

When I'm gone ... you won't be left alone

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Date: 29 January 2023

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[0 : 00] Our reading is taken from John's Gospel, chapter 14, starting at verse 22, and that's on page 1082 in the Bibles.

Then Judas, not Judas Iscariot, said, But Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world? Jesus replied, Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.

My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.

These words you hear are not my own. They belong to the Father who sent me. All this I have spoken while still with you. 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.

Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.

[1 : 20] You heard me say, I am going away, and I am coming back to you. If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.

I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen, you will believe. I will not say much more to you, for the Prince of this world is coming.

He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

Come now, let us leave. This is the word of the Lord. Thank you, Ruth, very much.

If you could keep your Bibles open, that would be a great help. We're going from verse 15 today. We just had the second half of that read, but we're picking up from verse 15. And you can find an outline inside the notice sheet, if you find that helpful, just to follow what we're doing as we look at this together.

[2 : 29] And let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word. Let's pray. Holy Spirit, living breath of God, we pray that you will speak to us now, that we will hear these words, that you breathed out as a present word from you to us, that you will be at work in our heads for our understanding and in our hearts, that wherever each of us stands with you this morning, this will be a significant morning in helping us respond rightly to Jesus.

For we ask in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So I don't know whether you saw this in the news this week. We've got a picture, I think, of a man complained that the delivery people for his sofa left it like this.

They got kind of halfway up the stairs, it got stuck, and they left. I wonder if you've ever had a sense of feeling someone has left at a key moment.

Maybe you're at school, and right before exams, your teacher announces that they're leaving. Or they have to go on maternity leave, and you think, oh, how am I going to get through my exams?

Or maybe you're in a sports team, and you're doing really well, and then your coach moves on to a bigger club, and you're left thinking, well, how are we going to carry on without them? Or maybe you're a musician in a band, and then a key member of the band quits, and you think, how can we manage without them?

[4 : 04] And you're left wondering, how do we go on when this person has gone? Well, when it comes to the Christian faith, we're being asked to trust a person who has gone. We can look back to what he was like, and what he did, and what he said, and we hear his promise that one day we'll all stand before him.

But today, in 2023, how do we trust a man who is not with us? And how do we live our lives for him? How do we make him known to others?

Well, the disciples must have felt anguish about that, because they'd had Jesus with them. They'd come to follow Jesus because he'd called them, and they could see him.

And now, we're looking at the section where he shares a special meal with them, the Passover meal, the night before he died. And Jesus has told them that he's going away.

He said, I'm going away, and where I'm going, you cannot come. And his words here are preparing them for life when he's gone. So let's pick things up with the first promise in verse 15.

[5 : 07] Let's have a look. 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. So that's the key thing we're going to look at this morning, is who is this Spirit who Jesus says is coming after he's gone to encourage and equip his people?

Who is he, and what does he do? Our first point is Jesus sends another advocate to teach us. For the first time in John's Gospel, he's called the Holy Spirit in verse 26.

If you just look there, Jesus uses that language again of he's the advocate, the Holy Spirit. And when he uses that adjective, holy, it speaks to us not just of the Spirit's moral purity and perfection, but actually of belonging to God.

Being holy is to be set apart and to belong to God. And key for us to understand who the Spirit is, is that Jesus describes him as another advocate.

[6 : 20] He's another Jesus. What Jesus has been for his disciples until this time, now God the Holy Spirit will be. But instead of just being with them as Jesus has been, he will come to make his home in them.

So you see that in verse 17. Just have a look at that. Jesus says, 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.

So the Spirit is a person, he's not a force. We're told elsewhere not to grieve the Holy Spirit. But you'd never say that about a force or a power, would you? No one says on a Saturday night, I'm just going to turn the TV off for a bit, because I think the electricity might be getting grieved by what we're watching.

But the Spirit is a person who can respond to our actions with an attitude of grief. And the Spirit makes his home in us when we come to believe in Jesus.

And that is God making his home in us. Sometimes we can drift in the Christian life into thinking, God the Father and God the Son, I'm kind of clear on what they're doing.

