

John 14:15-31 The coming of the Spirit of truth

Tim Anderson 9/9/18

Someone said to me last week,
life would be so much easier,
if Jesus were still with us.

If we could see him and listen to him teach.

Well of course it's natural to think that.

But today's passage lets us know that is not actually the case.

When Jesus walked the earth,
he was only in one place at a time.

If he was at Mary and Martha's house having a meal with them in Bethany,
then he couldn't also be teaching the crowds beside lake Galilee.

Jesus' presence with his disciples
was very limited while he was with them.

But now Jesus is with all of his disciples all of the time.

We are actually far better off.

How is it that Jesus is with us all the time?

It's because Jesus lives in us by his Spirit.

It's the presence of the Holy Spirit living with us
that is the subject of our passage today.

How did we get here?

Well back in 13:33, Jesus has said to his disciples,

"My Children,

I will be with you only a little while longer."

Jesus' disciples are upset by the knowledge that he's going away.

And so the thrust of today's passage is,

"Don't worry.

I am going away.

But I will be with you through the Holy Spirit

who is coming to live inside of you.

And we are actually better off with the Holy Spirit living inside of us, than we would be if Jesus were walking around amongst us, like he did in first century Palestine.

So today's passage begins,

"If you love me, keep my commands."

In the sentence this is tied to the gift of the Holy Spirit.

If you love me, keep my commands.

And I will ask the Father and he will give you the Holy Spirit.

So there are three things,

our love for Jesus,

our keeping Jesus' commands,

and his giving us the Holy Spirit.

It sounds a little bit like if you are good boys and girls,

I will give you a special present -

the Holy Spirit.

But I don't think we should look at it that way.

Better to think about three things

that are always true of the genuine Christian.

Genuine Christians love Jesus.

Genuine Christians keep Jesus' commands.

Genuine Christians have the Holy Spirit.

All three are true of the genuine Christian.

Now there are a couple of matters worth exploring here.

The first is the connection between love and obedience.

These are not words that are commonly held together anymore.

In fact obedience is dying out.

I remember talking with a school teacher

about how children were struggling to learn obedience these days.

She looked at me like I had appeared from another century and said,

"We don't use that word anymore."

Obedience is a rude word in current educational circles.

It's all about giving agency to the student.

The student has made good choices or poor choices.

But never talk about obedience directed towards a teacher.

Heaven forbid!

Well I don't think Jesus would survive too long in the teaching profession.

"If you love me, obey my commands."

And then down in verse 21.

"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me."

In verse 23,

"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching."

In verse 24,

"Anyone who does not love me, will not obey my teaching."

In chapter 15:10,

"If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love,
just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."

How can Jesus connect love and obedience so readily?

We think of love as a matter of the heart.

Something that wells up of its own accord.

Something that is beautiful and unforced.

We think of obedience as something that you are compelled to do.

Something that is often dragged from a person unwillingly.

They don't seem to fit together.

But Jesus says they do fit together.

In fact they fit together so tightly,

that if you don't obey his commands,

that is clear evidence that you don't love him.

So how does it work?

The thing is that real love results in actions.

If I say I love Richmond and never go to a game or watch them on TV,
I'm kidding myself, aren't I?
If I say I love Cherida,
then that must result in putting her first in action.
Real love results in actions.
Claims of love without actions are just sentimentality.
They are not real love.

What sort of actions is it appropriate to do towards God the Son?
How can I demonstrate my love in action?
Well obeying his commands is one thing I can do.
Imperfectly.
But none the less,
that's a practical way I can show my love.
My obedience to Jesus' commands is not compelled.
It's not dragged out of me.
It's something I willingly offer.
And then when I fail because of my human weakness,
it's something I would be willing to offer,
if only I were stronger.
For the Christian, love and obedience to the Lord Jesus go together.

And that means
that if you are being intentionally and knowingly disobedient,
you can't claim that you love him.

v21

"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me."
Jesus isn't just talking about specific do this or do that commands,
but about the whole of his teaching.
Whoever lives by his teaching is the one who loves him.
Sometimes people say to me,
"I'm a non practicing Christian."

A non practicing Christian is someone who doesn't live by Jesus' teaching.

What does it mean to practice as a Christian.

It means to live by Jesus' teaching.

"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me."

A non practicing Christian

is another way of saying a sympathetic non Christian.

Someone who has heard about Jesus' teaching
and largely thinks it's a good idea.

But for whatever reason

has decided not to put it into practice in their own life.

"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me."

Well that was all exploring the connection between love and obedience.

But what's it all got to do with the Holy Spirit?

Three things that are always true of the genuine Christian.

Genuine Christians love Jesus.

Genuine Christians keep Jesus' commands.

Genuine Christians have the Holy Spirit.

Jesus send the Holy Spirit to those who love him and keep his commands.

The Spirit is not a reward for loving him and keeping his commands.

They are just things that go together.

Better to think of it like this,

we wouldn't be able to love him and keep his commands

unless we had the Holy Spirit living in us.

No one can love Jesus without the work of the Spirit in their heart.

And everyone who has the Spirit will love Jesus.

What does this passage tell us about the Spirit?

First, the Spirit is a gift of God the Father

given at the request of the Lord Jesus

given to Christians to help us.

Sometimes people might ask you if you have received the Holy Spirit.
If you are a Christian,
then the answer is Yes.
Whatever experience they are thinking of is secondary.
Whether they really mean, "Have you ever spoken in tongues?"
Or something else.
I have never spoken in tongues,
but have I received the Holy Spirit,
Yes I have.
I am a Christian.
Jesus asked the Father,
and the Father has sent the Spirit.
The promise of these verses
is that the Spirit will be with me and all Christians forever.

