

Help from The Helper

John 16:4-11

I did some clearing in our woods this winter and I got to a medium sized tree that I wanted to take down but it was leaning one way, and I wanted it to fall the other way. So as I studied the tree I thought I could still get it to fall the direction I wanted if I did a notch cut on that side and then a back cut on the other side, so I started cutting. I did the notch cut and started to do the back cut, but instead of leaning toward the notch, like I thought it would, it leaned even more heavily the other way and pinched the chainsaw so I couldn't get it out.

I pushed on the tree as hard as I could, but I couldn't get it to move, so the chainsaw was stuck and I went back to the truck to figure out what to do. As I was standing there, a light gust of wind came and caught the top of the tree, pushed it exactly the direction I wanted it to go, and dropped it perfectly in just the right spot while releasing the chainsaw at the same time. It was amazing, and I was very thankful that the wind showed up to help!

I thought of that story because the wind reminded me of the work of the Holy Spirit that Jesus talks about in our passage today. Last week we talked about our role of bearing witness about Jesus to the world, but we also talked about the reality that if we do that we will be hated and persecuted, sometimes from our very own family members and friends.

Some of you are 1st generation Christians and had to part ways from your family or the church you grew up in in order to truly follow Christ, and because of that you've been turned against or even persecuted by the people who used to be your people. As followers of Christ we have a spiritual enemy who is spreading an attitude of hatred for Christ and Christians in the world, even in the families and churches we grew up in, and as we go out into the world to carry out our mission of bearing witness about Jesus, we are going to face hostility and persecution by people who are blinded by Satan's hatred for Christ.

And that kind of puts a damper on our enthusiasm for carrying out the mission. I don't know about you, but I'm not a big fan of starting conversations

where I might tick off the person I'm talking to. I don't really like stirring up conflict and I naturally avoid those situations. I think a lot of us do. And because of that I think a lot of us naturally shy away from our calling to bear witness about Jesus.

I think the Disciples would have felt the same way, which is why I think Jesus told them the things about the Holy Spirit that we're going to look at today. He said these things to encourage them and I believe they will encourage us too.

After telling them about the hatred and persecution they would face in world because of being his disciples, and that they would be put out of the synagogues and even be put to death, Jesus continued to teach them in John 16 with these words...

Read John 16:4b-7.

"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ Nevertheless, 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.

So he begins by saying he didn't tell them about the hatred and persecution earlier because he was still with them. But now he's telling them because he was going to go to his Father. He wanted them to be prepared and remember his words when the persecution started.

He then says in verses 5-6 that when he told them he was going to the Father, they were so filled with sorrow that they didn't even ask about where he was going. So in verse 7 he tries to alleviate their sorrow by telling them that it would actually be to their advantage that he went away because then he would send the Helper to them. If he didn't go away, the Helper wouldn't come, but because he was leaving, he would send him to them.

So he's trying to comfort them, or at least show the benefits they would receive because of his departure. And as you can see, the benefit he's talking about had to do with the Helper coming to them – the Holy Spirit.

Now, they were not familiar with the Holy Spirit at that point because even though he was in the world, he was not active in the way he would be after Jesus' ascension. The work of the Holy Spirit in and through the disciples would be much more prominent after Jesus departed than ever before. This was a key part of God's plan of redemption and accomplishing his mission of blessing and making disciples of all the nations of earth. So Jesus was teaching his disciples about what the Helper would do.

Earlier that evening, he already taught them a few things. In John 14:16-17 he said: *"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you."* He then told them in John 14:26: *"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."* And then in John 15:26 he said: *"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me."*

So he had already taught them a few things and now he is going to teach them more, especially about the role the Holy Spirit would have among the people they would be bearing witness to. So these are the reasons Jesus gives for why it would be to their advantage that he was going to the Father and would send the Helper to them. If you're going out into the world to bear witness about Jesus and there's hatred and persecution, these are some things you need to know...

Read John 16:8-11.

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

So think about that tree I talked about earlier. That tree wasn't going anywhere and my chainsaw was stuck. I did what I could to accomplish that mission,

but it wasn't enough. That tree wasn't budging. I needed help, and then the wind showed up. The wind did what I was unable to do, and so it is with the Holy Spirit. The disciples couldn't take the hatred and persecution of the world and turn it into faith and repentance. They could only bear witness. They needed a Helper in order to accomplish the mission, and that's what the Holy Spirit would do.

