

Last Words, Lasting Presence
Jesus and the Disciples at the Last Supper
Part Three: A Life Empowered by the Spirit
John 14.15-31, 15.26, and 16.5-15

March 13, 2022

David Henderson

Last weekend we were down in Charlotte for our granddaughter Rosie's baptism, and while we were there my daughter-in-law Christy told us she'd gotten a new swing set that needed to be put together.

"I'll do it!" said my five-and-a-half year-old grandson Shepherd.

"Would you do that, Shepherd?" Christy asked.

And he did! He carried that huge box out of the shed, got out all the pieces, looked at the instructions, figured out how to put it all together, fit the poles into each other, screwed every one of the bolts tight, set up the swing set and leveled it and anchored it to the ground.

And . . . when he couldn't carry the box, when he couldn't read the instructions, when he couldn't lift the poles, when he couldn't tighten the bolts, when he couldn't heft the post hole digger, and when he lost interest and wandered away . . . he had a little help.

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One of the really challenging aspects of the Christian life is the sense of its being an impossible life that we are nonetheless expected to live.

Do you ever feel that tension?

One of the tenets of the Christian faith is that we are called to nothing less than a life of full yieldedness and submission, a cost-you-everything sacrificial life of Christlike love.

And it's a life we *want* to live. We want to please Jesus and live our lives faithfully, in a way that honors the One who purchased our lives at the cost of his own.

And yet one of the tenets of the very same faith is that we are unable to live a life that is perfectly pleasing to God.

As created human beings, finite in every way, we have profound limits to what we are able to grasp by ourselves and do and change and sustain in ourselves.

And as fallen human beings in whom sin touches and taints everything, we are characterized by spiritual rebellion and spiritual indifference and spiritual amnesia, making a life of holiness and obedience next to impossible for us.

Do you feel that?

Nowhere do we feel it more in the New Testament than as we sit around the table with the disciples on the last night they spent on earth with Jesus, and we hear his challenge to a fledgling new entity called the church.

Until now, the Christian faith has been a rabbi named Jesus leading a small band of followers that we know as the disciples, criss-crossing back and forth across a small region in the Near East.

Now Jesus is leaving them, and the Christian faith becomes the church, a family of Christ followers that will gather and grow and spread around the globe.

The upper room discourse is the charter of this new entity called the church.

Until now, Jesus has walked with his followers. Now, he is about to leave them. With these words, he readies them for what comes next.

In one sense he is leaving them.

In John 13.33 Jesus says, "My children, I will be with you only a little longer."
And in 13.36 he says, "Where I am going you cannot follow now."

His words startle them.

Peter asks in 13.36 'Wait – where are you going?'
And again in 13.37 "I don't understand. Why can't we follow you now?"
And Thomas in 14.5 says "We don't know where you're going. How in the world are we supposed to follow you?"

But in another sense the disciples are leaving Jesus.

On this last night with his followers, he says in effect, "This is where I stop. But this isn't where the Christian faith stops. I'm sending you on."

In John 17.18 Jesus prays for the church, "As you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world."

As I said in the first message, this moment when Jesus gathers his followers for the last time is like a commanding officer gathering with his troops before he sends them onto the beach, or a coach meeting with his players on the sidelines before he sends them onto the field, or a mom saying goodbye to her son before she sends him off to school.

I can't go with you past this point. But before I sent you out there, let me remind you who you are, and how I want you to be, and what I want you to do.

And what he wants them to be and do is no small thing.

John 13.13

You call me "Teacher" and "Lord," and rightly so, for that is what I am.

You who have given me your allegiance, you have surrendered your life to me. Now let me remind you of the life I'm calling you to as you go forward without me.

Jesus calls the church to . . .

- A life in imitation of Jesus our teacher 13.12-17
- A life in submission to Jesus our master 13.12-17
- A life in obedience to Jesus our ruler 13.12-17
- A life of sacrificial service to others 13.1-17
- A life of love for one another 13.34-35, 15.12-17, 17.26
- A life of obeying Jesus and the Father 14.15, 14.21-23, 15.10
- A life of enduring the opposition and hostility of the world 15.18-25
- A life of bearing fruit for the Kingdom 15.1-8, 15.16
- A life of testifying about Jesus 15.27, 17.23
- A life conforming to the truth of Scripture 17.7-8
- A life of unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ 17.11, 20-23
- A holy and sanctified life 17.17-19

Imagine being one of the disciples gathered in the upper room and hearing this charter for the church, being reminded again of the rigorous costly all-in sort life to which he calls us as his followers that you've been hearing for the past three years.

How do you feel as you see that list? Excited? Motivated? Challenged? Discouraged? Overwhelmed?

I think when we are confronted with a high calling like that, we can go in one of two directions.

On the one hand, we can think, okay, I can do this, I'm going to give myself to this, and we hunker down and try to make it happen, relying on ourselves, trying through our own effort to please Jesus.

