

“John: Spirit of Truth”

Isaiah 64:1-9 • John 16:1-15

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Dr. Charles S. Blackshear • January 21, 2024

This morning’s passage is really kind of a “part 2” of what we studied last week. If you were here or watched online you hopefully remember that Jesus said his followers should expect persecution from the world. When he talks about the world he usually means the people who are opposed to Christ. He said, “If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.” Now in chapter 16 he goes into some detail about what his disciples could expect. He says in verse 2, “They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.”

This is exactly what we see in the book of Acts. Stephen is stoned to death by the religious authorities for speaking about Jesus and we’re told that Saul approved of the execution. Acts chapter 8 begins, “there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.” Saul believed that arresting and killing followers of Christ was offering service to God, just as Jesus had predicted.

The reason Jesus is telling his disciples these things is so that they will not be surprised. There are lots of churches today that teach what’s known as the Prosperity Gospel. This teaching says that if you become a Christian nothing bad can happen to you, in fact, they say, if you have enough faith you will be healthy, wealthy, happy, and wise. I don’t know where they get that idea. It sure is popular but it’s not biblical. Jesus clearly teaches that his followers will experience difficulties and persecutions. The problem for people who believe in the Prosperity Gospel is that when those difficulties *do* come their

theology tells them that they are the problem. Many people have walked away from faith in Jesus because of difficulties.

But Jesus wants us to be prepared for it. He says, “I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away.” Just knowing that we should expect persecution and other troubles helps strengthen our faith when it comes. On May 13, 1940, Winston Churchill gave his first speech as Prime Minister to the House of Commons. Great Britain had declared war on Germany in September, just before Churchill was elected.

Churchill knew that the war was going to be long and exhausting for his country and they needed to be prepared to fight at home, across Europe, and even to North Africa. Instead of trying to only give positive news, like Chamberlain had done, Churchill tried to prepare his country for the difficult years ahead. He said, “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat. We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I will say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory. Victory at all costs—Victory in spite of all terror—Victory, however long and hard the road may be, for without victory there is no survival.”

Unlike Churchill, Jesus wasn’t calling his disciples to fight. But he was, like Churchill, trying to prepare them for the difficult times to come so that when the time comes they may remember that he had told them. We, too, need to remember Jesus’ words when things get tough, when we face persecution for following Christ.

Jesus was also preparing his disciples for his departure. In verse 5 he says, “now I am going to him who sent me.” He acknowledges that they are feeling sorrowful about this. Honestly they are scared and confused. So Jesus tells them, “I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper (literally the Paraclete or Advocate) will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” While Jesus was on earth there were only so many people he could come in contact with. He was limited by his physical body to a particular place and time. But when the Holy Spirit comes and indwells believers He can be present with all of them. Remember Jesus said, “wherever two or three are gathered in my name I am with them.” God is present with us just as Jesus promised.

Jesus then gives us one of the clearest descriptions of the work of the Holy Spirit. Beginning in verse 8 he says, “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.”

The Spirit’s role is conviction. The word “convict” can have two different but related meanings. One definition would be a legal term meaning “to find or prove someone guilty.” This would be followed by punishment. That’s not what Jesus is saying is the role of the Holy Spirit. The other definition is “to convince of error or sinfulness.” The work of the Holy Spirit is to convince people of sin and righteousness and judgment. As Josh Moody put it in his commentary, the Holy Spirit “stirs in people a sense that things are not as they should be, that their lives are not as they were meant to be, and that there is some accounting still to come.” In other words, what many people would call *conscience*, the sense of right and wrong, is really the work of God the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit makes you aware of your own sinfulness and gives you a desire to do something about it. But if you try to deal with your sin yourself you will always discover that you can’t. If you turn to the Bible you find that God’s standard is absolute perfection. You become convicted of God’s judgment. And so the Spirit points you to the righteousness of Christ Jesus. The proof of his righteousness is the resurrection. He then returns to heaven, to the place of honor. Jesus is the perfect man that God accepts. The greatest sin, as Jesus says in verse 9, is failing to trust in Christ.

Many people may say they believe in Jesus but have not yet put their complete trust in him. They continue to try to earn their way to heaven. You’ll often hear people say something like, “As long as I do more good things than bad God will let me in heaven.” Wrong. Here’s a great way to think about this. Someone who lives far from the coast may say he believes in lifeboats. That’s an intellectual belief. But until he is drowning in the ocean he hasn’t trusted his life to a lifeboat. Moody says that in the same way you and I need to be convicted of sin before we will savingly trust in Jesus. The truth is that we are all drowning in the ocean of our sin. We need Jesus the lifeboat and it’s the work of the Holy Spirit to show us our need and also to show us that Jesus is our savior.

If you have not yet been convinced of your own sinfulness and need for the savior, don’t wait. Ask the Spirit of Truth to guide you into all truth about yourself and about Christ. Ask him to make the Scriptures come alive and point you to the truth. As Jesus says in verse 14, “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” I pray that’s your experience.

Amen.