

As we read this text I want to remind you that, just like last weeks text, Jesus is speaking prophetically about things that are and things that will be—things which, from the perspective of eternity, already have happened.

John 16:5-11

"But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' "But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. "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. "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

I love the way this passage paints such a precise picture of our humanity and our relationship with God or I should say our general response to God. Too often when God talks to us or starts to do a work in our lives we are so inward focused that we miss the big picture and too often miss the blessing of what God intends to do with our lives.

In ***Chapter 14***, Jesus told His disciples that He was going back to the Father. After 3-years of intense discipleship, where they gave up everything to follow Him, He was just going to up and leave. And if that was not enough, He then says that because of Him those in the world will hate them, persecute them, and even want to kill them. Of course, this was all in the

context of being loved by Jesus, being His friend, and being appointed to go and produce fruit that will last.

But once they heard the negative, out went the good, out went the unbelievable truths, out went the amazing promises, and their minds begin to obsess only on what might happen to them and what their future holds. They don't even pay attention to the fact that Jesus said He was going away; they were just sad. None of them even asked Jesus about where He was going. I would have wanted to know what heaven was like, what He will be doing up there, whether or not the angels have wings and carry big swords and if in their battles with demons whether anyone gets hurt or dies. But nothing; they were just fixated on the fact that He would be gone and they would be hated.

I have found myself in this place many times and many of you find yourselves in a very similar place right now in your life. God has begun His work and is pressing extra hard on you to set you free from some of the areas in your life where He just does not rule—areas that have wrecked havoc on your relationships and have literally prevented you from being able to love others. These are areas that have grown from wounds which you have received in your life and which God wants to heal so that you no longer react from pain but you choose to respond from His love.

And although you know that letting Him have control will be the best decision you have ever made, right now you are stuck in a glass box of emotion and many of you are mad, sad, distressed and upset that God is even messing with you. As a result, instead of cooperating with His work you are resisting His work, which just means that you are going to spend an awful lot of unnecessary time out in the desert, so to speak.

God has even given you some very specific promises or visions for what He has in mind for your life—assignments that He has given you to

complete and those things are totally awesome. But it seems that those amazing promises fade to grey in light of the difficulty of the journey that God must take you through in order to free you from all that hinders you from experiencing all of Him.

But there is one thing I want you to keep in mind, and I have told you this many times, God is extremely patient. *Philippians 1:6* says that if He has begun a work, He will complete it which means that He will wait as long as is necessary for you to choose to let Him have His way with you. So I would suggest that you lift yourself up from the pool of emotions and sadness and focus on the goal: growing closer to Jesus so that when this work is done you will be able to live in His absolute freedom and abide in His love.

The goal is marvelous; it is something I know that we all want. If you set your mind on the goal, and not so much on the methods that God uses, you just might actually experience some life during this time of pressing and not constant dread. I can say this with authority because during my time of great pressing I did not learn to do this until way too far into the experience. Instead, I was constantly fighting God's methods of pressing because I really hated the way He was peeling my flesh away. I thought He should do it differently. Therefore, I fought the wrong battle and I believe I made my time of pressing more difficult than God wanted it to be and probably a longer than it needed to be. It is always far better to cooperate with the work of the Spirit because God is going to complete the work anyways.

I think we find ourselves in this place of despair and hopelessness because we forget that Jesus loves us and all the pathways which He has chosen for us are good (*Psalms 25:10*). We must try and remember that He is pressing on us because He knows that it is necessary in order for us to learn to abide in His love. Therefore, if you stop fighting with Him and embrace what He

is doing, knowing that when it is done you will be satisfied, your transformation will be accomplished before you realize it.

This takes what I call raw faith. You must choose to let His intangible truths invade your tangible reality. In order to cooperate with God you have to believe that He loves you, that He has chosen you, and that He does have amazing assignments for you to fulfill. He just needs to get you out of the way so He can do His work through you, which, of course, is why He started pressing on you in the first place. He just wants you to experience more of Him. We must not be so short-sighted and carried away by our sadness that we do not see the very real and practical blessing that will come at the other end of the journey.

