

John 14:15-27
(Ezekiel 36:25-27; Acts 2:1-21)
“The Promised Holy Spirit”

Introduction

Place yourself in the story, and imagine the concern of the disciples: They have left everything to follow Jesus. They have followed him into a hostile city where all of the religious leadership is against them. Jesus now tells them that he is leaving them and that they cannot go with him. They are sick with grief. How can he abandon them now? Jesus' response is astonishing: Don't be afraid. Don't be troubled. It is better for you that I go away than that I remain with you, first, because I am going away in order to secure your future by preparing a place for you, and I will return for you. And secondly, I am going away in order to give you a life of abundance here and now. I am gifting my own life and ministry to you. You will take up my work and do even greater things than I have done.

How can Jesus make such a statement? How could his disciples possibly take up his life and ministry? The words of this chapter are so familiar that we risk missing the *dunamis*, the dynamite of the Spirit's power found here. Yet this promise goes back to chapter one, where John the Baptist testifies that when he baptized Jesus, he saw the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus, in fulfillment of God's promise: "He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." And so, John says of Jesus, "I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God" (1:33-34). What is the significance of this? Jesus' ministry was a display of the same power that God makes available to all who are baptized with God's Spirit. What the disciples experienced at Pentecost was the fulfillment of John's prophecy concerning Jesus.

Jesus is saying this: I have shown you what it looks like when a person is united to God by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Such a person has the very life of God in his soul and is given the task of making God known. As long as I am with you, there is only one person in whom the Spirit dwells in this new and powerful sense. But after I have given my life in payment for your sins, I am going to return to my Father and will then pour out this same Spirit upon all of you. When twelve people, then hundreds, then thousands, and then millions are filled with my Spirit, this world will be transformed in a way that is far and beyond what even the Son of God could do while restricted to a single human life and to the physical geography of Palestine. Jesus says, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another *paracletos* (here translated as 'Helper') to be with you forever." Jesus makes it clear that it is through God's Spirit that he, Jesus, continues to be present with his people: "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (14:16-18).

There is no greater gift that God gives us than his own Spirit. The apostle Paul speaks twice in his letters of the gift of the Spirit as God's *down payment* on his promise to give us eternal life. It is, in fact, the beginning of the experience of eternal life now for the Christian. *Look with me this morning at six things Jesus teaches us in this text about this greatest of all gifts, the gift of God's life in us, the gift of God's own Spirit, the gift of Pentecost.*

Body

1. The Spirit is the one who helps us (14:16).

Paracletos literally means one who is “called along side,” and was used as a legal term for an advocate or counsel. It also meant one who is called along side to bring comfort. Our translation seeks to capture both meanings with the word “Helper.” Jesus is depicted at times in this role as one who intercedes with the Father on our behalf. In our text, the disciples are frightened and Jesus says, “Let not your hearts be troubled... I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” It is in this context that he says, “I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.” The implication is this: All that Jesus has been to the disciples and for the disciples, all of the many ways that he has – in the very deepest and most profound sense – helped them deal with the greatest issues of life, even setting them free from sin and death, all this the Spirit will now be for them – and for us.

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ, and when he comes to us, he brings to us the very life of Christ to live with, in and through, us. As Jesus is now at the Father’s right hand interceding for us, so the Spirit prays for us in our weakness, turning even the inarticulate groans of our hearts into powerful prayers that lay hold upon the promises of God. He is our advocate, our helper and defender.

2. The Spirit is the one who guides us in truth (14:17).

Even as Jesus came to reveal the Father to us, so the Spirit of truth continues to teach us the truth of God. How does he do this? J.I. Packer uses the idea of a spot-light to illustrate: the Spirit turns the spot light upon Jesus much as Jesus turned the spot light upon the Father. “Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me” (14:19). Where the Holy Spirit is powerfully at work, you will not hear constant talk about the Holy Spirit. Rather, you will hear much talk about Jesus, because it is Jesus who supremely reveals the Father. If the Spirit turns the spotlight on Jesus, how does he do it?

He does it first through *inspiration*: Jesus said, “[The Spirit] will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (14:26). This the Spirit did in moving the writers of Scripture to remember and record things that Jesus said and did. And this the Spirit did in moving the apostles to write the wisdom of God in their letters to the churches and to individuals which were then recognized by the early councils of the church as uniquely God-breathed.

He also does it through *illumination*: And thus the Spirit continues to “teach [us] all things” by illumining our hearts and minds as we study his Word, as we meditate upon it and seek his face, until new light breaks forth from the text, and the Spirit “turns eyes into ears” (E. Peterson), and again God speaks by his Spirit to his people.

