The Spirit that Broke the Church

Scripture: John 15:26-16:4 Sunday, September 15, 2019

Last Sunday Pastor Mervin preached a sermon from the book of Lamentations. The book is heavy with cries of the troubles of this world but it is the best context for us to be reminded of God’s faithfulness and God’s consistent and never changing character. God is consistently good and we can have faith in God’s character no matter how terrible things get in our lives.

Today we will jump back into John and look at a small but interesting section that spans the end of John 15 and the beginning of chapter 16. In our passage today, Jesus is saying, “***I will send you an Advocate, the Spirit of truth. He will come to you from the Father and will testify all about me***.” But let’s look at some other passages where Jesus is promising to send the Holy Spirit.

A little later in John 16 and verse 7 Jesus says, "***But 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 go, I will send Him to you***.”

A little earlier in John 14:16-17 Jesus says, ***“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper***” In John 14:26 he says, “***But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name”.*** In John 15:26 it says***, “When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me.***

If I were to ask you a simple question, who is sending the Holy Spirit and where does the Holy Spirit come from? Is He being sent from the Father or the Son? Is the Holy Spirit proceeding from the Father or the Son? What is scripture actually saying? What is your answer according to the plain meaning of what you just read? Now, some people would say, the plain meaning indicates that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. Some people would say, the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, because the Son is the one doing the sending but the Spirit is coming from the Father.

Now believe it or not, but this issue caused an incredibly charged theological argument in the early church. Part of the church said that this is a matter of “procession” versus “generation”. So when you say that the Holy Spirit is coming from both the Father and the Son, is the Holy Spirit being generated both by the Father and Son? Some people said yes, while some people said no, the Holy Spirit is being generated only by the Father but the Holy Spirit is processing from the Father and through the Son and into the world.

Now you may not care so much about whether the Holy Spirit is being generated through the Son as well or only processing through the Son but the church in the middle ages did care very much about this. Massive debates about this issue started in about the 8th century. They debated this for 300 years believe it or not! And then in the end, in the 11th century, the church split into the Eastern Orthodox church and the Western Roman Catholic church. So when I titled the sermon, the spirit that broke the church, I was playing on the world “Spirit”. Because the whole debate was on the Holy Spirit, but the division in the global church occurred because they did not have a unifying spirit to be able to come to one conclusion on the matter.

Sometimes when we read scripture it can get frustrating when we read the different theological points of view. We want to reject everybody else’s interpretation and simply decide what to believe for ourselves. We call this the “plain” or “pure” reading of scripture. But the problem is that what seems like the plain reading to one person is not such a plain reading to another person. Today’s text is a great example of this.

So today we are going to look at how we can study the Bible in such a way that it is helpful in accomplishing its purpose in our lives, rather than having us get tied up in knots and accomplishing the enemy’s purposes for us 😊

Now the protestant church does not insist on either the Eastern view or the Western view in how it views the Trinity. I believe it is futile pinning down specifics of the inner workings of the Trinity because this contradictory language of Scripture in some of the passages is a limitation of the language that is being used to describe something that exists in a higher dimension. Sometimes paradoxes are set-up in the Bible and you have to get some help in resolving these paradoxes. Sometimes you can see just enough to recognize that you are looking at a mystery in a higher dimention.

What do I mean by that? Well, thing about this situation. If you lived many years ago, you would have thought that the earth was flat because it looks pretty flat to you. But when you look up to the sky, you would see in a particular position, a constellation called the Big Dipper. Now if someone in Australia looked up into the night sky they would see constellations like Sagittarius or Scorpio. This would make no sense to our friends if they were discussing their observations of the sky, unless they understood that that the world they live on cannot be thought of as a simply flat world but a sphere and one of them is in the Northern half of this sphere and the other on the Southern half and so when each of them look up, they are actually looking at a different section of the night sky. It takes expertise beyond what is available to our two friends but if they are able to access the right expertise, they will be able to understand that both their observations are right if they understand the higher dimensions of their world.

Does that make sense? So sometimes, understanding Biblical passages that seem to contradict is about seeing the higher dimensions the passages are pointing to. So let me apply this to our passage today.

Take Luke 11:13 which says, "***If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?***" So this verse is saying, the Father sends the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand we have a verse like John 16:7 which says, ***"But 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 go, I will send Him to you.*** This verse is clearly saying, it is the Son who is doing the sending.

