

# The Encouragement of the Holy Spirit

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 18 February 2024

Preacher: Ali Sewell

[ 0 : 0 0 ] and I'm not going to get your answer so don't worry about that but if you could go back to any moment in history to experience it firsthand when would you choose? Maybe a great battle, maybe a sporting event, maybe a kind of a state event, maybe a natural wonder, the kind of things perhaps that come to mind where really being there would have been incredible, would have been dramatic, would have been exciting, far more so than simply reading about it in a dusty history book or watching old footage of it on YouTube, an unrepeatable experience, one of those things where you really had to be there. Well I ask that question because sometimes I think, I wonder whether we've thought about it or not, we can have similar thoughts about the Christian faith.

Wouldn't it have been amazing to have been around in Galilee or Nazareth or Jerusalem, these places where Jesus walked, to have been with Jesus 2,000 years ago, to have seen Jesus, to have heard Jesus?

Wouldn't that be incredible to go back to that point in history? And the answer to that is well yeah it would, it would be absolutely incredible. But sometimes if we're not careful we can slide into the second part of that thought process, which says that because we weren't there, because it's impossible for us to get back there, that what we have today instead is somehow second best.

That actually to be a follower of Jesus in the 21st century is a little second rate compared to actually having been with him, compared to Jesus being physically present. It's kind of like listening to the live album rather than actually being at the gig in person. It's like reading the book rather than having been present ourselves. Not the best, just the best we can hope for. Perhaps that's the attitude that we can sometimes slip into. Well this passage that we're looking at this morning, this teaching from Jesus to his disciples, remember on the night before his crucifixion, this passage is here to give us real confidence that actually being a Christian today, being a Christian here on earth, after Jesus has returned and ascended back to heaven, that actually we can have ultimate confidence that we do not have a second rate experience, but rather we have everything that we could possibly need. That's what Jesus is reassuring his disciples and us in these verses. And that is all down to the

Holy Spirit. Jesus showing us that through the Holy Spirit we have everything that we need. And so the Holy Spirit is our focus as we look through this passage this morning. These are great verses to help us get to grips with, well who is the Holy Spirit? I think it's probably fair to say that if we think of the Trinity, the God of the Bible, that there is one God but he is in three persons, Father, Son and Spirit, it's probably that the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, where we can be the most hazy as to who he is and what he does. This passage won't say everything there is to say on the Holy Spirit, but it will help us, I think, get a better grasp of him. And we're going to look at that in two areas.

[ 3 : 31 ] First, the promise of the Holy Spirit, and then more fully that the work of the Holy Spirit, as we see it laid out by Jesus in these verses. These verses, remember, that are here to give us encouragement and peace for those who love, who trust, and are seeking to follow Jesus. So let's get stuck in. The first thing we see is the promise of the Holy Spirit to those who love Jesus. Verse 15, If you love me and you keep my commandments, I will ask the Father and he will give you another helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth. And it's good to remind ourselves as we get stuck into these verses of the situation here in this section of John's Gospel. Remember, the disciples have been following Jesus for the last three years or so, all through his kind of public ministry.

Put yourself for a moment in their shoes. You've seen Jesus do incredible miracles, signs, as they're called in John's Gospel, even to the point of raising the dead.

Signs pointing to the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the chosen one, that he is actually God himself. You've heard Jesus' incredible teaching, the wisdom with which he has spoken, the way he's won every argument when opponents have tried to get one over him, the incredible promises that he's made, that those who believe in him would have eternal life, that he is the resurrection and the life. And no doubt, at times, things have been tough and there's been real opposition. Often things would have been a bit confusing. Jesus hasn't always done what you've expected, but actually there's always been this sense that we are on the winning side here.

Jesus' words and actions have so clearly demonstrated that he's the real deal. You've given everything to follow him. You're convinced that nothing can stop him from achieving what he's promised and what he's come to do. And yet now in this upper room where these chapters take place, the mood has turned a bit more somber now. As Jesus has made it clear already this evening, as you meet, that he's going to be betrayed. Most shockingly of all, perhaps, that he's going to go away. He's going to go somewhere that his disciples cannot immediately follow. He says he's preparing a place, but you're not 100% clear where. But what you do know is that in the meantime, Jesus will not be present. And so if you put yourself in the disciples' shoes, you can see why this is a kind of a bleak moment, isn't it? What on earth are you going to do without Jesus? It's not just that they are losing a friend. They're losing kind of their general. They're losing the only person who really seemed to know exactly what was happening, the route they were taking, and had the strength, the ability to actually get them there in the face of a world that constantly seemed to be pushing in the other direction. These are worrying, anxious times for the disciples. And perhaps as we kind of run through that, as we put ourselves in their shoes, that doesn't feel too unfamiliar, that often in the Christian life, we can maybe feel a bit aimless, or we can feel like we're in a bit of a fog. We don't have the full map. You know, if only Jesus was physically here to guide our steps, or to take over when we get a little bit stuck. Or perhaps we often feel very weak. We feel like a failure. We mess up time and time again. If only Jesus was kind of standing at our shoulder, well, then we would remember to live as we should. He'd keep us accountable. He would encourage us in that. Or perhaps at times it's simply just that we find it hard to believe.