3. The Spirit is the one who makes us God's children (14:18).

In this sense, he is the Spirit of Adoption. One of Jesus' central teachings was that we are God's own children. Though we are lost in our sin and rebellion against him, he tells us of the prodigal, and of the waiting Father, and of the prodigal's true home and the feast the Father sets at the prodigal's return. He tells us that there is great rejoicing in heaven over the return of just one sinner. It is the Spirit who testifies to our spirits that we are God's children. We are no longer orphans tossed up on the shore of a meaningless cosmos. We are children of the One who made and rules the cosmos. When the Spirit comes, says Jesus, "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (14:20).

But how does the Spirit assure us that we are God's children? It is the Spirit who makes us God's children by baptizing us into Christ. And it is the Spirit within us who testifies to us when we call God "Father" that we are indeed God's children (see Paul's development of this theme in Romans 8:12-17). Those who don't have God's Spirit living in them cannot understand this, anymore than I can understand what you are thinking. Only a person's own spirit knows what the person thinks, and those to whom the person chooses to reveal what he's thinking (see how Paul develops this in 1 Corinthians 2:11-16). Here in our text, Jesus says that when the Spirit comes to us and is in us, then we will know that we are in him and he is in us, and our hearts will be at peace. Thus he is able to end this section by saying, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (14:27).

4. The Spirit is the one who makes us holy (14:26).

Holiness is God's preeminent attribute, the perfection of all his other attributes. It is the way in which he is utterly different from us. Yet, his word addresses his people, saying, "Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44). How can this be? How can we become what we are not by nature? When we adopt a child, we can give that child a new name, a new family, a new future, a new inheritance, a whole new life. But we cannot give that child our genes. We cannot change that child's physical nature. But God can do what we cannot do. When he adopts us, he gives us a new name, family, future, inheritance – a new life. And he gives us his own Spirit, to live in us and begin to bring God's character to life in us.

Here is where the new covenant experience of the Spirit is so different from the old: Satan is now a defeated foe and the power of Christ's victory over death and sin is now at work in God's children through his Spirit. And it is here that many of us profoundly miss the greatest comfort and greatest power offered to us in the gospel, for both comfort and power come to those who seek an active obedience to Christ through conformity to the holiness of God. Paul put it this way: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Of course, it is ultimately the

righteousness of Christ, his own perfect righteousness, that covers us as we are in him, but he wants us to begin to experience even now this life of righteousness and holiness for which he has saved us. And the Spirit who lives in us is the Holy Spirit. Thus, when we are careless about holiness, when we set our minds on the flesh rather than the spirit, when we pursue the old life rather than the new, we may – in Paul’s words – “grieve” or “quench” the Spirit, and may even – in the language of the author of Hebrews – “outrage the Spirit of grace,” and so lose both the power and comfort, the wisdom and joy of intimacy with Christ.

We need, on this Pentecost morning, to examine ourselves closely to see what patterns of thought and what heart affections we may have permitted to supplant the Lordship of Christ and hinder the intimacy with him through the Holy Spirit that is offered to us in the gospel.

5. The Spirit is the one who brings us peace (14:27).

In the world we will have trouble, but Christ has overcome the world (16:33), and he gives us his *shalom*, his peace. Of course, we have peace with God, because our sins are forgiven and the righteousness of Christ is ours. But here, the emphasis is on the sense of *shalom* that is a precious gift of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives. The Lord would not have us always in the grip of anxiety and fear. If the victory is already won in Christ Jesus, if our enemy is defeated and our eternal destiny secured, then we are invited to begin enjoying even now the confidence of those whose future is secure, who have been granted eternal life, and who have an inheritance awaiting them in the presence of God.

What of you? Have you begun to know this peace that Paul describes in these wonderful words: “And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7)? This is Christ’s legacy to us, and another aspect of the Spirit’s ministry to those whom he fills with the life of the risen Christ.

6. The Spirit is the one who brings us God’s love (14:15,21&23).

We would not be faithful to this text if we did not close by underscoring the place of love in all this: Three times in our text, John says words to this effect: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments,” (14:15, 21&23). Love is the greatest aspect of the Spirit’s fruit. Love is the heart of the Law and the motive of grace. *Love is the central theme of Scripture because it is the clearest expression of the heart of God and of the relationship for which he created humanity.* What does Jesus command? “A new command I give to you that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (13:34&35).

What it all comes down to is just this: “God so loved the world that he sent his Son” (3:16). And his Son so loved the world that he sends us out into the world, day by

day, millions of us the whole world over, and says to us, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it” (14:12-14).

Conclusion

What are you daring to ask him to do through you these days? Are you seeking to carry his life to the world, to your family and friends, to those you work with and live near? Has the Spirit of Christ yet begun to stir you with love for those who need to know how dearly God loves them? Then give yourself to that passion and to that calling, and he’ll pour out his Spirit on you afresh, the great Helper of his people, the one who will make us as much like Jesus as we are willing to be made. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever” (14:15-16).