In verse 17, the contrast is between 'the world' and 'you'.
The world cannot accept the Spirit.
The world in John's gospel is not a neutral word meaning creation.
The world for John, is the fallen world opposed to God.
And the world cannot accept the Holy Spirit.
We see this.
The world we interact with can often accept Jesus.
People who don't have saving faith will tell me that Jesus was a good man.
But they never tell me that the Holy Spirit is a wonderful spirit.
Why is that?
Because the Holy Spirit is invisible to the world.
Jesus says, "The world neither sees him nor knows him."
We see the Spirit and know the Spirit.
He lives in us.
But to them, the Spirit is invisible.

Jesus' words match with my experience.

So often, I meet someone
and I can tell they are a Christian before they tell me.
I put that down to the work of the Spirit.

I should say something about the word
that is used for the Spirit in these verses.

In our Bibles it says "advocate".

There are a range of words used because it's hard to translate.

Sometimes people have used the word 'comforter' -

which is fine if you speak old English,

and you know that comfort means exhort and encourage,

not give a cuddle when you are feeling sad.

'Advocate' is a legal word.

You could think of how a lawyer advises you of the best path to take.

'Counsellor' is another word used.

Which is fine if you think about it

in terms of advisors giving good counsel to a king.

Not so great if you think about the Counsellor who says "there, there".

The key thing is that the Spirit is taking over the role of Jesus.

Notice that the Spirit is 'another advocate'.

Who was the first advocate?

It was Jesus.

Jesus was the person

who taught his disciples about how to relate well with God.

Jesus was the one who provided his disciples with good Counsel.

Jesus is the one who exhorted and encouraged his listeners
to relate rightly to God.

Jesus is the one who like a lawyer advises us the best path to take in life.

The Spirit now has that role

because Jesus has returned to the Father.

That's why Jesus says in verse 18,

"I will not leave you as orphans;
I will come to you."
How is Jesus coming to us?
He is coming to us in the person of the Holy Spirit.
The Holy Spirit is Jesus living with us.

One of the main roles Jesus had with his disciples was to be their teacher.
They called him teacher.

Often Jesus arranged matters so that he could spend more time teaching.
And the Holy Spirit will also be our teacher.

In verse 26, Jesus says,
"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."

Now we want to be clear about this.

The Holy Spirit is a teacher.

But his teaching ministry is a reminding ministry
not a showing new things ministry.

If someone says to you
that the Holy Spirit has revealed a new doctrine to them,
then be very suspicious.

People say this kind of thing often.

It's always dangerous.

You might have wondered how it is,
that Jesus' disciples remembered so accurately what he had said to them.
Particularly as their behaviour in the gospels is so goofy.

They just don't seem to get it.

How could people who just don't get it at the time
have such crystal clear recollection later on -

enabling them to write the gospels so lucidly?

The answer is the Holy Spirit reminded them of everything Jesus said to them.

We even get comments like this in John 2.

"Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.'"

They replied, 'It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?'

But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

After he was raised from the dead,

his disciples recalled what he had said.

Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus has spoken."

So the Holy Spirit didn't only help the disciples to remember the words.

He also helped the disciples to recognise the significance of those words.

When they first hear it,

they had no idea Jesus was talking about his body.

But with the Holy Spirit's help,

they recognised it.

But of course that wasn't the Spirit teaching them new doctrine.

It was the Spirit enabling them to recognise what Jesus had already taught.

It works exactly the same for us.

Sometimes I'm talking with someone and I need a particular Bible verse.

And it pops into my mind.

That's the Spirit helping me to remember what Jesus has taught me.

Other people when they are facing a crisis in their own life

have had very specific passages of Scripture just come into their minds.

Of course the Spirit will only remind you of what's already there.

So be wise and put stuff in to be reminded of.

Sometimes when we don't understand a passage of Scripture,

we will feel a sudden illumination.

The penny just drops.

It happened to Luther with Romans 1.
It happened to John Wesley.
It happened to my friend James
on the FCA conference we were on this week.
That's the Holy Spirit helping us
to recognise the significance of God's Words.
He will teach you all things.

But it's the kind of teaching that pointed the disciples to Jesus' words.
He teaches us by bringing the Scriptures to light.
Be very wary of anyone
who suggests that they have new doctrine from the Holy Spirit.

Well there's so much more we could talk about in this passage.
But I have time for just one last thing.
So I want to return to where we were at the beginning.
We spoke of the connection between love and obedience.
At the end of the chapter,
we find out that it's not just about our relationship with Jesus.
It's about Jesus' relationship with the Father.

Towards the end of the passage,
Jesus is talking about his return to the Father.
And that means his death on the cross.
That's how he returns to the Father.
And Jesus' death on the cross means that the devil is coming.
An act of such evil -
killing God's only son -
that is the work of the devil.
But why is it that Jesus still willingly goes to the cross?

We would normally phrase this in terms of his love for us.

Jesus loved us so much he was willing to die for us.
But look at how Jesus puts it in verse 31.
"So that the world may learn
that I love the Father
and do exactly what my Father has commanded me."
Love and obedience go hand in hand
even among the members of the Trinity.
Jesus loves the Father.
How do we know?
He carries out the Father's most painful instructions to the letter.

Genuine Christians love Jesus.
Genuine Christians keep Jesus' commands.
Genuine Christians have the Holy Spirit.
Let's spend a few moments in prayer
praising God for the truths we have been reminded of
by his Spirit this morning.