



WHY JESUS WENT AWAY

SERIES: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

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John 16:1-15

35th Message

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Most parents have at one time or another felt the struggle of attempting to go out for the evening and finding their children didn't want them to go. At times, children just don't like saying good-bye when their mothers and fathers have to leave for the evening. Judith Viorst, a children's author and a favorite of mine, wrote the following text for a children's book depicting the familiar dialogue between a couple going out for the evening and their child, who has to remain behind with a baby-sitter:

"Don't go. I don't want you to go. I don't want you to go to a French restaurant and leave me home. I want you to go to McDonalds and take me with you. I'll even go to the French restaurant. No, I won't have fun with the baby-sitter; I hate baby-sitters. They make you eat vegetables. They could make you only watch the TV programs they want to watch. They could make you go to the bathroom before you go to bed, even when you don't have to. I didn't say they did, I said they could. And also, I'm sick. I mean, I'm getting sick right this second. I mean my head hurts so much I can't see. And my knee hurts so much I can't walk. And my throat hurts so much I can't swallow supper or water or anything, except a little chocolate chocolate-chip ice-cream. I mean, maybe I'm dying. No, I won't feel better soon. I won't feel better ever. You're still going? Even though my temperature is 108 or 110? Don't go, don't go until you read me one more book. O.K., half of a book, a poem. I'm really mad now. I mean mad. I mean tomorrow when you say 'good morning,' I'm not saying 'good morning.' And tomorrow when you say, 'Guess who we met at the restaurant last night,' I'm not guessing. And tomorrow when you say, 'Let's read a book,' I'm covering my ears up and I'm not listening. Maybe I won't even be here. Maybe I'll run away and find a new family that always stays home and never goes to French restaurants. You're going to be so sad. You're going to cry and cry. You're going to be really sorry. You're going, you're still going to the restaurant? Stop that. I don't want that. I don't want a good-bye kiss. I don't want say good-bye. I'm not saying good-bye. I'll never say good-bye. Good-bye."

This feeling of distress at being left alone, at being abandoned, overcame Jesus' disciples on that fateful Thursday evening when he told them he was going away. We all feel the need to be kept and protected, don't we? This is what we are learning from this Upper Room Discourse from the gospel of John — that we are designed to be dependent on someone else. We cannot handle life by ourselves. No one can. The disciples hadn't learned a lot in their three-and-a-half years with the Lord, but they had learned that much. They needed Jesus, but now he was leaving them.

Sometimes I wonder why didn't Jesus stay. It would be wonderful to have him around today, wouldn't it? If we needed his counsel on a particular topic, I'm sure that, with our modern telecommunications, we could find a way to sit under his teaching. If someone wanted to know what God was like, we could point to Jesus and say, "Just watch him for awhile." Wouldn't that be nice? Well, apparently not, because he did not remain on earth.

Why didn't Jesus stay? He answers this question in chapter 16, saying that it was to our advantage that he was going away.

We pick up Jesus' words in 16:1

"These things I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling.

These are his last words to his apostles. Together they were walking across the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane, and on the way he was preparing them to deal with the hatred of the world. (We saw that at the end of chapter 15.) Before he left, all the hostility of the world was organized against him; now that he was leaving, he tells his disciples that that hostility would be directed against them, and he wants them to be prepared for it. One aspect of maturity is having realistic expectations. Jesus didn't want his disciples to have a Pollyanna-like view of life. Everything wasn't going to turn out just fine. They would face hatred and hostility.

The word that is translated "stumbling" is the word from which we get our English word "scandal." But it doesn't mean to scandalize. Its meaning has changed over the years. In Greek, the word originally was used of the trigger stick on a figure-four trap. Some of you may have made one of those when you were children. You cut notches in three sticks and made a trap. Then you baited a stick, put a box or basket on top of the contraption, and when the animal pulled on the stick, the box or basket would fall on it, trapping it. (Then you had to figure out how to get the captive out of the box!) That was the word for the trigger stick on a trap. Later, the word came to refer to the trap itself; then to the idea of being trapped; and finally to the idea of being brought to ruin. Christians picked up the word and used it in their literature to refer to being brought to spiritual ruin because of some unforeseen obstacle or problem. The obstacle became a crisis of faith, leading the individual to say, "I never should have become a Christian."