[7 : 37] They're right in this together. They had a saving plan. The Father sent Jesus. And together they do all this saving stuff for me, bringing me back to God, forgiveness, eternal life.

And then the Holy Spirit, it's as though he's kind of over here, and he does some other stuff I'm not so sure about. He gives people experiences. It almost sounds as though he's gone a bit rogue, and he's got a different agenda to the Father and the Son.

But Jesus teaches us that the Spirit is coming because Jesus will ask the Father for another like him, another advocate, another Jesus, to do for the disciples the things that Jesus has been doing.

And that word advocate is a difficult word for us to pin down in English. Some of you might have used Bible translations that use a different word there. There's an older Bible translation that used to use the word comforter, which makes us think today about fabric softener.

But in older English, it was a good word because comforting was about strengthening and drawing alongside to strengthen someone. Another translation uses the word counselor, not in the sense of a person who gets you to sit on their couch and tell them about your childhood, but someone who, again, comes alongside you to encourage you.

[9 : 05] And the ESV translation that lots of people use today goes with the word helper, which, again, is useful as a word, but quite generic on the Spirit being a helper.

But what's going on? When we come across good translations into English and they're choosing different words to translate one word in the original Greek language, what that shows you is that the original word has a meaning that no English word can quite put its finger on because there's a breadth to it and a depth to the meaning.

And the word that they're looking to translate there is this word paraclete, which literally is about one who draws alongside you to strengthen you and encourage you.

That's what the Holy Spirit comes to do. He draws alongside us to strengthen and encourage us. So how does he do that? Well, Jesus shows us two ways in his teaching here.

The first is by teaching us. He's called the Spirit of Truth. And then look at the vital work that he will do in verse 25. All this I have spoken while still with you, says Jesus, 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.

[10 : 35] Now, some parts of Jesus' teaching in this section would apply to all followers of Jesus at all times until he returns. But here, when he says you, clearly he means them, not us.

It's one of the most common classic mistakes that people make when reading the Bible is to think that everything the Bible says, it says to me and to you. Here, clearly it's only them who can be reminded by the Spirit.

They were in the room where it happened. They can be reminded by the Spirit of what Jesus said to them. And it was crucial to God's plan to save people from every nation, which he has promised, that those first disciples will remember truly and clearly all that Jesus did and all that Jesus said.

Now, this is very topical for us today, isn't it? Because we want to know, don't we? Any reasonable person wants to know as they look into the Christian faith, can I rely on the Bible?

Is it reliable for me? There's a very popular history podcast at the moment. It's called The Rest is History. Tom Holland and Dominic Sandbrook. It's easily my favorite podcast.

[11 : 49] These guys are brilliant historians. I mean, they are unbelievably clever to listen to. But they ran two podcasts recently. They're just coming up to podcast 300.

But they ran two just before Christmas about Jesus as their historical topic. Now, neither Tom nor Dominic are Christians. They're not Christians. And what was very striking in hearing them talk as historians about Jesus was how much they wanted to affirm that we can rely on as historically reliable about Jesus from the Gospels as they record Jesus' life.

In fact, Tom Holland, who took the lead in these episodes as a historian, he said this, his final words. He started by saying, I don't think you need supernatural explanations to explain Jesus because he's not a Christian.

But then he said this, having said that, though there might be lots of reasons you might choose not to believe in God, I would say the inadequacy of the New Testament as source would not be one that I would use.

Having studied Islam and having studied classical sources and the closer I get to studying the origins of the New Testament, I'm pretty impressed, actually, by how much evidence there is for Jesus.

[13 : 10] See what he's saying? He's not a Christian. He's saying you might find reasons to choose not to believe in God, but saying the Bible is not reliable as a historical document should not be one of those reasons, he says, as a historian.

The Bible is historically reliable. And it was remarkable when you heard him in these episodes as he talked about what we can confidently say about Jesus, even just using history.

He's saying as a non-Christian, clearly Jesus grew up in the north of Israel around the region of Galilee. Clearly he claimed to be God. Tom Holland said he must have claimed to be God.

His disciples would not have made that up. He then said the teaching from Jesus must have come from him because he's the greatest teacher who has ever lived.

