



HELP FROM ON HIGH

SERIES: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

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John 14:12-31

32nd Message

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Fall is in full swing. The casual summer evenings with nothing to do are a distant memory. Our densely packed lives at times lead us to respond like the Mad Hatter, who, when he was told that the inhabitants of Alice's world had to run very fast to get anywhere, replied, "A very odd world. Here one must run very fast to stay in the same place." A number of years ago, a member of our body mailed me a copy of an article that is always a reminder to me to simplify. It's called *All I Ever Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*.

Most of what I really need to know about how to live, and what to do, and how to be, I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not found at the top of the graduate school mountain but there in the sand box at nursery school.

These are the things I learned: Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt someone. Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Live a balanced life. Learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.

Take a nap every afternoon. When you go out into the world, watch for traffic, hold hands and stick together. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the plastic cup. The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.

Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the plastic cup - they all die. So do we.

And then remember the book about Dick and Jane and the first word you learned, the biggest word of all: LOOK. Everything you need to know is in there somewhere. The Golden Rule and love and basic sanitation. Ecology and politics and sane living.

Think of what a better world it would be if all of us — the whole world — had cookies and milk about 3 o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankets for a nap. Or if we had a basic policy in our nation and other nations to always put things back where we found them and cleaned up our own messes. And it is still true, no matter how old you are, when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.

We all need to work on simplifying our lives. A good way to begin is identifying the important parameters of life, the fixed reference points, the principles that apply regardless of time and location.

I want to have a significant and effective ministry. I am always looking for things that will help me focus upon the important things. Someone has said that 20% of what we do in life brings 80% of the results. This is the focus of our text

from the gospel of John this morning. What do we need to know in order to have an effective life and ministry? As we will see, the answer is really simple.

We have been studying the Upper Room Discourse, where Jesus has been talking to his apostles about his imminent departure. They expressed fears about the future, but he went on to assure them that he was coming back (14:3). In this section of the discourse now, Jesus turns his attention to another matter. He had assured them that their ultimate destiny was secure; they had no need to fear death. But uppermost in their minds was the question, What about life right now? Where would they find the resources to live life in the world in his absence? The apostles would learn that Jesus' going away (by way of the cross) would not only secure their destiny, but provide the resources to live in the present.

Jesus introduces his remarks with a startling promise of power. John 14:12:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also;...

What a staggering promise! It is addressed not only to the apostles, but to anyone who believes in him.

... and greater {works} than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do {it.}

If you are hearing this verse for the first time, you are probably stunned at this promise. Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, and cleansed lepers. The magnitude of his works was astonishing. How can he speak of "greater works"? Does he mean more spectacular or sensational? But what could be greater than enabling a lame man to walk or raising the dead? The only answer is that such works would be *greater in significance*. Jesus' statement here is similar to the one that he made in Matthew 11:11: "I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." The point Jesus was making there was that, despite John the Baptist's unparalleled greatness, he never participated in the kingdom of heaven. (His calling placed him too early in the history of redemption.) It is a *greatness of privilege* that Jesus is talking about here: the privilege of participating in the already inaugurated age to come. His going away would inaugurate a new age, the Age of the Spirit, when the gospel would be preached over all the earth.

Truly, this is a staggering promise of power. We will come back to it, because it will make more sense as we move along in the passage.

Jesus continues (verse 15):

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

There is Jesus' description of a Christian. A Christian is not an especially pious person. If we really love Jesus with all of our hearts we will do what he has asked of us. We will take his yoke upon us. We will learn from him. We will submit to his lordship. We are not at liberty to question what he says. Our duty is to obey. The hymn says, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way" — not only to be happy in Jesus, but to be a Christian. That doesn't mean our Lord expects perfection; it simply means we must have submissive hearts. This is the condition: If we love him, if we belong to him, certain things will be true of us.

Verse 16:

"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; (that is) the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him [it doesn't see him with spiritual eyes] or know Him, [but] you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

Here Jesus gives his disciples a short course in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. In seminary they call this the Doctrine of Pneumatology. The Greek word for "spirit" is *pneumos*. We get our word "pneumatics" from *pneumos*, because it is also the Greek word for "wind". "Wind" and "spirit" are the same word in Greek. This, then, is a brief course in understanding the Holy Spirit.