Jesus' words, "I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling," are saying that to be forewarned is to be forearmed. There were hard times ahead. It would be unrealistic to deny that.

Our Lord then tells the disciples the form that this hostility would take:

"They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, [They would be excommunicated, a very serious thing for Jews. As a result their businesses would be boycotted, and they would suffer economically. Unfortunately, that was the good news; the bad news was that they would be killed.] but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. And these things they will do, because they have not known the Father, or Me.

That is what the apostle Paul thought. He imagined he was doing God's will by seeking to destroy the church. Jesus says there will be times when religious people will

oppose you because they think they are doing God's will. They don't know God, but they think they do. That is what happened in the early church. Christians were exiled, excommunicated, burned at the stake, and thrown to the lions in the Coliseum. It was a time of intense persecution not only from the Jewish community, but from the Romans as well, all through the reigns of Nero, Hadrian and others, right up to the fourth century. *Fox's Book of Martyrs* paints a grim picture of some of those of whom the world was not worthy.

And the age of martyrdom did not cease then. Men like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others died at the hands of the Nazis. Millions of believers died in the gulags of the Soviet Union. Millions died under Mao's purges in China. In fact, it is estimated that there have been more Christian martyrs in the twentieth century than in all of the previous centuries of the Christian era combined.

Jesus continues:

"But these things I have spoken to you, that when their hour comes, [the hour when they kill you] you may remember that I told you of them. And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. [I was there. I was your source of strength, your comfort. I was available to help you and encourage you in these times.]" But now I am going to Him who sent Me; [That was what devastated the apostles. Not only would they experience hostility, more devastating was the fact that he was leaving. This was their great concern. They were so concerned that they had lost interest in asking questions.] and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.

They were wallowing in despair, self-absorbed to the point that they were incapable of asking where Jesus was going or what he was doing. Notice how remarkably perceptive and compassionate our Lord is. He is hours away from his own death, and yet he is totally aware of their needs.

Now comes the good word:

"But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

Our Lord had to go by way of the cross, through the resurrection and ascension, into glory, before he could send the Holy Spirit.

We have already seen why it was important for Jesus to leave and send the Spirit. Remember in chapter 14 he said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, [I have been the helper up to this point. But there will be another helper who will come that he may be with you forever; [instead of just three-and-a-half years]] the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him 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." We learned there that the Holy Spirit is nothing more than the Lord Jesus himself come back to indwell believers. He would not only be *with* them, he would be *in* them. And "in" is better than "with"! He would not be localized in time and place; that would make him almost inaccessible to us today. Think of the long lines to see him; the delays on the telephone (even with call waiting!), the high cost of flying to Israel to have a talk with

him. "It much better that I send the Helper," says Jesus. And the Helper is none other the Lord himself, the Holy Spirit who comes to indwell us.

So Jesus is here and he is available to us. He is not over in Israel or up in heaven. He is here, and he is our adequacy for whatever we have to face.

In 14:26, Jesus said: "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." The Lord taught his disciples while he was with them, and he would continue his teaching ministry in the person of the Spirit. Finally, as we saw last week, that Spirit would bear witness to the world. That is why he had to go away: so that he could come back in the person of the Spirit to indwell them and continue to teach them, thus making his teaching available to us today. He would witness to the world, not just to the world of Palestine, but to the entire world.

The rest of these opening verses of chapter 16 are an amplification of these last two aspects of the Holy Spirit's ministry; i.e. his witness to the world, and his teaching to the church. That is what the Holy Spirit does. He witnesses to the world, and he teaches the church.

Jesus begins by addressing the Spirit's witness to the world, and then he elaborates on that. Verse 8:

"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 behold Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

Here Jesus specifies that the convicting ministry of the Spirit has to do with three moral categories: the Spirit will convince the world concerning the gravity of sin, the reality of righteousness, and the certainty of judgment. Those are three issues that the world will know about and be convinced of. Christians don't need to try and convince the world; the Spirit will do that. We learned last week that the witness of the Spirit is antecedent to ours: He goes before us. It is not that we witness first and then the Spirit comes and corroborates our witness. He witnesses, and our witness corroborates his. In other words, we don't have to convince people about these issues. They will already know. One day, before he became a Christian, C.S. Lewis was walking with a close friend, discounting Christianity as they walked. Suddenly, Lewis' friend stopped and said, "You know, it does seem after all that it really is true." They knew it was true because the Spirit had told them that it was true.