The disciples were very short-sighted. They were overcome with sadness and had a real hard time looking beyond their current circumstances. They did not understand that Jesus returning to the Father was actually a good thing. I am sure they were freaking out wondering how they would handle the hatred and rejection from the world if He was not with them. When He walked before them they could handle anything. They saw Him silence the religious leaders, calm the storms, rebuke the demons, feed the masses and they knew that when things got bad they just had to stand behind Him and watch Him do His Jesus stuff. He always had their front and their back. But what were they going to do now that He was leaving and everyone was going to turn on them?

Instead of sorrow they should have been excited. Jesus' leaving was not just a good thing but a *great* thing. Jesus was going to send to them the Holy Spirit—the Helper—who would always be with them. The Greek word we have translated here as “Helper” can also be translated as: Comforter, Counselor, Intercessor, and Advocate. What an amazing provision for our

lives—the Spirit is like the best friend we could ever have. But what is unique here is the juxtaposition Jesus makes between the role of the Spirit with believers and His role with those in the world.

The Spirit comes to believers and helps us in our weakness, comforts us in our pain, counsels us as we navigate the paths of our lives, intercedes for us with the Father in harmony with God’s own will, and advocates for us against the accusations of the enemy. Our relationship with the Spirit is intimate and very personal. And the best thing is that we are never alone. We never have to abide in those dark places of despair and loneliness in which we so often find ourselves, for the Spirit is always with us and if we turn to Him, He will always console us, fight for us, and lead us to the truth.

But look at His role with those in the world, He does not come to them with any promises of intimacy and comfort; rather, His job is to convict or admonish them of sin, of righteousness, and judgment. With regard to sin, He will not be running around convicting everyone of their personal moral failures (there are already enough “Christians” out there doing that; besides Jesus died for their sins); rather, the sin He convicts people of is their unbelief in Jesus. This is the one fatal sin that will determine a person’s eternity.

Do you want to know how He convicts them? He does it through our belief. As we go through these verses you will see how missional this entire passage is. The Spirit comes to us and lives in us so that we can be the evidence of their need to believe in Jesus. Our belief puts the light on their unbelief. That is why people are so ok if you believe in anything or anyone as long as it is not Jesus. When it comes to our belief in Jesus there is an intolerance that is unparalleled.

The Spirit also convicts those in the world of righteousness (not unrighteousness). I believe this conviction comes on a couple of levels. First of all, if Jesus goes to the Father then it means that everyone else was dead wrong. The so called “righteous” of Israel, the religious leaders, had accused Jesus of being a blasphemer, a follower of Satan, a deceiver and even a demoniac; yet, none could truthfully accuse Him even of a single sin. How ironic it is that after being accused of such horrible things, Jesus goes to be with the Father and the so called “righteous” will go to be with their father the devil and suffer his eternal destiny (*John 8:42-59*).

Second, Jesus says that those in the world will be convicted of righteousness because the disciples (or all true believers) would not see Him any more. When I first read this I was thinking: “what in the world could this be talking about. How does our “not seeing Jesus” impact anyone.” But after staring at this I began to understand how this statement must also be understood in a missional context—Jesus reaching the world through us. Follow me: For God loves the world so much that He sent His Son to die for the world, Jesus loves the world so much that He gave up His own life (no one took it from Him), the Spirit loves the world so much that He convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, and we love the world in that we tell others about Jesus (*John 15:27*). We are the physical representation of the Jesus here on earth (we are His body); therefore, our words and deeds testify to His righteousness.

Consider this in light of the persecution spoken about in last week’s text and the perspective of an unbeliever. Though we have not seen Him we love Him, though we do not see Him now, we still believe in Him. We devote our lives to this invisible Savior and we remain faithful to Him even in the face of total opposition, discrimination, hatred and persecution (*1 Peter 1:6-9*).

This has to freak unbelievers out and totally mess with their minds. They have to wonder how we can do this; it is not even rational.

But our faithfulness to this God which we cannot see or touch speaks of the fact that despite persecution we trust ourselves to Jesus' righteousness knowing that in His time He will bring about His righteous rule. There will be a day when the score is settled and His justice and truth will prevail on this earth. And, because we trust that in His righteousness He will do everything He says, we are free to suffer and even give up our lives for Him knowing that we belong to him; and, if we do die, we will be with Him.

A story which highlights this reality is in *Acts 7*. In this chapter, Stephen is murdered for His faith and none other than the Apostle Paul—before he got saved—was overseeing the execution. But while Stephen was being pummeled with rocks, he prayed: “Lord, don't charge them with this sin!” and with that He died. You got to know that must have seriously convicted those who killed Him. How could this man pray that God be merciful on all those that were willfully, purposefully, and violently murdering him?