The first thing Jesus wants us to know is a truth that many Christians are confused about. It is this: *If you are a Christian, you possess the Holy Spirit.* The Father himself, said Jesus, "will give you another Helper." You don't have to ask for the Spirit, you don't have to have some special experience to receive him. If you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, if you have submitted to his lordship in your life, you possess the Holy Spirit. We have this on the authority of Jesus' own words. Moreover, the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:13 that "all of us" (i.e. every believer in the church at Corinth, some pretty carnal-minded folks included), "all were made to drink of one Spirit." Furthermore, in Romans 8, Paul says that if you do not possess the Spirit you are not a Christian at all. If you are a Christian, therefore, you possess the Holy Spirit. If you are not a Christian, you do not.

The second truth revealed here by Jesus is this: *This person (the Holy Spirit) will be with us forever.* We cannot lose him. We cannot drive him out of our lives through sin.

We have an old basketball at home that has a leaky bladder. For years we played with it without repairing it. We would shoot around with it, but after awhile we had to take it in the garage to pump it up, and then we would go out and shoot some more. That is how some Christians think about the Holy Spirit. They think they have a slow leak, so they continually need to go to meetings in order to get pumped up, to get more of the Spirit. But Jesus says that if we are Christians, we possess the Spirit and he is with us forever. In his flesh, Jesus was with the disciples for three-and-a-half years, but the Spirit will be with us forever. He will not leave us. He will not leak out. We don't need to be pumped up all the time. When you became a Christian, you received all of the Holy Spirit you will ever receive, nothing more, nothing less. You didn't receive part of him. He does not come in doses. He is not poured into your life. He is a person.

The third thing we need to know is that *the Holy Spirit is within us.* I don't know where, but he resides somewhere in our human spirits. That is a difficult concept for children. I heard of a parent whose toddler had learned that Jesus would come to live in the hearts of those who would invite him in. Shortly thereafter the little girl came over to her mother and put her ear to her mother's chest. "What are you doing?" asked the mother. "I'm listening to Jesus in your heart," replied the child. After a few seconds the mother asked, "Well, what did you hear?" The little girl replied, "Sounds to me like he's making coffee!" Jesus said that we will "know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you." In other words, we do not need to go to a special place to get more of the Spirit. There is no more of the Spirit here in this building than there is your home or at work or at a restaurant. There is no more of the Holy Spirit present in this building than there is in a bar down the street. I remember seeing Ray Stedman once riding his little moped up and down the aisle of the PBC North auditorium to demonstrate to his grandson that the Holy Spirit does not reside in buildings but in people. Some people want to visit Israel because they think that is where they will really "feel" the Spirit and draw closer to God. Although Israel is a wonderful place to visit and learn, people are not any closer to the Spirit there than they are here. Wherever we go, he goes. That is why the NT says that we are the temple, because the Holy Spirit makes our body a sanctuary.

Finally, and most importantly, we need to know that the *Holy Spirit is nothing more than the Lord Jesus coming to dwell inside us.* Listen again to the words of Jesus: "you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." The Holy Spirit is nothing more or less than the Lord Jesus come to indwell us.

Remember that in verse 3 of this chapter we learned that his "coming" there referred to his second coming, when he will come for us at the end of our life. This "coming" here is referring to Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit would come to the apostles. For us it is referring to conversion. When we become Christians, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us. He is nothing more and nothing less than the Lord Jesus himself. In fact, that is the ministry of the Holy Spirit: to make the life of Jesus continuing and real to us.

That is what Paul describes as the "treasure within an earthen vessel." Do you know that the same Lord Jesus who walked here on earth and did these mighty works, now lives in you? That is the beauty of the Christian life: We grow by laying hold of his power within us. We are effective because we keep reaching down and laying hold of him who resides within us. The famous cable cars of San Francisco don't have an engine inside of them that makes them go. What drives them is a clamp-like apparatus that attaches to an underground moving cable. When the brake-man wants to move the trolley, he pulls back on a lever and the clamp grabs on to a moving cable that runs beneath the street. As Christians, we have no independent source of power in ourselves. We are not going to change anything. We can't change our own lives, never mind the world. Psychologists tell us we should reach down inside ourselves and find that beautiful person that lives there. I have to confess that the more I look, the less beauty I see. It is because I am tainted with sin. But there is an endless cable inside, which is the risen life of our Lord Jesus, that is available to us. All we have to is reach down and clamp on to that life. That life is available to us to stand in the face of adversity,

to do whatever it is we are called to do; to have the moral courage to make tough decisions. The power is there.