There are three things which the Holy Spirit will say to the world. The first has to do with sin. Notice that Jesus tells what sin the world is convicted of. He does not say that the Holy Spirit will convict people of the sin of adultery or the sin of cheating or the sin of using drugs. Some people know that those things are wrong; others have ways of rationalizing them and don't regard them as sins. No, it is not the role of the Spirit to convict the world of individual sins, because it is not our individual sins that separate us from God. It is not the fact that we tell lies that separates us from God. The only sin that separates us from God is the sin of unbelief in Christ. Earlier in this gospel, Jesus said to Nicodemus: "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the

name of the only begotten Son of God.”

What brings men and women into judgment is not their sins, but the fact that they don't believe in Jesus. That is the issue. They have not accepted the solution to sin that God offers. They have a disease that only God through Christ can cure, but they refuse the remedy. That is what kills them. It is not our sins; those have been paid for. John says in one his letters, “He [Jesus] is the satisfaction for our sins, and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world.” Christ died for people's sins. So it is not their sins, but their unbelief that is the issue. That is what the Holy Spirit convicts them of.

Have you found that to be true? You can talk about religion and people will scoff at you or ignore you; you can talk about morality and it means nothing; but mention the name of Jesus and something happens: There is a respect for that name, even among some very sinful pagans. I believe that is the result of the Spirit's witness of the sin of not believing in Jesus. That is the first issue that the Spirit will raise in a person's mind: “What about Jesus? What am I going to do with him?” The Spirit convicts the world of the sin of unbelief.

The second issue is righteousness. Jesus says, “. . . and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you no longer behold Me; . . .” What does that mean? Well, Jesus always did things right. He knew how to act in every situation. He knew how to talk to all kinds of people, to men, women, and children. He always acted in the proper way. He knew when to be hard with people and when to be gentle and kind. He spoke forcefully to Nicodemus, but gently to the woman at the well. He was tranquil when everyone else was falling to pieces. He had moral courage. He could stand against trends and act in God-like ways. He was a perfect example of righteousness.

But now he says to the disciples, “I'm leaving.” Their question was, “Where is our example going to come from? How will we know the standard of goodness?” Jesus says that when the Spirit comes back, he will convict and convince the world of the standard of righteousness. That is why you don't have to tell people what it means to be a good person. They know already. They know that a bitter, unforgiving spirit is wrong. You don't have to belabor the fact that people should be better than they are. They know that it is true. So where does that standard come from? It comes from the Spirit of God who is writing it on people's hearts, telling them what they ought to be.

So the Spirit convicts the world of their unbelief in Jesus, and he convinces the world that there is a standard of righteousness which they fall short of.

The third issue is that of judgment. Jesus says, “. . . and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.” The ruler of this world is Satan. He was judged on the cross, when our Lord defeated the principalities and powers. If the ruler of this world is judged, then what about the inhabitants? Do they think they are going to escape? No! What Jesus is talking about is the deep-seated sense of accountability that we all have. We cannot get away from the fact that one of these days there is going to be a reckoning. We will not get away scot-free in life. Judgment is coming up. One day we are going to have to stand before God and answer for what we have done with our lives. We can't get away from that fact, although we try to ignore it and forget it, but it is written on our hearts. Where did it come from? The Spirit of God put it there: Jesus says,

“concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.” If he did not escape, why should we think we will?

We can see the Spirit's work in these areas in the apostle Paul's conversion. The book of Acts describes how he became a Christian. He was on the way to Damascus, as Luke puts it, breathing threats and murder against the disciples. He believed it was God's will that he destroy the church, and he had letters from the synagogues giving him authority to put Christians in prison. But on the way to Damascus he met Jesus face to face. In Acts, Paul put in his own words what happened. The Lord appeared to him, and said, “Paul, it is hard for you to kick against the goads.” A goad is a long wooden shaft with a metal point, an implement that was used on reluctant donkeys. This raises the picture of the Lord following Paul, giving him the goad every time he turned around, and Paul, like an ox, kicking against it. (Finally he got the point!) Paul's hostility was due to these prods, from the fact that the Holy Spirit was convicting him. If you could have looked into Paul's heart, you would see that he knew he was guilty of the sin of unbelief in Jesus; that he was not a righteous man despite his efforts to be righteous. He fell short, as he describes in Romans 7. He could not stop coveting. And he knew judgment was coming.