So if he hadn't taught like that, who could have made it up? So he's saying we have a man from Galilee who claimed to be God and who taught as no one has ever taught before.

[14 : 14] And then he said, clearly he went to Jerusalem knowing he would die, knowing they would kill him. So you are left with just the history with this conundrum of, so this greatest teacher who ever taught, taught about himself that he was God and went and laid down his life in Jerusalem.

Why has he done all of that? And at the same time, they did say that when you look as historians at any document like the Bible, you have to deal with this issue of the time gap between when it was written down and when the events took place and the things were said and ask, might things have been forgotten or embellished?

And he was saying that the New Testament's very reliable in that sense compared with other documents from history. And at the same time, you have that question. How much can we rely on John's gospel?

Well, wonderfully, Jesus promises the Holy Spirit. So we can have even greater confidence, far greater confidence than simply from history when we hear Jesus promise that after he's gone, he sends the Spirit of God with this ministry to remind the disciples of Jesus' words and his works so that the Spirit inspired them as they wrote the Bible so that God could get exactly what he needed in his book and people from every nation until Jesus returns can know truth about Jesus so that today we can be confident we're reading truth thanks to the Holy Spirit.

And it's good to reflect on what a privilege that is for us that when we set our alarm 15 minutes earlier than we would need to in the morning so that we can open up a Bible app on our phone or get the Bible off our bedside table and open it, when we win that battle not to just get an extra 15 minutes sleep, here is God himself speaking to us by the Holy Spirit today.

[16 : 21] 500 years ago in this country, we would not have had that privilege and people died to give us that privilege to have the Bible in our own language so that we could have those words we can trust.

Powerful words because the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit and we all have that privilege and opportunity that these words give us truth we need.

And we live in a world, an age, where we long for truth, we're starved of truth. I don't know if you saw this week George Santos in the news. He's a New York congressman and it's come out that he's told an extraordinary number of lies to get where he is today.

He lied about who he'd worked for. It wasn't Goldman Sachs. He lied about where he'd gone to school. He lied about where he'd gone to college and the stories he's told about the sports games he played against Harvard and Yale while he was at college completely made up.

He lied about what his mother had died from. He said that it was related to 9-11 and it turns out she was in Brazil. He lied that his grandparents had escaped from the Holocaust. They were in a different continent at the time.

[17 : 30] He claimed that his shoes got stolen in a mugging and that he was the target of an assassination attempt. And George Santos has had these lies exposed and what he said is he embellished some things.

And the really haunting thing about all this was that the report in my newspaper said we shouldn't be altogether surprised by George Santos. He is a man for our times because even though lying is theft, as the writer in my newspaper said, it steals from the people you're lying to, we now live in a country where we've had a prime minister have to step down because he was telling people to lie.

And in America they had a president who lied freely and without any sense of shame. And George Santos is the product of a culture that says you can just reinvent yourself and whoever you choose to be, that becomes true for you.

Just tell your own story about who you are. Create your own identity. And that becomes the truth. Even if it's a denial of reality. We're just plasticine people now and you can invent who you are.

And people think that will give us freedom but actually it's terrifying because we need a foundation of truth to build our lives on. And it's destabilizing to be told you don't have to worry about what's really true.

[18 : 58] You can just make up who you are. Well, Jesus frees us by saying I am the truth. We heard him two weeks ago. I am the way and the truth and the life.

And now he promises for us, for those who come after the disciples, the spirit of truth will come to teach us. And it means that as Christians, we should never ever be afraid of searching for truth, of asking questions to lead us to truth.

We are people of the truth. That's who we are. And the more truth we discover, the more it will reinforce our confidence that God is there and he's spoken to us.

So that's our first point. Jesus sends another advocate to teach us. But what else does the spirit do? Well, our second point is Jesus sends another advocate to help us.

Verse 15 again, he says, 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.

[20 : 09] Now, the first thing he helps us with is he's going to help us believe because the big work Jesus has been doing that we've seen in John's gospel is he helps his disciples to put their faith in him.

