

How Are We to Use This Gift?

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John 15:26-16:14 ²⁶ "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. ²⁷ "And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning. ^{NKJ} **John 16:1** "These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. ² "They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. ³ "And these things they will do to you¹ because they have not known the Father nor Me. ⁴ "But these things I have told you, that when the¹ time comes, 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. ⁵ "But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' ⁶ "But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. ⁷ "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 depart, I will send Him to you. ⁸ "And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹ "of sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰ "of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; ¹¹ "of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. ¹² "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. ¹³ "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. ¹⁴ "He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare *it* to you.

15: 26-27

If your kids unwrap their birthday or their Christmas present and find inside the box a note saying, "All my love," they will likely be very disappointed. Even though they know that to be a very great gift they still want something that they can play with.

In the same way today, Jesus gives us a very great gift, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and yet we are often disappointed with this gift. Just like children we would prefer to have something that we can touch and feel and play with.

We read the words of our text, and we think "Ho Hum, no big deal." We come to church, and we are surprised to find out that it is Pentecost Sunday. We celebrate Christmas and Easter with great exuberance, but Pentecost is often lost in the background. When I ask my confirmation kids what the three major Christian Festivals are, Pentecost is the one that they almost always forget.

Just like children finding a note that says, "All my love," we are disappointed with Jesus' gift here although we try our best to pretend not to be.

The power and usefulness of this gift is seen in both our OT reading and our reading from Acts.

Ezekiel stands over a valley of dry bones. He preaches and as he preaches, the breath or wind which is the same word for spirit in Hebrew, comes and gives life to the bones. The people of Israel were lost and scattered

throughout the Babylonian empire. Many of them thought that there was no hope left. They were dead as a people and as a nation. In the midst of this hopeless despair the Spirit gives life to the dead.

This is one of the things the Holy Spirit does. He gives comfort, life, strength, and hope to those who walk in the darkest despair. He takes dry bones that are dead and cause them to stand and live again.

Many people who neglect God's word in their lives, suddenly find how wonderful and sweet it is when they have great adversity in their life. This is the working of the Holy Spirit through the word. Without the Holy Spirit the word would not have such a comforting effect in our lives, but with the Holy Spirit it is a light in dark places.

A flashlight might not seem like a particularly wonderful gift until you must walk on a dark path, a deep dark cave or a trail through the woods in the middle of the night, then it is your dearest possession.

In our reading from Acts as well you seem how great this gift is. The Holy Spirit gives strength and power and boldness to the apostles to proclaim the word of God. Which of us possibly feels capable of sharing God's word. Whether it be to share it with a stranger or to share it with a loved one who needs comforting. At such times we desperately need this gift. This helper whom Jesus promises to send will work through that word to accomplish what we cannot, to give comfort to those who are in distress or to turn the heart of an unbeliever.

So often we think that these things are a matter of our wisdom. If I can only find the right words, I can comfort the distressed or change the mind of the unbeliever. Our words, no matter how good are not going to accomplish either thing. The words are here in scripture not in our mind. The power to make them effective is from the Spirit.

The first thing we ought to always do is pray that the Helper would be present with us to give power to God's word, then we can give life even to dry bones.

16:1-7

The third article which pertains to the Holy Spirit, like the other three articles is a profession of faith. That is, we confess that we believe in these things even though we cannot see them. One problem with the third article however is that unlike the other two we expect to see or sense these things.

The first article speaks about creation, we don't expect to see creation, so it doesn't bother us that we don't see it.

The second article speaks about Jesus being born, dying for our sins, and rising. Again, these are things that happened in the past and we don't expect to see them.

The third article, however, speaks of things that are a part of our life now, and it sometimes bothers us that we cannot see or sense them.

Where is this Holy Spirit? How come I cannot feel his presence. How come there is so much sin in my life and the lives of my family? Where is this one Holy Christian Church? Why is there so much disunity, so much fighting, so many separate churches, so much false teaching? Why is the Holy Spirit not leading and guiding his church? The churches in this world often do not appear to be a gathering of loving believers who are one in Christ.

Jesus anticipates such thinking in our text when he says, "**these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.**" John 16:4

Jesus knows that there are many things that will happen in this life that will make it appear as though his promises have failed. He reassures us that whatever it may look like his promises have not failed.

In our text he says that he will go away. That is, we will not see him, but that does not mean that he is gone or that he has failed.

Again, we see this in our Old Testament reading. The people of Israel were scattered. The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. The nation was gone. Clearly the people were dead dry bones and all the promises that God gave to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David had failed. God makes it clear in that vision to Ezekiel that this is not the case. The bones will live again through the preaching of the word. God's promises have not failed, the nation was not gone forever, and the people would rise again.

Some people have said the same thing about this church that Israelites were thinking about the nation of Israel at time of Ezekiel, that it is dead. They look at this church and to them it looks like a valley of dry bones. Regardless of whether that is an accurate view or not, it is a human view or perspective.

It is the preaching of the word and the coming of the Holy Spirit which gives life to dry bones not the mechanisms of man's wisdom. Jesus speaks more about this in our next verses.

16:8-15

What is the purpose of the Holy Spirit? What does he come to do? How are we supposed to use this gift?

Jesus told us back in verse 26, "**he will testify of me.**" He repeats again in these verses. His purpose is to preach sin, righteousness, and judgement.

My brother Jesse got me into roasting my own coffee. It tastes so much better when it is freshly roasted, and it's cheaper. You can roast coffee with a popcorn popper, but one of the things the website tells you is that this is not what a popcorn popper is designed for. It is not surprising that you will eventually ruin the popcorn popper.

One of the reasons that we fail to appreciate the gift of the Holy Spirit, and even fail to recognize his presence is because we forget what his purpose is. We try to use the Holy Spirit in ways that aren't his purpose.

We want to use the Holy Spirit to make us feel joy, or to fix all our earthly problems, or to give us our best life now, or do miracles. Consequently, we are tempted to think where people dance in the aisles, and everyone is perfectly loving there is the Holy Spirit. When I feel lifted up there is the Holy Spirit. It's not that the Holy Spirit can't do these things, but it is not his purpose.

The purpose of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost was not to cause the apostles to speak in tongues but to proclaim the wonderful works of God. The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to testify about Jesus. The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to preach sin and righteousness and Judgement.

Thus, we do not find the Holy Spirit in those places where I feel elevated and lifted up, but in those places where the cross is elevated and lifted up. We don't not find the Holy Spirit in those places where people dance in the aisle but where people come with repentant hearts to receive the forgiveness of sins.

That is not to say that there is anything wrong with dancing in the aisles or feeling excited or lifted up. The Holy Spirit is not against such things. It is only to say that such things are not evidence of the Spirit's presence. The evidence of the Spirit's presence is the preaching of the Word. Where sin is convicted, and forgiveness is preached through Jesus' name, there the Holy Spirit is.

This church may look dead if we look with human wisdom. Are people excited and joyful? Are they exuberant? Do the stats indicate a healthy growth curve? But these are the wrong questions.

Instead, we ought to ask. Is this a place where sinners come in humble repentance and receive the forgiveness of sins because of what Jesus did for us? To that we say yes, therefore it is clear that the Holy Spirit is at work here. For it is certain that without the Holy Spirit people do not come in humble repentance, and without the Holy Spirit the word of God is not preached.

This is truly a very great and wonderful gift which Jesus gives us. A gift which we ought to make use of in our daily lives. The Spirit that we receive from Jesus can give lift to dead bones. He can give us boldness to share God's word, both to encourage one another and to confront sinners with God's word. Wherever the word of God is preached there the Spirit is present. We should truly appreciate and use this gift. Amen.