God feels a long way off. Our faith feels a bit more like an academic exercise, or a struggle, than a close and a loving relationship. Again, if only we could just perhaps, you know, share a meal with Jesus. If only we could talk face to face. That would be the real deal. Again, we worry perhaps that what we have is slightly second rate. And yet to those wondering, often struggling to work out how they'll live without Jesus being physically present, there's these incredible promises here that Jesus makes. That at his request, the Father will send another helper to be with you forever. Even the Spirit of Truth, that is the Holy Spirit, that great promise in verse 18, I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you, Jesus says. Intentionally linking himself with his Spirit, promising that he will be present. He will come to his people through his Holy Spirit. And so really the great encouragement here is that for those who love Jesus, both for his first disciples in that upper room, and for everyone throughout history, including those of us here this morning who've trusted in Jesus, that we have this promise of the Holy Spirit, a promise that has been fulfilled. That if you are a Christian, if you have asked Jesus for forgiveness, that you have that gift of the Holy Spirit.

[ 9 : 14 ] That is not a kind of a higher level of Christianity, that is not a second stage of Christianity. No, that is Jesus' promise for all those who love him, the gift of the Holy Spirit. And it's really important as we begin this section that we kind of get that nailed down before we start. We're going to talk about the work of the Spirit in our lives, but the first thing we need to be certain of is that he is with us, because Jesus has promised that, that we have the fullness of the Holy Spirit with us. Remember, the Holy Spirit, biblically speaking, is a person. So we can't worry that, oh, maybe I only have a little bit of the Spirit, maybe I don't have enough of the Spirit.

It's a person like you or me. I'm either in this room or I'm not in this room. I'm either present or I'm absent. I can't just be a little bit here. It's the same with the Holy Spirit. It's never a case of us not having enough of the Spirit. If we love Jesus, if we are forgiven, if we're following him, we have the fullness of the Spirit, fully with God's people. The question really is, how much are we walking in step with the Spirit, giving our lives over to him as he does his work?

And that's what we're going to be thinking about in a bit more detail. So there's the foundation, though, that Jesus lays in these verses, the promise of the Holy Spirit to those who love Jesus. If we love Jesus, if we trust in him, if we accept his forgiveness, we have that gift of the Holy Spirit here and now. And we can have certain confidence in that. And equally, just as certain, if you're here and you're not yet a Christian, if you're not yet someone who's put their trust in Jesus, as always, we're delighted that your with us church is the very best place that you can be.

But this promise of the Holy Spirit is just as certain for you as well, that if you turn to Jesus, if you accept that forgiveness offered at the cross, that it is done, as James was saying earlier, then you too are promised the Holy Spirit. And we're going to see just now why that is such good news for those who love Jesus. So that's the promise of the Holy Spirit for those who love Jesus. This passage then unfolds by showing us, secondly, the work of the Holy Spirit in those who love Jesus. If we believe in Jesus, we have the Spirit. But what is it that the Holy Spirit does within us? I've tried to group what Jesus says in these verses into three main areas that highlight this work of the Spirit. And remember, again, these are not just bare facts. These aren't just given to us as a kind of a theology textbook, but these are given as encouragement for God's people.

And so the first one is this, that the Holy Spirit enables us to know God's truth. The Holy Spirit enables us to know God's truth. Straight away, Jesus speaks of the Spirit of truth. A big theme throughout John's gospel is Jesus revealing the truth about God to the world. Remember last week, Jesus says, he is the way, the truth, and the life. And we see here in the Holy Spirit that he is another helper, as he's called in verse 16. Another one in the same vein of Jesus himself, who continues this role of enabling us to know God's truth, to know the truth about God. And so how does that work? Well, we see this in verse 25 and 26 in this passage particular. Do have a look. Jesus says this, These things I have spoken to you while I am still 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 have said.

[ 13 : 06 ] Now, remember here that Jesus is speaking directly to his first disciples in this upper room, those who will become his apostles. And in that role will write or will directly influence the writing of the New Testament that we have in our Bibles today. And so it's good to be clear on this. These verses are not Jesus saying to us this morning, you guys have got this much information, but the Holy Spirit is going to come and he will secretly, individually teach you everything else, all this extra stuff that you need to know but currently have access to.

That's not what this passage is saying. I think that's a really kind of common misconception about the Holy Spirit, that he's primarily interested in communicating truths that the Bible somehow missed.

