord!" (John 20:20) The believer's joy can never be taken away.

Charles Spurgeon had an interesting insight on the disciples' sorrow and joy: "It is most remarkable and instructive that it does not appear in the apostles' sermons or epistles [that they spoke] of the death of our Lord with any kind of regret. The gospels mention their distress during the actual occurrence of the crucifixion, but after the resurrection, and especially after Pentecost, we hear of no such grief."

The principal theme of the next few verses is prayer. Jesus said, "In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in My name. (16:23) Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete." (16:24)

Until His final teaching, Jesus had not taught His disciples to specifically pray *in His name*. To pray *in* the name of Christ means to pray in harmony with His will and His nature. For example, if someone cuts you off in traffic, you're not going to pray, "Father, in Jesus' name, please let that guy get a ticket." (Well, ok, maybe *I* have a *couple* times!). We can't expect God to give something contrary to His will, or His glory. God's Word and the Holy Spirit teaches us how to pray in conformity with God's character:

- "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:33)
- "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:2)

It is in Jesus' name that we ask and receive. Pastors John MacArthur and Bob Utey agree that asking in Jesus' name is not simply tacking His name on the end of our prayers to ensure its success.

We're to pray in the will and character of Jesus Christ, to affirm our dependence on Him to supply our needs, and that He be glorified in the answer.

Jesus continued: "I have spoken these things to you in figures of speech. A time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but I will tell you plainly about the Father." (16:25) Because of their spiritual immaturity, Jesus often used figurative language, symbolic images and parables to get His message across. But after His resurrection, the Holy Spirit would guide them to understand His mission and teachings.

"Before the cross, the disciples were unable to fully grasp the profound significance of the Son's work of redemption. But when the Spirit comes at Pentecost, they would understand more fully about their Heavenly Father." (John MacArthur)

Jesus continued: "On that day you will ask in My name, and I am not telling you that I will ask the Father on your behalf." (16:26) When the curtain in the temple was torn in two, it symbolized we have a direct access to Almighty God. After Jesus' resurrection, ascension and the coming of the Spirit, the disciples could do what they had not done before - pray directly to the Father in Jesus' name. "We have the heart of God as soon as we place before Him the name of His Son." (John Calvin) Praise God that the following statement from Jesus applies to all believers: "For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came from God." (16:27)

A major theme of Jesus' preaching was of the intimate connection between Himself and the Father. "I came from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father." (16:28) It's necessary for **our** relationship with the Father that we believe in His Son. "It is the work of God to believe in the One He has sent" (John 6:29) and "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

Then the disciples said: "Ah. Now You're speaking plainly and not using any figurative language. Now we know that You know everything and don't need anyone to question You. By this we believe that You came from God." (John 16:29,30) What made the proverbial "light" go on making them recognize Christ's omniscience and divine origin? Warren Wiersbe was a bit hard on the disciples when he wrote: "They moved out of their spiritual stupor and made an affirmation of faith." But Wiersbe also added, we're not to be critical, because "we too have just as many blind spots when it comes to understanding His Word."

Jesus responded, "Do you now believe? (16:31) I'm sure scholars of the Greek language would know whether Jesus was commending their faith, or not, but His following words were not flattering: "Indeed, an hour is coming, and has come, when each of you will be scattered to his own home." (16:32a) The Message Bible says: "You're about to make a run for it—saving your own skins and abandoning Me." And soon, Peter would be slashing away with his sword in contradiction to everything Jesus taught them.

Jesus knew soon He would be betrayed, arrested, forsaken, rejected, mocked, humiliated, tortured and executed by those **He** created, yet He declared: "Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." (John 16:32b)

Chapter 16 concludes Jesus' Last Discourse with His disciples. He is hours away from atrocities He will suffer to redeem the world but wanted to comfort His disciples, "I have told you these things so

that in Me you may have peace.” (16:33a) “The “peace” Jesus spoke of here is the confident “rest” believers experience when they set aside anxiety and trust God to work out His will.” (bibleref.com)

“You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have overcome the world.” (16:33b)
From this verse let’s look closer at the words, *suffering*, *courageous* and *overcome*.

In the Greek, suffering is: “*thlipsis*” (most often translated - *tribulation*). Tribulation means extreme suffering, oppression, affliction, distress. I believe if the Lord tarries much longer before He takes us home, more and more of His followers will experience extreme *persecution*, *that is, tribulation*. Jesus did not say His followers **may** suffer - He said we **will** suffer.

And Jesus exclaimed - “Be courageous!” (16:33) In the Greek, “be courageous” is *tharseite* meaning “to trust; to rely on.” In the Amplified Bible, it reads: “be confident, undaunted, filled with joy.” “*Be courageous*” is a **command**, not a suggestion. “The powers of the world are impotent when the “Greater is He that is in you” is with us.” (William Barclay)

In the Greek, “overcome” is *nenikeka* and in the New Testament it always means spiritual victory. Don't miss that when Jesus said, “I have overcome the world” He declared victory even **before** His crucifixion. Believers are also overcomers: “Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” (1 John 5:4,5)

When Yeshua Hamashiach, Jesus Messiah, walked out of the tomb, He conquered, defeated and overcame death. His death brought eternal life for those who call Him Savior. This glorious news must be shared with those who don’t know Him because it may determine where they will spend eternity. Believers will live victoriously in Jesus and follow Him as He leads His victory march!

“The Christian race is the only race in the world that **begins** at the finish line.”
(Jon Courson)

Jesus is the Victor!