Well, the explanation is simple: Stephen trusted Himself to Jesus and the Spirit took care of the rest (which by the way is a promise in which all of us can rest). *Matthew 10:19-20* explains that in those moments of persecution we don't have to worry about what we are going to say because we will be given the right words at the right time, for we wont be doing the talking—it will be the Spirit of our Father speaking through us!

The Spirit also convicts unbelievers of judgment because Satan, the prince of this world, has been judged and if Satan has been judged then all those who are his children will suffer the same horrific fate. Now let me clarify as this might be a bit confusing. When Jesus died on the cross He crushed Satan's power of sin and death and in so doing He gave all of humanity an

opportunity for life. So the cross literally stripped Satan of his power to bind people in sin and death; thus, although he is still called a prince he is in actuality a defeated prince (See *Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14*). Jesus won the battle for the souls of men and Satan has been judged unrighteous and his eternal destiny is suffering upon suffering.

You can actually look at Satan's judgment both from within and outside of time. From outside of time—from God's perspective—it is all said and done. Satan has been defeated and Jesus and His saints are victorious. The view from within time however is a bit different as Satan has been judged but is not yet carrying out his sentence. He is on death row waiting for the beginning of his eternal destiny. *Revelation 20:10* describes the horrors of his sentence which will start at the end of Christ's 1000-year reign on earth:

Revelation 20:10

Then the Devil, who betrayed them, was thrown into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur, joining the beast and the false prophet. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

So how does the judgment convict those in the world? Well Satan's defeat is evidenced in our victory. Again, I think this is very missional and speaks to how we live amongst those in the world. Through the Spirit we are able to separate ourselves from the things of this world. We are able to live as aliens and strangers completely detached from the values, morals, methods, and the self-seeking and prideful system of the devil's kingdom. We are able to live without fear and we triumph over the enemy's plans and schemes to destroy our lives. We can stand behind our shield of faith as it extinguishes every lie

that the enemy speaks. And what is really strange, but also cool, is that we even live in victory over his demonic spirits that carry out his work.

Satan has been defeated and we are the proof. We are not slaves like those in the world and this truth brings conviction to those who are bound by their sin. Why do you think those in the world try so hard to get us to be like them? They are convicted by our very existence. That is why if we don't join them in their darkness they come against us; they can't handle the fact that we have a power and a freedom that they don't have.

So let's summarize this passage. The Spirit convicts unbelievers of the foolishness of not trusting Jesus. He does this by pointing out to them our belief. He brings conviction to their souls because Jesus' righteousness is demonstrated in our lives. When we are submitted to the Spirit we prove that Jesus rose again and now lives with the Father. His righteousness highlights to their conscience their own unrighteousness. He shows them Jesus' perfection so that they can come to grips with their own imperfection. And once they take an honest look in the mirror they cannot help but wonder what will happen to them when they die or what will be the consequence of their unbelief. If Jesus is righteous and they are not, then they will not be able to be with Him in eternity; rather, they will suffer the same fate as all those who reject God. And when they realize that they are condemned and sentenced to the same eternity as their father the devil, there are some who start to realize that there is only one way out of their predicament, there is only *One* who can rescue them from their destiny, and that is the *One* who is both righteous and victorious over the devil—Jesus!

This is the work of the Spirit with unbelievers. He does this work through our lives; thus, He always helps and provides for us everything we need to be His example here on earth.

John 16:12-15

"I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you." All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.

It is so comforting to know that Jesus never gives us more than we can handle. He knows our limitations and never pushes us too far. I know that sometimes it feels that His expectations are far beyond what we are able to handle, but that is simply not the truth. That is a lie of the enemy. He never pushes us too far!

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

Besides, every place He leads us He makes provision. ***Philippians 4:13*** says that we can do all things through Christ that strengthens us. So He is our way of escape and He will be our provision every time we turn to Him. Remember, through His Spirit He will comfort us in our affliction, strengthen us in our weakness, help us when we are unable to carry on and

He will never leave us. So we don't have to fear and we don't have to ever worry that God is asking too much; we just have to continually trust His wisdom for our lives. He is the gatekeeper and the Good Shepherd. He knows what He is doing.