No, what Jesus is saying here is that the Holy Spirit inspired those first apostles so that they could recall all that Jesus had taught them and everything else they need to know, all things as it says in verse 26, so that they could put those things down in writing in the Bible, that the church throughout the ages might have that truth, might have all the knowledge of God that it needs.

The Holy Spirit enables us to know God's truth as it first of all inspires the apostles as they write scripture. And yet his work doesn't finish there because the Holy Spirit continues to work through God's word as he illuminates it to us. Because of the promised Holy Spirit, when we open our Bibles, it's like reading a book, sitting next to the author of that book. You know, they're able to make sure that we understand it. They're maybe able to make sure that we get what they're trying to get across at each point. The word and the spirit are not opposed in the Christian life, but they come and they work hand in hand. We have more of the Holy Spirit as we have more of the Bible he inspired and the Bible that he helps us to truly grasp the truth of. That's why as we turn to the Bible, we pray that God would, through the Holy Spirit, open our eyes to the truth that it contains. Ultimately, that he would show us how it points us to Jesus, who is the full revelation, the truth of God himself, the word become flesh, as John said, right at the very beginning of this gospel. Just as a practical outworking of this, how we see that in action, this is one of the reasons why as a church, we spend a lot of time, much more time, speaking about Jesus than we do speaking about the Holy Spirit. And I think, I hope we get that balance right, that it's not a focus on Jesus at the expense of the Holy Spirit, but rather it's a focus on Jesus because that is exactly what the Holy Spirit wants us and enables us to do. The Holy

Spirit enables us to know the truth about God through pointing us to Jesus in his word, the Bible. Think about it this way, that if the Holy Spirit was to organize, you know, a Christian conference or a church weekend away for us, it would not be a conference on the Holy Spirit. It would be a conference about Jesus because in the gospel, God reveals himself to us. The work of the Spirit is to enable us to know the truth about God, to shine that light on Jesus, who is the fullness of that revelation to us. And remember, Jesus is teaching all these things then to be an encouragement.

[ 16 : 55 ] These great verses at the end of chapter 16, where Jesus says, I've said all of these things to you, chapter 14, 15, 16, all of these things to you, that in me, you may have peace. And so we want to read all these things through that lens that Jesus is reassuring us. The point here is that we are not lacking, we are not needing more when it comes to knowledge of the truth of God. So often the teaching about the Holy Spirit can have the opposite of effect. You know, why haven't I had this particular experience? Why haven't I had this personal revelation? Actually, Jesus is saying we can have peace as through the work of the Holy Spirit, as he inspires the apostles, as he illuminates their words to us. We can know the truth about God. And so that's the first part of the Holy Spirit's work.

He enables us to know God's truth. And then building on that, we see next, the Holy Spirit enables us to keep God's commandments. The Holy Spirit doesn't just help us in terms of information, but he also gives us strength in terms of transformation. Again, a big part of these chapters of John that we're looking at is Jesus telling his disciples how they're to live in his absence. And so we saw that last week, chapter 13, verse 34, Jesus said, a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. It was the first verse of our passage this morning as well, wasn't it? Verse 15, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. And that note of obedience runs throughout these verses. And it's into this context then of Jesus calling people to live in obedience to him, that he also promises this helper, that he also promises he won't leave his people as orphans. That actually the Holy Spirit he promises is the one who enables people, enables us to love others as Jesus has loved us. The Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to keep God's commandments, not only to know the truth about God, but also to live that out day by day.

There's a big kind of link throughout these verses again, that those who love God, are obedient to him. Whenever we mention that, it's always important that we make sure we've got the order of all of these things right, that our obedience to God is not what earns our love from him. God's love, remember, is a gracious love, a love we could never deserve, a love that has been shown for us in Jesus. He has made that first move. And it is as we respond to Jesus, as we accept his grace, his mercy, his forgiveness, that we are moved to love him because he first loved us. And we live out that love in obedience. And actually we see here that how the Holy Spirit fits that same pattern.

It's as we respond to Jesus and the gospel that we receive that gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit promised, remember, to all those who love Jesus. And it's that same Holy Spirit who enables us to live out that love in obedience. My nephew turned 17 a couple of months ago. And so to my sister's kind of great worry and to her insurance company's great delight, he's learning to drive in a big kind of gray estate car cruising around. But, you know, when people are learning to drive, you don't just tell them what to do, you know, give them a copy of the highway code, tell them what the free pedals are, and then just send them off to do it by themselves, do you? No, they need someone.

It's the law that they have someone who will sit alongside them to help them as they look to drive as they're supposed to, as they look to keep the rules of the road, as they look to be safe and do what they're supposed to be doing. And in some ways that's a bit like the Holy Spirit.

