

May 19, 2024
Pentecost

“To Our Advantage”

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-14

Jesus tells His disciples shortly before He is arrested in Gethsemane: *“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. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”*

Nobody here today doesn't understand that it is to our advantage that Jesus leave to go to the cross. Our sin is paid for there and the following resurrection guarantees us eternal life despite earthly death. But that it is advantageous for us that Jesus then ascends to heaven not to be seen bodily on earth again until the Last Day? It is better that He be gone and this Holy Spirit then come? That makes us scratch our heads and Jesus' explanation of why here isn't really all that helpful. Even the guy at my seminary who literally wrote the textbook on translating biblical Greek says this section is extremely difficult to grasp.

Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning sin, because they do not believe in Him. Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit brings people to faith through the preaching of the Gospel. So if one rejects the Gospel they reject the Holy Spirit and stand convicted of their sin. Unbelief condemns. Those who receive the Gospel are no longer of the world, but standing in the kingdom of Christ, fully forgiven their sins. The Holy Spirit comes with the gift of saving faith in Christ that receives all His gifts, but refusal of the gift convicts you of damning sin.

Jesus saying that the world is convicted of righteousness because He goes to the Father is a bit more challenging. But when you rightly see with eyes of faith Christ glorified in heaven, how much righteousness of your own can you claim in comparison? Precisely. Only Jesus is truly righteous and we can only be righteous in Him as a gift of grace. But the world stands convicted because the worldly seek to justify themselves. How many folks to you know who have convinced themselves that everything will be okay when they die because, after all, they're a pretty good person? “Righteousness” at its root means doing life right and lots of folks give themselves credit for that. But the bar is perfection. The bar is Christ who stands as the glory of God. The Holy Spirit proclaims Christ and everybody falls short. If you refuse the Spirit's leading to the righteousness of Christ, you stand convicted because the only righteousness you have is your own.

Ultimately the Holy Spirit convicts the world of judgment because the ruler of this world is judged. This one is the simplest to grasp. So goes the king, so goes the kingdom. Those who insist on clinging to this broken, fallen world are its citizens. Because it is fully infected with sin it is condemned along with its ruler—the devil who stands defeated by the cross. The Holy Spirit invites sinners to turn, repent and receive the new citizenship in heaven under the rulership of the king of salvation. Turn down that invitation and you have what you chose—the damned world with its damned ruler.

But even assuming that this is all the correct way to interpret what Jesus is saying here (and I fully admit there may be other correct ways to take this) why is it to our benefit that our Jesus, our Lord, our Redeemer and divine brother in human flesh, leave us and go away?

Well, I think the day of Pentecost itself reveals the answer. So long as Jesus remained in the world those forty days after His resurrection, where were His followers looking? At Jesus...in the world. You've got to believe that they were hanging out in anticipation of His next appearance here. They were looking for Him here. Their attention was all here.

The Spirit arrives on Pentecost and what immediately happens? Immediately Peter and the others start proclaiming Christ. They don't proclaim Him as walking around doing miracles again. They proclaim Him crucified and risen, ascended and reigning over all things in power. They proclaim the forgiveness of sin unto reconciliation with God and life everlasting. They proclaim the perfect life beyond the fallen and broken one of here and now—the life to which Christ stands risen and ascended—the life He now lives forever in holiness and glory.

They are inspired by the Holy Spirit to proclaim life beyond this world in Christ—not Jesus dwelling in the brokenness and feeding and healing so we can remain in the fallen world with Him. They proclaim freedom to the captives of sin and death and Satan to exit the fallen and enter into the glory of the Father—where Jesus reigns at the right hand.

Think about how obsessed we can be with the temporary things of this fallen world. If Jesus remained here, would we ever even think to look beyond it to something infinitely better? Despite everything the Word says about the new heaven and new earth and the resurrection of the dead, we still have quite a number of Christian denominations and heretical sects who misinterpret Revelation and remain totally focused on Jesus coming back to rule here for 1000 years.

No, it is to our advantage that Jesus go away, for the Helper He sends, the Holy Spirit, gives us the eyes of faith that look to Jesus where He has gone, trusting in His promise to take us there as He said earlier in this same dialogue: *“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”*

It is to our advantage because saving faith is looking to Jesus; His cross, His empty tomb, and ultimately to the kingdom He gives us that is not of this world.

This is true comfort, because we often question the quality of our faith, maybe especially today with the story of how the Holy Spirit came with power, endowing gifts of speaking in tongues, prophesying, healing and whatnot. But if you are desperately looking to Jesus for salvation, sorrowing and repenting of sins in your life and clinging to the promise of forgiveness in Christ's blood, if you shamefully come before Him as a beggar pleading “Lord, have mercy,” that's a faith looking to Him where He is, reigning not forever in the brokenness of the world, but in the kingdom of heaven where His grace and His mercy today grants you entrance.

This is saving faith. This is the Holy Spirit doing the work for which Jesus sends Him. His work is a divine work that does not fail, and He does it upon you as you call Jesus “Lord.”

The world does indeed stand convicted of sin and righteousness and judgment. Embrace the calling of the Holy Spirit to look beyond the convicted world to the everlasting kingdom of heaven. Received by the Savior you call “Lord”, have no fear of the world's fate for you are not of it anymore. By the Spirit's leading you today dwell in Christ beyond it.

Amen.