Have you been resisting the work of the Spirit in your life and fighting the direction He is leading you? Do you think He is asking too much of you? Are you tired and worn out and just wish He would finish already? Are you holding on tight to your best friend—the “ME?” Let go; stop resisting! I want you to understand that no matter what you feel, what you think, what you fear, the Spirit is only trying to take you deeper into Jesus. It's just that the pathway to Jesus is 100% opposite from the way you have lived your whole life, 100% opposite from the way you would otherwise naturally think, and 100% opposite from the way you feel. But it is a path you can trust because everywhere the Spirit leads you is in accord with the Father's will for you life.

The Spirit also does not directly force us to follow His leading. The Spirit guides us. He will literally show us the way we should go and the choices we need to make, but we have to be willing to follow. We have to be willing to listen to Him. In fact, we have to be in an ongoing relationship with Him so we can even be aware of where He is leading. But regardless, one thing we can be confident of is that He will always lead us to Jesus—always! The Spirit of truth leads us in truth and according to *John 14:6* we know that Jesus is the truth.

I find it a little odd however that in this passage Jesus makes such a big deal about the authority of the Spirit and even His own authority. Jesus is clearly affixing in our minds the role of the Spirit in the Godhead and the interrelationship between the all three of them. The Father gives all things to

Jesus. This is very important to understand, He does not give all things to the Spirit. The Son is the heir not the Spirit. The Spirit however takes from what belongs to Jesus and gives it to us because as children of God we are joint heirs with Jesus—we get to share all that He receives from the Father. And in the same way that Jesus said that His words were not His own and that He only spoke what He heard from the Father, and in so doing brought glory and honor to the Father, the Spirit only speaks what He hears from Jesus and in so doing glorifies and honors Jesus. It's like when you quote someone as an authority; it gives that person honor and respect in the eyes of others. That is what is happening with Jesus and the Spirit.

But I think that Jesus wants us to understand these interrelationships so that we might be fully convinced that we must trust the leading of the Spirit in our lives. The Spirit does not do anything on His own initiative, but He guides us, comforts us, helps us, advocates for us, and intercedes for us all in accordance with the will of God. Sometimes He speaks to us directly and sometimes He speaks through others in the body of Christ. Either way, Jesus wants us to know that we need to follow His leading for He speaks with authority.

That is why it is important for each of us to learn how He speaks into our lives and how He leads us (even if it is through other people who are in the body of Christ). We cannot guess at this part of our lives—we must know!

I find it interesting, but whenever I talk about hearing the voice of the Spirit in our lives people tend to get a little jittery. I completely understand this reaction. For most people, it is very difficult to discern the difference between the voice of the Spirit and the voice of the flesh. The flesh can at times come across as so religious that we get confused. The flesh is so tricky

and deceptive that it can convince us that what we want is really what God wants. Sadly, I have confused the two way too many times.

However, I think if I was completely honest I would have to admit that I really have not been all that confused between the voice of the flesh and the voice of the Spirit. Rather, there are times when I just don't want to hear what God is saying and I don't want to follow the path He sets before me. I don't like what it means and I really just want to do what I want to do.

In those times, I usually know what He is saying to me and asking of me, but it's too hard and I am tired of my life being so difficult and I just want to take care of "Me" for a while. And for some insane reason, I find the voice of my flesh far more appealing. I don't know why, my flesh has never done me any good. It has never led me to a place of peace and rest—never! It has always just messed me up and left me a wreck. And the absolute ridiculous thing is that it is usually when I am dead set on doing what I want and I am willfully walking in my flesh that I protest the most about not being able to know the voice of God or His will for my life. I guess it's a way to not face what I know to be true and to try and put the blame on Him so I don't have to admit that I have chosen to serve my flesh. It is silly misdirection and completely not genuine.

Jesus sent us the Spirit so that we would not only know His voice in our lives but we would also maniacally follow it. This is not to be a mystery. Jesus is so jealous of us that He does not want us to ever journey down our own paths. He wants us to trust the Spirit. Therefore, If you don't know yet what the Spirit's voice sounds like in your life then you need to make it a priority to start seeking Jesus with your whole heart and let His Word be the ultimate authority in your life. You need to invest hardcore in your

relationship with Him. If you do this I guarantee that you will quickly learn to hear His voice and know His leading in your life. It will be unmistakable!