So somehow both the Father and the Son are both doing some sending. But obviously there is a difference in the nature of the sending that each is doing. We also know this, the Father is the Highest authority within the Trinity. 1 Cor 15 ***27For the Scriptures say, “God has put all things under his authority.”[***[***a***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Cor+15%3A27-28&version=NLT#fen-NLT-28706a)***] (Of course, when it says “all things are under his authority,” that does not include God himself, who gave Christ his authority.) 28Then, when all things are under his authority, the Son will put himself under God’s authority, so that God, who gave his Son authority over all things, will be utterly supreme over everything everywhere.***

So the Father is the highest authority in the universe and the Son is second to the Father. Now the Father sent the Son into the world on a special mission. Before the Son completed his mission, the Holy Spirit could not be sent into the world on a mass scale. Once the Son completed his mission, and the Son now has authority over everything except the Father. This gives the Son authority to send the Holy Spirit into the world. Now the Father and Son share a Spirit. They are distinct persons with distinct wills but One spirit. So even the Spirit that the Son has comes from the Father, but it is the work that Jesus accomplished on the cross that gave Jesus Christ the authority to send the Holy Spirit. So you can say, the Father sent the Holy Spirit. But you can equally say the Son sent the Holy Spirit. You can say the Holy Spirit came from the Father, but you can also say the Holy Spirit came from the Son. All those statements are true simultaneously. They are not either or, because the Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist in higher dimensions that ours. That may have been a bit intense and technical. Sorry about that.

So how does this way of interpreting our passage today help you in your walk in the Lord?

Well, first thing to note is that if we try to figure a passages meaning by reading just one verse is never a good idea. There is a reason why there are 4 Gospels and not one Gospel. To understand Scripture, you have to drink large portions of it. Then you can see patterns of though and principles to live by.

The second thing to note is that when you consult all the relevant versus, you might find that some verses seem to contradict each other. Like the situation we just explored. When Scripture passages say different things on the same topic, it is setting up a paradox for us. And paradoxes point to the higher plane in which those facts can co-exist. Resolving paradoxes takes a deeper understanding of all the elements of the situation. Everybody may not have all the information to resolve the paradoxes. If you do not understand something, there is no shame in consulting a commentary or Bible dictionary or even consulting someone you trust who has spent years studying the Bible. We are not afraid to consult others when it comes to fixing our cars or house or even our own bodies, right? Yes we all have access to the Bible and all who have given their life to Christ has access to the Holy Spirit. However, all of us are not gifted the same way, nor do we spend the same amount of time studying a topic. So go and consult people who send their time on that topic. Sometimes it feels like in the protestant world, we have swung the pendulum so far that we don’t recognize any Biblical authority besides ourselves. Study the Bible well, but don’t make up your mind without consulting others who God may have put in your path who spend a lot of time studying scripture.

Now I took some time to explain a little but about the “how” of studying scripture. But when Jesus talked about the sending of the Holy Spirit, His intent was not to get into a theoretical discussion about the Trinity. In chapter 16, immediately after the verses I talked about Jesus says, “I have told you these things so that you won’t abandon your faith”. Jesus was clearly talking about a persecution to come that would be so severe that his followers will be tempted to abandon their faith. He says, ***“for your will be expelled from your synagogues and the time is coming when those who kill you will think they are doing a holy service for God”.***

The example we have in the Bible of this of course is Saul before he became Paul. People will tell lies about you and make your life difficult. And what will you have for your protection? Two things. The advanced warning Jesus has given all his disciples. And the Holy Spirit- the Spirit of truth.

So the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life, when he is controlling you and directing your thoughts will help you over come the persecution you will face. Now, remember we have three kinds of enemies, right? The world, the flesh, and Satan. So what kind of enemy is “persecution?” Well, it works like this. When you are born again, one of the things that Paul testified is that the things of this world will grow strangely dim, right? In other words, for a mature believer, the world and the flesh, will loose a bit of its edge over you. When that happens, the enemy will prepare a customized attack on you.

When brother Yun finally got out of China and came to the United States, one of the things that he discovered here was that while nobody was arresting him or beating him up for his faith, both of which he was able to handle really well, then he experienced a new kind of persecution. People started telling lies about him and slandering his reputation. That he said was harder to take than all the beating he received in China. Yes, lies and slander will be thrown at you in such a way that not only will other people doubt you, but even you might begin to doubt yourself. When that happens, it is only the Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of truth will be able to right your boat.

So what do we need to withstand the persecution? Jesus says we need the Holy Spirit who is the spirit of truth. The Spirit of truth helps to unlock scripture. And when scripture is unlocked for you, you will have access to the truth about yourself, the truth about the world you live in and the truth about God Himself.

The truth about yourself is that you are both immersed in sin, but you are also uniquely and wonderfully created by God. The truth about this world is that it is ruled by Satan and desiged to bring you down. The truth about God is that he has sent his Son Jesus Christ to seek and save you and then to use you to bring others to Him. The truth about God is that he has given us his word and with the help of His Holy Spirit and with others in our lives, we can unlock God’s word for us and he will guide us as well as keep us firm in the faith when persecution comes.

If you have allowed the Spirit of truth to do His work in your life, you have been storm proofed and battle hardened. So hold on tight my friends to the Holy Spirit sent by the Father and the Son to do amazing things in each of our lives! Let us pray.