So in John chapter 2, Jesus performs his first miraculous sign. He turns water into wine. And John says, through this sign, Jesus revealed his glory and his disciples put their faith in him.

They believed in him. And in chapter 20, John says, Jesus did many other miraculous signs, not recorded in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life in his name.

So Jesus is saying, when I'm gone, another advocate will come to do that faith-giving, confidence-building work so that you can believe in me.

And no one can believe without the Spirit's help. We've seen that in John's gospel as a religious leader, Nicodemus, came to Jesus in John chapter 3 and Jesus said to him, you have to be born again by the Spirit of God to see the kingdom of God.

[21 : 16] So the Spirit is another advocate like Jesus because he is the Spirit of life come to give us spiritual life so that we can see who Jesus is and put our faith in him.

His ministry's been described before as a floodlight ministry. I went to Fir Hill last week to watch Partick Thistle. The floodlights were on as it got dark.

They helped us watch the game. After the game, nobody talked about the floodlights and what they were like. We all talked about the football and what had happened on the pitch because we could see it thanks to the lights.

And the Holy Spirit, that's what he delights to do, to shine Jesus up for us so that we can see who he is and through him we can have life.

He strengthens disciples, drawing alongside us to help us believe. It's the Australian Open finals this weekend and Novak Djokovic is playing right now unless he's already won.

[22 : 19] And when you watch top tennis players playing in big matches, one thing you notice is they often have one place in the crowd they keep looking to. You notice that in the tennis? During the intensity, in between points, they're often looking up at one spot and it's not a family member they're looking to.

They're always looking to their coach. And there's this sense of in the midst of the heat of the battle of a tennis match, there's one person who even though they're up in the crowd, they're right there with them giving them signs that they're with them and exhorting them and encouraging them from the sidelines.

And it strengthens them. And so it is for the Christian with the Holy Spirit. Not just from the sidelines but even in us because he's come to strengthen us.

It's a great spiritual battle that we're all in to keep going as a Christian, to endure. And the Spirit is there to strengthen us, showing us Jesus day by day so that we can stand firm in our faith.

It's funny, it's strange to think, isn't it, the very fact that any of us are still Christians here today is thanks to the Spirit's miraculous work helping us believe. So the Advocate helps us believe and the other way he helps us in this passage is he helps us to love.

[23 : 43] We need the Spirit speaking to our hearts, moving us to obey Jesus. If you look at verse 23, Jesus says, anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.

My Father will love them and we will come to them and make our home with them. Now what does obeying Jesus look like? It looks like radical submission to the Word of God that means we say in our lives, God has the right to contradict me, I don't have the right to contradict him.

And the Christian motivation to live like that is love. But you might be someone visiting church this morning and you might have heard Christians say that they love Jesus or sing that they love Jesus and you might think that's really weird.

How can you love a person you've never met? It does sound strange, doesn't it, when you first hear that. How can you love a person who isn't there? Well the Holy Spirit awakens in our hearts a knowledge of Jesus' love for us, what it cost him to love us.

And as the Spirit shows us that love, he helps us respond in love for Jesus. A love that means that we grow in the fruit of obedience. I don't know if you watch Strictly Come Dancing but you always have this pairing, don't you, of an expert, the dancer, who knows what they're doing, they know exactly what they're doing, and the partner who doesn't know how to dance.

[25 : 18] Bill Bailey, Tony Adams, Ed Bowles, what you see is their massive gratitude over the weeks towards this expert who's come into their life and that through the steps that they're doing and day by day the coaching they're giving, they are helping bring out from this contestant change and helping them learn to please the judges.

And even though they're the one doing the bulk of the work, what they're trying to do is bring bring out the best in this contestant on the show and please the judges.

And I think we've got that kind of picture going on in John 14 of the work of the Holy Spirit, the advocate, that just as Jesus' followers were disciples, they were learners, they were learning Christ and learning to be like Christ, he sends the Spirit so that all God's people who believe in Jesus can learn to be like Jesus.

We can grow in loving obedience of Jesus. So how is the Spirit a helper? He helps us believe in Jesus. He helps us love Jesus.