Too many of us don't trust that He will speak so our first reaction to anything that happens in our life is to turn to someone else instead of the Spirit. He should be our first stop. Yes, He may give someone else wisdom and if that is the case He will lead you to them. But He needs to start becoming your automatic go to person for your life.

If you regularly turn to the Spirit, the distinction between the Spirit and the flesh will become very pronounced. The Spirit always leads in truth and always glorifies Jesus. Our flesh, on the other hand, leads us in lies and very subtle deceptions and our flesh always glorifies the "Me" in one way, shape or form. The voice of the flesh focuses our minds on what we want, when we want it, and the way we want it. The Spirit on the other hand compels our spirit to cry out, Lord, not my will but your will be done. It is a matter of trust.

In closing, I want you to notice that the Spirit will also disclose to us what is to come. In terms of the top level application of this verse, the Spirit revealed to the writers of the New Testament how the events of the end will transpire. With even the most rudimentary of studies we can understand that Jesus will return to this earth and He will establish His kingdom and rule here for 1,000 years. We will come with Him and rule over the nations as His emissaries. And at the end of that time He will crush Satan and bring an end to the heavens and the earth and we will be with Him forever. It is an amazing story. But I believe this verse is not just dealing with the times of the end, but its layers also apply to our lives here and now.

There are times when God, through the Spirit, will speak prophetically and let you know what plans He has for your life. Sometimes He gives a lot

of specifics about what you are going to have to go through and other times He may be more generic, but He often speaks about what lies down the road.

For example, the Spirit let Paul know what was going to happen to him when he went to Jerusalem so that he could set his mind to follow the will of God regardless of the consequences (*Acts 20 and 21*). The Spirit told Paul that He did not have to worry about going to a certain town and assured him that he would not be harmed (*Acts 18:9*). The Spirit told Peter that he would be visited by three men who were gentiles and that he was to go and follow them. This was unusual as it would not be normal for a Jew to go to the house of a Gentile. But in obedience to the voice of the Spirit, Peter went and actually led a whole household to faith in Jesus (*Acts 10*).

God has done this with me so many times. Before He started pressing on my life He told me that He was sending a hurricane into my life and it would completely undo me (*Psalms 107:23-43*). He has also given me many details about what He plans to do with me: *Isaiah 42; 43, 44, 51, 53, 54, Jeremiah 15, Haggai 2, Zechariah 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, Psalm 22, 63* and so many others scriptures that I could list. In addition, He has spoken through others (Linda, Lesley, Peter McGrath, and my brother Eric) about who I am to Him and what His plans for my life are and the purposes for what He has taken me through.

Believe me, if there is one thing that I cannot complain about it is the volume in which God has directly communicated to me through the Spirit. My issue has been my willingness to believe it and my choosing to live accordingly. Instead of focusing on where God is taking me, like the disciples, I have been sad and have missed out on so much peace that God wanted me to experience. He told me about my future so that I would have

HOPE and would even be excited to get on with and finish this journey. But I have been so short-sighted.

The good news (and bad news—depending on how you look at it), is that there is never a short cut around the things that God wants us to learn. We don't get to skip to another chapter. We have to travel the entire course that He has set before us. He was not going to let me move on until I learned 1) to stop obsessing on what I did not have, and 2) to stop living in sadness because of what He was doing. He insisted that I learn to be content with Him and His plans for my life such that I could experience both His peace and His joy in the midst of horrible circumstances. He wants me to trust Him completely and not find any sort of sordid comfort in myself. He has proven that He is so jealous of me and loves me so much and I am finally beginning to learn to appreciate that love.

Can you see now why this gift of the Holy Spirit which Jesus has given us is more than great news, it is phenomenal news. The Spirit is such a powerful provision for our lives. He is truly our Helper and He will speak to you about your life. He is not going to leave you hanging always wondering about your future. He will speak; but the question is, will you listen and will you believe. Trust me when I say that even your ability to hear what He says will come down to your willingness to be separated from your flesh. God knows this and that is why He is pressing on your life. He wants your flesh out of the way! In fact, He insists on it! This is a good thing! This is a great thing!

I encourage you to stop fighting, stop resisting the work that God wants to do in your life. Embrace it! Set your mind on Him and seek all that He has for you. I encourage you to start fostering and developing your relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit by trusting yourself to them,

listening to them, and choosing to believe what they say. They love you—
always have and always will!

Let's Pray