That is what it means to have the Holy Spirit. If you are a Christian, you possess the Holy Spirit. He is within you, and he will be with you forever. He is the Lord Jesus Christ who is available to you.

Jesus continues in verse 19:

"After a little while the world will behold Me no more [Jesus is going to the cross. No longer would they see him with physical eyes]; but you {will} behold Me [They would perceive him in a spiritual sense]; because I live, you shall live also. In that day [Pentecost, when the Spirit came] you shall know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

This is the perfect union that he has talked about so often in this gospel. He and the Father are one. Here he says that the Father and he are going to come dwell in us, so that all three members of the Godhead are resident in our bodies. I don't understand the Trinity. The apostles didn't understand it either. But Jesus says that the three persons of the Trinity are united and they are resident in our bodies. Isn't that astonishing? The God who created the universe lives in you and me!

Verse 21:

"He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him."

When? "When I come to him," says Jesus. And when was that? It was on the Day of Pentecost. Remember what happened on that day. There were 120 believers gathered in that same upper room (that seems to be the sum total of those who were true believers after the crucifixion), and they heard a wind blowing. One can't see the Spirit, but one can see what he is doing. That is why the wind is such a good analogy for the work of the Holy Spirit. You can't see wind, but you can see the trees bend and the dust rise. These 120 heard a wind, and then they saw something. They saw a fire come into the room and distribute itself over the heads of all of them. One flame broke into 120 parts, and all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. What was the purpose of this? God gave them an audio-visual aid to show them what happened. They could not see the Spirit, but they could hear the wind (the same word as Spirit). They put two and two together: wind/spirit/Spirit is coming. They saw this one flame break into 120 parts over their heads, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

This is an audio-visual demonstration of what happens when we, too, become Christians. The wind begins to blow, the Spirit of God comes into our lives, and the fire of God becomes resident inside us. The Holy Spirit is there!

Verse 22:

Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us, and not to the world?" [These were Jews who believed that when the Messiah came the whole world would acknowledge him. They didn't quite understand.] Jesus answered and said to him, "If *anyone* [underscore that word; this is his point] loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him. [Anyone in the world

who loves the Lord Jesus will have the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit residing in his body.] **He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me. These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. 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 said to you.**

In the first section, Jesus told the apostles of one ministry of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of *indwelling*. Our Lord comes in the person of the Holy Spirit to indwell. Notice his argument: "I was with you. I was your helper, your companion, your friend, your sidekick." (That is what the word "helper" means: a sidekick, a buddy, a companion.) "Now I am in you. I taught you for three-and-a-half years, but the helper will continue to teach you." What is different? Nothing, really. The only difference is that he would no longer be in the flesh. He would be just as much present after his death and resurrection as he was before. "I was your companion. (I will still be your companion.) I was your teacher. (I will still be your teacher)."

This promise was fulfilled on one level for the apostles. Have you ever wondered how John remembered with such exactness all of these things? He didn't have a lap-top computer; he didn't know shorthand. He remembered them because the Spirit brought back to the apostles what Jesus said.

This is not a promise that you can use for your algebra test. For us, the fulfillment of this promise is right here in this book that we call the Bible. Here we have the apostles' teaching. We know exactly what the apostles knew. They had the indwelling Spirit — and so do we! They had Jesus teaching them — and so do we! Sometimes we might wish we lived in that day when we could sit under Jesus' teaching, but there is nothing different today. He is resident with us, with the same power as when he lived with the apostles, and he is still teaching. If you and I knew that the Lord Jesus would be speaking somewhere today, we would go and listen to him, wouldn't we? But you know, he is! Every time we open this book it is our Lord teaching us. How foolish we are to ignore it. These are his instructions about life. This is the Word from the Creator, the manual that goes with mankind. It tells you what your manhood is for. It tells you what your womanhood is for. It tells us everything we need to know about life. It shows us what is real and what is not.

The same resources that the apostles had are available to us. They had the indwelling Christ, and they had his teaching. We have the same: We have his presence and his Word.

And we have peace as a result. Jesus says (verse 27):

"Peace I leave with you;

Our Lord is using peace here as a metonymy, a word picture, for the things that bring peace. He is saying, in effect, "You have my presence and my word; and that will produce peace. Are you troubled or frightened? Are you confused or anxious? I have given you the elements that produce peace."

Now he is not going to, as it were, pour a bucket of peace on us. That is not what he is talking about. This peace does not come from nowhere. This is a peace that comes from the awareness that Jesus is present and in control, and therefore we have all the resources necessary to cope with our cir-

cumstances. We have his presence and his Word. These are adequate, and these are what make us adequate. With those resources we can handle anything that life brings our way.