That can quickly lead to faith as performance, faith as effort divorced from grace, which can quickly lead to spiritual pride and works righteousness.

Or we can look at his expectations and think, there's no way I can do this. I can never fully satisfy his expectations; I can't even come close. Discouraged from repeatedly trying and falling short, we come to the end of ourselves and we throw up our hands, and we stop trying altogether.

That can lead to faith as belief divorced from life, faith as cheap grace, faith with no distinctiveness, faith disconnected from works, faith as forgiveness only.

Can you identify with either of those responses? Faith as trying hard or faith as giving up trying altogether?

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Feeling that tension sets us up perfectly to hear the startling pledge that Jesus makes to his followers, and to all those who will come after them. Us included.

Running throughout this charter for the church, weaving in and out between these overwhelming expectations, is an amazing promise, in which Jesus assures us that what he asks of us he himself will make possible for us.

John 14.15-18

If you love me, keep my commands. *And* I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans.

Another advocate. When I leave, he will come, and he will carry on in my stead. Walking with you, guiding you, teaching you, encouraging you, equipping you, strengthening you, just as I have.

He will help you and be with you forever. Just hear those words again. *He will help you and be with you forever.* As we seek to live a life that pleases Jesus and fulfills his commands, he will come alongside of us and help us. He will be with us in it.

You know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. You are not, you are never, on your own as a follower of Christ. You will never be left to your own limited strength and ability, and you will never be left by yourself. My spirit will be with you and he will live within you!

And you will *know* him! My spirit is not a power but a person, not a force but a friend, who takes up residence in every one of my followers.

In John 13.33 Jesus says

My children, I will be with you only a little longer.

But then, in John 14.18, he says
I will not leave you as orphans

As you go forward from here, without me walking beside you, you will remain under the loving care of God

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Jesus talks about the Spirit of God in five sections of the upper room discourse. Twice in chapter 14, once in chapter 15, and twice in chapter 16. (14.15-18, 14.26, 15.26-27, 16.5-11, 16.12-15)

What I'd like to do now is use those five sections to answer two questions. What does Jesus tell us about who the Spirit is? And what does Jesus tell us the Spirit will do in and through those of us who are his followers?

Jesus uses three terms to describe him.

An Advocate

John 14.15-18

If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another **advocate** to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans.

Jesus uses that term three times - in 14.16, and also in 14.26, 15.26

The Greek word *Paraclete*, from the word meaning “call alongside”.

The first translation of the Bible into English, Wycliffe's translation that was finished in 1300s, translates this “Comforter.” And that makes sense, because it's closely related to the word that means comfort or encourage.

But the most common meaning of the word in secular Greek is “advocate.” It's opposite is “accuser.”

It's a courtroom term: it refers to someone who defends you in the face of charges or accusations

The one who comes alongside to help you out.

When you come under attack he defends you

When you come into difficulty he helps you

When you come up short he provides for you

That leads New Testament scholar Dale Bruner to translate this: True Friend
Other modern translations say counselor, helper, or advocate.

Someone who is there for you.

John 14.15-18

If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans.

Jesus calls us to obey his command that we would live a life of love, service, obedience, sacrifice. And then he promises us the Advocate who will empower us more and more, as we cooperate with him, to live a life that conforms to God's calling, equipping us for the Christian life from within

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Jesus also calls the Spirit the **Spirit of Truth**

John 14.15-18

If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— **the Spirit of truth**. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans.

Jesus calls him the spirit of truth in 14.17, also in 15.26, 16.13

When Jesus calls the Spirit the Spirit of truth, he has in mind something much wider and deeper than true statements or a moral standard, though that is certainly included.

Truth means whatever corresponds to reality. It is whatever is the way things really are.

When we walk through the day, our senses deceive us about what is real and true. We don't see God, we don't see angels, we don't see heaven, we don't see the new humanity.

As a result of that, over time our world drifted from a world centered on God to one that has a largely material view of reality – if it isn't matter or energy, it doesn't exist. The universe and what it contains is all there is. And all there is is just an accident. There is no God, there is no supernatural realm, there is no divine design according to which we are to live our lives. What you see is all there is.

But for those of us who believe in God we believe there is a whole realm that we can't see but is every bit as real as this physical realm

We can't prove it exists, but we are confident that it does not on the basis of scientific proof but based on an inner knowing, faith, as the Spirit of God awakens us to truth and equips us to believe what is true

The Spirit brings us into the truth, which is that God exists and he created us, the world exists by the will of God and for his sake, and the spiritual realm is real, every bit as real as this physical realm.

There is a personal knowable God, who created us for his purposes. There is a universal moral code by which we are meant to live. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and there is only one way to be made right with God, which is through the saving work of Jesus, God's son, who died on the cross in our place.

The Spirit bears witness to the truth, awakens us to the truth, brings us into the truth Gives us eyes to see what is invisible, opens our ears to hear what is inaudible, opens a path into the inaccessible.

