

Sermon – 11/06/2006 am

The Holy Spirit Guides the Disciples

Study Text: John 16:12-15

Jesus was going away. He would be crucified, rise from the dead and ascend into heaven. From there he would send the Holy Spirit to be with them. His disciples had difficulty comprehending all this – as we might have given same circumstances. Still today, even with the benefit of history, many cannot comprehend the Cross. The resurrection of Christ is beyond the realms of belief for many. Some in the church say that it is not important anyway. Without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit no one can know these precious truths of salvation. *No know one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God* (I Corinthians 2:1-10, Matthew 11:27).

This upper room discourse was pretty heavy going for the disciples. They were upset by the news that Jesus was going away. Then Jesus told them they would be hated by the world and persecuted, and thrown out of the synagogues and even killed. The promise of the Comforter was timely, if they had actually understood what Jesus was telling them.

At various times during this discourse Jesus spoke about the Holy Spirit. Actually we find the bulk of Jesus' teaching on the Holy Spirit in this discourse. But the disciples had trouble taking everything in – and Jesus said he still had more things to say to them! *But you cannot bear these things now* he said to them (16:12).

You Cannot Bear Them Now

The natural man, the man controlled by his sinful nature, cannot comprehend spiritual truths, the truths which Jesus Christ spoke about. Man can learn all sorts of things about the natural world. We have experts in every imaginable and even unimaginable discipline, filling the colleges and universities. Ask them about anything to do with this world and they can tell you. But ask them about spiritual truth and they can tell you no more than a child.

It is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that spiritual things are discerned. Without the inner working of the Spirit of God on the heart of a person, all the preaching in the world, even the preaching of great apostles, is of no avail. It will all be foolishness. *We preach Christ crucified,* wrote the apostle Paul, *to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (I Corinthians 1:23, 24).

The disciples were of course men who believed in Jesus, the Christ and Son of God. Yet even as believers they did not know all that Jesus wanted them to know. Jesus was teaching them one step at a time. He realised they could not bear/carry any more truth just now. In fact he goes over various things a number of times in this discourse to make sure that the foundations are established.

We know how important it is to have solid foundations when we are building a house. Some think they can cut corners on the foundations because not one sees them. My friend had to watch the builders all day every day to make sure they put the right amount of cement in the foundations. It was common to skim on this expensive item, but he knew that if the foundations were weakened in this way the whole building may collapse – as many did.

So it is in the Christian life. The foundations must be firmly established if a new believer is to grow into the person the Lord wants them to be. This takes time and effort. There are no short cuts. A leader in the church must not be a recent convert (I Timothy 3:6). Too often we see new believers loaded up with more than they can bear, and then tragically crumble.

New Christians can so easily get caught up in disputes within a church and start to focus on peripheral issues, to the detriment of laying good foundations. They get blown this way and that, and soon they are falling. In the early church people from a Jewish background made a big fuss about food – not to mention circumcision! Churches were divided. Paul had to take these immature believers back to the foundations of what we believe. *The kingdom of God is not about eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit* (Romans 14:17). His words echo the teaching of Jesus here in this very discourse. Remember that Jesus told his disciples of *my peace* and *my joy* that he was giving them (14:27, 15:11).

With the foundations established we can then bear more truth as Jesus chooses to teach us; nowadays though the Holy Spirit. We must carefully build our lives on the foundation, which is Jesus Christ, remembering that our work will be tested by fire (I Corinthians 3:13). We must not stop at the foundations for what use is a house that only has foundations.

We often see houses along the road that have foundations and a bit of framework – and they may stay that way for months or years. Maybe the money ran out or there was some dispute. But there is this house that no one can live in. It is useless. It can be the same with some Christians. They started out fine but then they stopped. They stopped reading their Bible, they stopped praying, they stopped going to church, and they stopped giving thanks and praise to God.

Paul said of such people, *And I, brethren could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able* (I Corinthians 3:1, 2).

Jesus did not load his disciples up with more teaching than they could bear at this time. But he graciously made provision through the Holy Spirit to guide them into all truth in the days after he had returned to his Father.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

However, when he, the Spirit of truth has come, he will guide you into all truth (16:13). Jesus again comforts his disciples with the promise of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would come as had just told them and *convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment*. The disciples would preach the gospel and the Holy Spirit would convict sinners of their sin.

The Holy Spirit would also indwell the disciples and indeed all believers as their helper (14:17, Acts 2:33). Moreover, the Holy Spirit would have a teaching role in the life of the disciples. *He will teach you all things and remind you of all things that I told you* said Jesus (14:26). As a teacher he would be a witness for Jesus and bring glory to him (15:26, 16:14).

The Holy Spirit was not an independent teacher with his own particular lessons. His teaching would be the same as that of Jesus. Jesus himself taught only what his Father taught him (8:28). Likewise the Holy Spirit would teach only what the Father and the Son gave him to teach. *He will not speak on his own authority but whatever he hears he will speak* said Jesus (16:13).

We must be very clear on this point. The Holy Spirit never teaches or tells us anything contrary to what Jesus taught nor contrary to anything in the inspired word of God. If someone tells you that

the Holy Spirit told them to worship an idol, to steal, to have an abortion (murder) or to commit adultery, remind them that it was not the Holy Spirit that told them but another spirit, for to do such things is contrary to the word of God.

The Holy Spirit will take of what is mine and declare it to you said Jesus (16:14, 15). He repeated these words just to make it clear to the disciples and to us in the church today. We have here not only teaching about the work of the Holy Spirit but also about the glorious Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There are three persons in the Godhead but one essence, and indeed one truth. In the past God declared this truth through the prophets but in these last days he has done so through his Son (Hebrews 1:1-2). The Holy Spirit declares this same truth after being sent into this world.

Holy Spirit and the Future

He will guide you into all truth – we return to this aspect of the Spirit's work. Jesus was going away but he had more to say to his disciples. When would they be able to bear these things? What were these things and who would tell them? Would Jesus tell them after his resurrection or would it be after his ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit? The context points to the latter.

Jesus did teach them from the Scriptures after he rose again (Luke 24:27, 45), but they were still slow to comprehend 'all things' and fearful of the Jews. It was when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost that everything fell into place as it were. They understood why Jesus had to die and rise again. They understood that *God had made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ* and that people must repent and call upon the name of the Lord if their sins are to be blotted out (Acts 2).

These disciples became the apostles who were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the New Testament. Peter, John and Paul in particular wrote letters to churches according to the wisdom given them (II Peter 3:16). The Holy Spirit was instrumental in declaring such truth, truth he heard in the Godhead. God has preserved these writings so that we have them still today.

He will tell you things to come (16:13). Jesus told his disciples a lot about the future so that they would not be caught unawares and stumble. Much if this was about the Cross and his resurrection, and about the coming of the Holy Spirit. He also told them that he would return himself. The Holy Spirit through Peter and especially John, would give more detail about the future, as we find for instance in the book of Revelation.

Jesus knows all things and wants us to 'grow up into Christ' and bear more and more spiritual truth. He wants to become mature and take solid food (Hebrews 5:14). He wants us to be built up into a glorious house – we are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Is it your desire to grow and mature as a Christian? Have you taken steps to fulfil this desire?

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