Jesus continues:

"My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. [The world's peace is shallow and transitory; it depends on circumstances.] Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful."

He has come full circle. He began this dialogue by picking up their troubled hearts. They were afraid that he was leaving, but he told them, "It's all right. I'm coming back. I have provided for your destiny, and I have taken care of the interim as well. I will provide my presence and my Word, and these are sufficient to give you peace. That is all you need to keep you together until I come back."

There are many things we could do to make life more worthwhile, but there are two things we cannot do without. These are the essential parameters, the fixed points around which everything else revolves. If we don't have these things, we don't have anything. Here they are: The presence of the indwelling Christ, and the Word of God. Those are what we need. We don't need a husband. We don't need a wife. We don't need to have children. We don't even need a job. We don't have to have good health. What we need are these two, God and his Word.

The principles of Christian ministry are not that complicated. All through the Scripture we are exhorted to keep depending on the Lord, focus on him, and share with others what we are learning. If we are doing this, we are "doing" the ministry.

In 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul summarized his ministry in this way: "Let a man regard us as servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God." The "mysteries of God" is the Word of God. Here we have the same two elements that we have just seen in this passage in John as Paul defines the two-fold task of all who serve in the church. This is ministry stripped to its bare essentials. We are *servants* of Christ and *stewards* of the secrets of God. The word for "servants" is not the one Paul usually used. Literally, the word means "under-rowers," the term used to describe the work of slaves who pulled the sweeps in ancient seagoing vessels. It was slave labor that kept the galleys going.

If we follow Paul's analogy, he is saying that leaders who make the church go, so to speak, are only under-rowers. Pastors are merely part of the crew, seated down below the decks, pulling on their oars with all the others. A pastor's place is not on the top. That is the Captain's place. Pastors set neither the course nor the cadence. It is the Captain's task to determine the heading and call the stroke. What a far cry from the usual picture of the pastor on the poop deck, resplendent in full regalia, telescope in one hand and tiller in the other, the only one who knows where the church is going, with everyone else down below sweating

over their oars! Pastors are not the ones who call the shots and control the ship. That is the Captain's job. The direction a church goes, the speed with which it develops, and the size to which it grows are his prerogatives. Our job is to fix our eyes on Christ and row.

And secondly, pastors are "stewards of the mysteries of God." A steward in that day was simply a butler whose job it was to rummage around the pantry and bring out bread and wine for family meals. That is our job: to descend into the pantry of God himself and bring out the good things of his Word to feed others. We are to hide ourselves in God and his Word, learning his secrets so we can impart them to others. How simple it is!

Do you want your life to count? Do you want to have an influence on your neighborhood, on your campus, in your office? It is not very complicated. Just keep depending on the Lord who indwells you. He will do it. Our job is to make visible the invisible Christ by our gracious, godly character, befriending people in a world that has few examples of righteousness. Impart truth wherever you go. In fact, Christian ministry could be reduced to just these two things — making friends and imparting truth. Share with people what you are learning here on Sunday, what you are learning in your home fellowship, in women's Bible studies and men's Bible studies. Pass on the truth.

Do you know what will happen if you do this? You will do greater things than Jesus did. Here is an example of this. There were 11 frightened men listening to the words of Jesus in that upper room. The might of the Roman Empire was arrayed against them, but following Pentecost, they went out in the power of the risen, indwelling Christ and proclaimed the truth, and within a hundred years the Roman Empire was evangelized. Churches were established in all the major population centers of the empire, and thousands of people came to Christ. Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost and three thousand people came to Christ. Our Lord spent three-and-a-half years in ministry and the most we could say is that at the end there were about 120 committed believers, and only about 500 with any faith at all. Jesus was limited in time and space. He ministered for but three-and-a-half years, mostly in Palestine. But the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost and filled believers, and they went everywhere, speaking to everyone, with the result that the church has done far greater things than Jesus did.

You and I today are evidence that what Jesus said is true. We are the results of those greater works. So we need not be frightened. Just ask, he said. "Ask in my name" — for whatever is in line with his plan and program. Ask him how you can be used. Ask him to use you. Have you done that? Ask him today to lead you to someone who has a need, to lead you to the right person and help you say the right things. Ask him to use you to lead someone to Christ. With that spirit, we can do greater things than Jesus.

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