John 14.26

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

John 16.12-15

I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will receive from me what he will make known to you

The Spirit of Truth brings us alive to the truth, and brings us into the truth, and establishes us in the truth.

Jesus says the spirit of God is our Advocate and the Spirit of truth.

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Jesus also refers to the Spirit of God as the **Holy Spirit**

John 14.26

But the Advocate, **the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

We use the term all the time, but we don't often think about what it means

Holy means: distinctive, different from the ordinary world, set apart as belonging to God, sacred

It's a word that's used of things connected to God
People, places, objects

But the word is also used of God himself, and that's how it is used here
Used of God the Father in Luke 1.49
Used of Jesus, the son of God, in John 6.69
Used of the Spirit of God in John 14.26

According to the Bible, God's *character* is like ours as human beings in many ways – he is personal, knowable, he communicates, speaks, acts, loves, and sometimes in the best of human beings we get glimpses of some of his attributes like wisdom, strength, kindness, and love.

But God's *nature* is a different story. It is utterly unlike ours, and almost completely beyond our grasping. For example, God is spirit, present equally in all places and times. As bodily beings who are confined to one place and time, we struggle to understand that..

And if that isn't enough to take in, according to the Bible, there is one God, but he exists eternally in three equal persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. We refer to this as the trinity.

Because God is one, and God the Spirit lives within us as believers, that means we enjoy not just the presence of the Spirit of God within us (14.17), but also the presence of the Father (14.23) and the Son (14.18, 14.20, 14.23).

The Spirit isn't just a God-given power, like the wind that blew back the Red Sea
The Spirit is not just a God-given agent, like the angel who spoke to Mary and to Joseph.

The Spirit is God *himself*, God awakening us to God, God revealing God, God drawing God's people to God, God equipping God's people to live the life he has for them

Jesus says in 14.17 that we *know* him. We can talk to him, feel his presence, ask him for his help, pray for his guidance, receive his power. The Holy Spirit makes a holy God present to us as his people.

But that's not all. God witnesses to himself within us, and the Spirit witnesses to himself through us to others as the Spirit of God makes the Son of God known. He testifies to Jesus alive in us.

John 15.26-27

When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—**he will testify about me**. And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning.

When the Spirit of God inhabits his people, it is God present in us whom people will see, and it is God present in us who will reveal himself to the world.

Application

Jesus calls the church to a rigorous life, one that is beyond our capacity to keep.

Jesus calls the church to . . .

- A life in imitation of Jesus our teacher 13.12-17
- A life in submission to Jesus our master 13.12-17
- A life in obedience to Jesus our ruler 13.12-17
- A life of sacrificial service to others 13.1-17
- A life of love for one another 13.34-35, 15.12-17, 17.26
- A life of obeying Jesus and the Father 14.15, 14.21-23, 15.10
- A life of enduring the opposition and hostility of the world 15.18-25
- A life of bearing fruit for the Kingdom 15.1-8, 15.16
- A life of testifying about Jesus 15.27, 17.23
- A life conforming to the truth of Scripture 17.7-8
- A life of unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ 17.11, 20-23
- A holy and sanctified life 17.17-19

The life we are called to is a life that requires more than what we have.

The secret at the heart of the Christian life, as we look at that long list of things we are called to do, is that while it is the life we are **called** to, it is not the life we have to **create** in ourselves, it is the life being lived in us with which we are called to **cooperate**,

Not to muster up in ourselves, based on our own weary effort. Rather, a life to open ourselves to, a life to receive, a life to flow through ours to others. Our work is to open our lives up to the work of God, to the presence and power of God within, the Spirit of God, helping us and being with us forever.

Turns out that big long list of things Jesus calls us to can be summed up in a single idea. Allowing God by his spirit to live his life in and through us.

That's why Paul commands us, in

Ephesians 5.18

Be filled with the Spirit.

I remember when I was a student at Gordon Conwell hearing John Stott say this was his daily prayer.

God, fill me with your Spirit. Let every part of me be open to your presence, touched by your presence, transformed by your presence, Live your life in me and through me. What if we made that prayer our daily prayer too?

Closing Prayer

John Baillie, in his *Diary of Private Prayer*:

O Lord my God, I kneel before you in lowly adoration before I set out to face the tasks and responsibilities of another day. I thank you for the blessed assurance that I will not be called upon to face them alone or in my own strength, but will at all times be accompanied by your presence and fortified by your grace. (93)

Because it is your own Spirit that stirs within my spirit's inmost room, I know that all is well. What I desire for myself I cannot attain, but what you desire in me You can attain for me. The good that I want to do I am unable to do, but the good that You will in me, that you give me the power to do. (41)

Fill us with your Spirit.

Benediction

Exodus 33.16

Your presence among us sets your people and me apart from all other people on the earth.

Live a life of love. Love Jesus. Love his people. And pour out his love on this world.