I don't know about you, but that encourages me. Every day I wake up to a world that seems indifferent, even hostile, to the gospel. But I don't take its hostility at face value anymore, because deep down I know that the Spirit is convincing them and they know.

It is important to say at this point that often the instrument through which the Holy Spirit does his convicting work is people. Twice in this passage, Jesus said that when he departs, he will send the Spirit *to you*. Every conversion recorded in the book of Acts was accomplished through the agency of someone who was already a believer. Take the apostle Paul, whose conversion we just talked about. In advance of that dramatic conversion (recorded at the beginning of chapter 8), we have the account of the stoning of Stephen. Significantly, Luke records that the witnesses to the stoning laid their robes at the feet of a young man named Saul, who is the same apostle Paul. Saul watched and listened as Stephen preached. He heard the wisdom of the Scriptures, and he knew that what he was hearing was true. He saw the beauty and courage of Stephen, and his love as he cried out to Jesus to not hold his murderers' sin against them. Stephen's life and ministry were the things that the Spirit used to convict Saul of the gravity of his sin, the reality of righteousness, and the certainty of judgment.

This then is the Spirit's ministry. He convinces the world of the gravity of sin, the reality of righteousness, the certainty of judgment.

Now Jesus goes on to talk about the Spirit's ministry to the church.

“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 shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall 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.

We need to know that in the first instance, this passage applies to the apostles. This is the promise to them that they would be guided into all the truth. The Spirit of God took the things that were in the mind of God and gave those to the apostles. First Corinthians 2 says that the Spirit not only gave the apostles the ideas and thoughts that were in the mind of God, he gave them the words, too, so that the very words are inspired of God. In fact, Paul describes this book, the Bible, as the "mind of Christ." If you want to know what Christ is thinking, all you have to do is read this book. When we think, therefore, that it would be nice to have the Lord around to teach us these days, we can remind ourselves that we do have him around. Everything we need to know about our relationship with him, how to cultivate it, how to grow in grace, is all right here!

The purpose of the Bible is not to inform us about geography or history or geology or biology, although where it touches upon these issues it is true and you can trust it to be accurate. The purpose of the Bible is to make us wise unto salvation, to lead us to know God, to love him, worship him, and ultimately to glorify Jesus. "He shall glorify Me; for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose {it} to you," said Jesus. What he discloses to us will glorify him. Thus the purpose of reading the Bible is to see the glory of Jesus. Isn't that what the disciples said about him? John wrote, "We beheld his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

So we see why the Lord had to go away. It is to our advantage that he did. We even have an edge on the apostles, because we have the Lord here in our midst, witnessing to a hostile world. For some of you here this morning that means a hostile husband or wife who has no use for God or your faith. Perhaps you are involved in a ministry and you are taking some hard shots; you feel ignored and mistreated. You can rest assured that the Lord is witnessing to your world just as he was when he was with the disciples.

This is very comforting and refreshing to me. There are times when I feel overwhelmed in my job. I feel it is beyond me. The magnitude of the ministry and the weight of people's needs and concerns sometimes is burdening. Though I know in my heart that solving all of these problems doesn't depend on me, sometimes I act as though it does. But this discourse of Jesus reminds me that the ministry is his, not mine. The need for a better facility, the need for adult electives, the need for more home fellowships, for more teachers, all of these are his concerns. My responsibility and yours is simply to abide, to love, and to bear witness. It is the Lord's task to reach this community. He puts his people in the right places at the right times so they can say the right thing. And it is his Word that has to be delivered. I don't have to make up sermons. All I need to do is make clear Jesus' words. The response rests not on my eloquence, but on him, because he is just as near today as he was on that evening with his apostles.

*No distant Lord have I, loving afar to be.
Made flesh for me, He cannot rest, until he rests in me.
I need not journey far, this dearest friend to see.
Companionship is always mine, He makes his home in me.
I envy not the twelve, nearer to me is he.
The life he once lived here on earth, he lives again in me.
Ascended now to God, my witness there to be
His witness here am I, because His Spirit dwells in me.
O Glorious Son of God, incarnate deity;
I shall forever be with Thee, because Thou art with me.*

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