[ 21 : 05 ] We're not just told through his inspiration what God commands and then left it to get on with it. No, actually, he is right there with us. Only more than a driver being next to a learner driver, the Holy Spirit is actually within us, enabling us, empowering us to do as we should.

St. Augustine, the great kind of theologian of the early church, put it this way, Lord, command what you will and grant what you command. That it is God within us, God the Holy Spirit, who enables us to keep God's commandments and to live as he calls us to live. And again, we're told this as an encouragement. You might well be sitting here this morning and thinking that you're making so little progress in the Christian life. That there are repeated patterns of behavior that you long to put off and yet feel kind of powerless to do so. However hard you've tried, however many resolutions you've made.

And yet Jesus here promises the Holy Spirit to help us. The Holy Spirit who, however many times we mess up, is always there, ready to help us back to our feet, not to give in, who will be with us forever, as Jesus promises, and enable us to gradually make that progress in living more like Jesus, living as God commands. John Piper puts it like this, Christianity means change is possible, deep fundamental change. It is possible to become tender-hearted when once you are callous and insensitive. It is possible to stop being dominated by bitterness and anger. It is possible to become a loving person no matter what your background has been.

It frees us from the terrible fatalism that says change is impossible for me. It frees me from mechanistic views that make my background my destiny.

And that great encouragement, I think that's an encouragement for all of us, that change, that progress is possible, that encouragement is only true because in the gospel we receive that gift of the Holy Spirit, the work of the Holy Spirit who enables us to keep God's commands.

[ 23 : 32 ] So the Holy Spirit enables us to know God's truth, to keep God's commands, and finally here the Holy Spirit enables us to enjoy God's presence, really to know God's life within us.

The work of the Spirit is revelation about what we know, it's transformation about how we live, but it's also about this relationship, about us truly appreciating our union with God made possible through Christ.

Let me read a couple of the verses in this passage here that kind of emphasize that. And again, as I read these, just listen carefully to them and just try to grasp the incredible nature of what Jesus is saying here about the relationship, the intimacy of the relationship that we are invited into with God.

In verse 19, he says this, Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Jesus is talking again there about the Holy Spirit he will send. Because I live, you also will live.

In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. And later on, verse 23, Jesus answered him, If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

[ 24 : 56 ] There's incredible words there about God himself dwelling within his people. Just stop to think of the closeness of the relationship that is being described here.

That union with Christ, which means we not only benefit from his forgiveness, not only also are able to live for him in his strength, but on top of that, we can know his presence with us, that he dwells within us, that we are never alone, that we are never orphaned, that there is never anyone closer to us than God himself who has made his home within us.

Sometimes the irony, but such a good kind of joyful irony of what Jesus teaches in these verses is that we can enjoy God's presence with us in a far greater way, because Jesus has gone, than we would have been able to if Jesus still walked on the earth.

Because in his place, that the Spirit has come, that God can make his home in us. That incredible promise that we can enjoy God's presence through his Holy Spirit, that promise that is true for all those, but also only for those who have put their trust in Jesus and follow him.

And I just wanted to finish this morning really by just saying, but what if I don't feel that? What if that doesn't kind of match up to what I'm experiencing at the moment?

[ 26 : 38 ] Perhaps actually God at the moment feels far from you. Perhaps that relationship with God dwelling within you isn't really something you're experiencing right now.

Perhaps you're struggling. Well, remember if that is you, that this is Jesus speaking to, teaching anxious and downcast disciples in this upper room.

People who are worried. The message of this passage isn't to say, well, if you're doing it right, you would feel warm and fuzzy all the time.

We just sang that great psalm, Psalm 13 earlier in our service, words inspired by God, but which say, how long, oh Lord, how long? The message of this passage is not to say about what we feel.

The message is to lean into what Jesus has promised. That incredible promise that if we trust in him for all those who love Jesus, if this morning you turn to Jesus and put your trust in him for the very first time, then the Holy Spirit is a reality in our lives.

[ 27 : 46 ] That through him, God has made his home with us. That's not based on how we feel, but what God has promised. So that is something we can rely on even when so much of our lives seems unsolid or uncertain.

It means that the deepest level, God knows us. That when we pray, God hears us. When we struggle, God is with us. Whether we currently feel that or not. And our prayer is that more and more, our thoughts, our emotions, our experience would be brought into line with that which is true, that God is with us and within us.

Because Jesus has promised that to us. The Holy Spirit enables us to enjoy God's presence because God has made his home in us through him.

And Jesus teaches us this, as he says, that we might believe, that we might have peace, that even though Jesus isn't physically with us, that we can know the truth about God, that we can live according to his commandments, can know his presence with us.

And that through that work of the Holy Spirit, promise to all those who love Jesus, we would know that we have everything we need. Let's pray together. Amen.

[ 29 : 00 ] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.