Jesus told them the Holy Spirit would do three things among unbelievers to turn people from hating Jesus to believing in him as the disciples were bearing witness. First of all, he would convict the world concerning sin, because they did not believe in Jesus. So one of the things the Holy Spirit does is brings the conviction of sin in people's hearts who do not believe in Jesus.

I don't know if you've noticed or not, but when unbelievers do evil things, they seem to know they're evil. It doesn't necessarily make them stop, and they might not admit it, but they're aware that what they're doing is wrong. I think Jesus is saying that's the work of the Holy Spirit. That conviction of sin remains as long as a person refuses to believe in Jesus because it's only through faith in Jesus and experiencing the forgiveness of sins and peace with God that the weight of conviction and guilt is lifted. That conviction is something the Holy Spirit does in the world, and it brings some people to Jesus. Without it, no one would see the need for a savior.

I remember my own conversion experience as a young man. In the weeks leading up to my surrender to Christ I had this realization that I was a hypocrite and sinner, living a double lifestyle and deceiving people in my family and church. And the weight of conviction that I felt in the weeks leading up to my conversion was one of the things the Holy Spirit did to bring me to repentance.

That kind of ministry is one of the advantages of Jesus leaving and sending the Helper. Another advantage is that the Holy Spirit would convict the world of righteousness, because Jesus was going to the Father, and the world would see him no longer. This is similar to convicting the world of sin, only now we're on the opposite side of the fence. Conviction of sin has to do with the inner realization of wrong, while conviction of righteousness has to do with the inner realization of what's right. In the same way that people in the world

seem to know what's wrong, they also seem to know what's right, even though they may not agree with it. This is another thing the Holy Spirit does in the world.

During his time on earth, Jesus was the perfect revelation of righteousness to the world, and therefore brought conviction of righteousness to the world, but because he would be ascending to the Father, the world would no longer see him, and then it would be the Holy Spirit whom he would send to fulfill that role. The effect of this conviction is similar to the conviction of sin, because by bringing conviction of righteousness, the world will realize they don't live up to that standard, but fall short. And this too is something the Holy Spirit does to bring people to Jesus and show them their need for a savior.

I certainly experienced this as part of my conversion experience. Even as a 14-year-old I could see that I didn't measure up to God's standard and was in need of forgiveness and transformation. Along with the conviction of sin, it was the conviction of righteousness that led me to repentance and making some immediate changes after surrendering my life to Jesus. That was the work of the Holy Spirit in my life.

Now Jesus mentioned one more advantage that the Helper would bring to his disciples and that is convicting the world concerning judgment because the ruler of this world is judged. Not only do unbelievers need the Holy Spirit to convict them of sin and righteousness, but also that there will be judgment for those who do not repent. Serious, eternal, painful consequences. If there's no judgment or punishment for sin, there's no real need for a Savior.

In the Old Testament there were all kinds of warnings of judgment through the bloody sacrifices that were offered at the temple and then burned on the altar. When Jesus taught during his years of ministry he often warned people of coming judgment. Now, since he was returning to the Father, he would send the Holy Spirit to bring warnings and the conviction of judgment to the world. We see a universal realization and fear of judgment and condemnation in the world today, and that's a work of the Holy Spirit to show people their need for a Savior. Just as Satan has been thrown down and condemned to face final judgment in the lake of fire, humans who reject God's salvation through the person and work of Jesus will face judgment as well.

That was something I realized as a child, and was certainly a part of why I turned to Jesus in repentance. The fear of judgment made me want to get right with God so I would be forgiven and welcomed into his kingdom.

Convicting the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment – these were the advantages the Holy Spirit would bring to the disciples and their ministry in the world, which is why Jesus had to go to the Father in order to send him. I'm not sure how much encouragement the disciples felt right away after hearing these words, but I'm sure that later on as they began their ministry and started to face the hatred and persecution of world, they deeply appreciated knowing that the Holy Spirit was at work bringing conviction and some of those they were witnessing to would actually soften and turn to Jesus.

If you find yourself shying away from bearing witness about Jesus in situations where you could face hostility, I hope this encourages you to keep pressing onward. Like the wind pushing that tree and doing what I was unable to do, the Holy Spirit is moving in people's hearts to bring conviction and repentance. Don't give up. Our Helper always goes with us and uses our witness to turn things around and bring people to salvation.