So if we think about Jesus teaching here in John 14, what would it look like to see the Spirit at work in power in our world today? Well picture Sarah at church going through a really difficult time.

[26 : 44] She's unfairly dismissed from her job, she's out of work, and her landlord evicts her from her flat because they want to sell the flat.

So she's lost her home, she's lost her job and picture her able to say, you know, I really feel that God has helped me to trust him more through all of this.

I really feel I've grown as a Christian through this difficult time. or picture James married with young children, being diagnosed with cancer, undergoing treatment, not being able to work, living with disability, his prognosis hanging over the family, not knowing what the future will bring.

But they keep praying, they keep talking about Jesus together at home and at church. They talk about how they know where he's going if he dies, to be with Jesus.

In fact, James finds that he speaks more boldly than ever before about his faith, his hope of being with Jesus forever. And as a family, they speak with confidence that they know that God is in control and he is wise and he'll do what's right.

[27 : 59] And in the midst of the sadness and the fear, you even see that they are thankful and have joy. This kind of scene is an everyday miraculous work of the Holy Spirit.

If we want to see the Holy Spirit working powerfully in the world today, a great place to look is just the everyday lives of people who still believe in Jesus and they learn Jesus and they love Jesus so they live for Jesus.

So we've heard Jesus sends another advocate to teach us. He sends another advocate to help us. And our third point follows that just briefly. It's that we should be glad that Jesus is going away.

Be glad that Jesus is going away. We should be glad because it's better for him. He says in verse 28, you heard me say, I'm going away and I'm coming back to you.

If you loved me, you would be glad that I'm going to the Father for the Father is greater than I. The Father is greater in status, the Son is fully God, but he's come to be a servant and when he goes back to the Father, the Father will crown him with honour and praise and strength and all that's due him for having saved the world.

[29 : 20] There will be worship for that magnificent achievement. So it's better for him that he's going and as he goes, he makes this extraordinary gift to his disciples of verse 27.

Just look at that as we finish. Jesus says, Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. Now that word peace or shalom is a big Bible word. It's a word that's often used as a greeting in other cultures because it's what we wish for one another.

Peace is everything our hearts were made for and longed for and by Jesus going away he secures that peace for us to give it to us. He makes for us peace with God.

The righteous anger of a holy God against our hostility towards him is dealt with. It's turned aside by his death on the cross. But that peace is something that we are to experience and enjoy in our own hearts.

[30 : 26] that sense that everything is now well between me and my God. The sense that all of your sin all of your regrets all of your shame all your mistakes they've been dealt with by a God who knows them and who loves you anyway.

That gives you an experience of peace. And Jesus says did you notice I do not give to you as the world gives. It's a different kind of gift because it can't be taken away and it doesn't depend on our performance.

It's not just a feeling inside it's about real life and it's based on the objective reality of what he has done for us that has changed our reality for good.

And I think the most astonishing word in verse 27 is my that Jesus says my peace I give to you. Imagine the peace that Jesus enjoyed in his life in the relationship with his heavenly father.

Picture him day by day growing up enjoying perfect access to God knowing the father's pleasure shining down on him. Picture him going off to pray every day knowing that the father sees him perfectly righteous enjoying close friendship with his God.

[31 : 49] Picture how he delighted to walk with God every day knowing that he was a beloved son of a perfect father. He gifts that peace to you and me.

Jesus is going to the cross where he will lose that access to the father. He will face abandonment. The father turning his face away. Him being treated as a sinful man so that we can receive from him the peace that he has always enjoyed and known.

a peace our hearts can rest in every day knowing the father looks on us now with delight with pleasure and we can grow to know him better and we can talk to him and draw near to him with full confidence.

So no wonder Jesus says do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. Let's pray together. Heavenly father we thank you for peace with you as your children.

Lord Jesus we thank you for your love and your words and your works. Holy Spirit we praise and thank you that you have come to be with us and in us that you are with us to teach us and with us to help us.

[33 : 04] Would you continue to keep us help us to learn Christ help us to love Christ help us to live for Christ and may we know your peace guarding our hearts and minds for the glory of your name Father Son and Holy Spirit Amen.