



Pentecost, May 19, 2013
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Cram Session: Jesus' Parting Words – Receive!

John 14:15-18, 25-26; 16:7

Out of 21 chapters in John's gospel, five of them are devoted to the "Upper Room Discourse," a cram session of teaching from Jesus on the night before his crucifixion. Obviously, if John devotes ¼ of his gospel to this one night of teaching... he must have considered it pretty important. So, for these weeks, we are soaking in the parting words of Jesus.

The other night, Rachel and Ellis White were over for dinner and we got talking about University exams. Most of us who went to college in the states take a final at the end of the term and then move on to the next set of classes. But in England, at the end of every academic year, you take a comprehensive exam on all of the classes you took that previous year. How would you like that? To have to retain and master the material you heard, read and memorized for an entire year. It sounds daunting, doesn't it?

Now, what if you were a disciple of Jesus and discovered he had a mission for you: to go into the world and teach and model everything he had taught you over three years. Not only that, this rabbi who had given sight to the blind and legs to the lame and life to the dead tells you that you will do "even greater things than he had done..." How would you feel? Helpless? Utterly overwhelmed? How in the world could you fulfill this impossible call of Jesus upon your life?

Well, you couldn't. Not in your own strength. But one of the most important promises that Jesus makes his disciples during this cram session—he repeats it five times—is the promise that they will not do it on their own. On this Pentecost Sunday, let's listen as Jesus teaches about the greatest gift he ever gave... his very own Spirit!

John 14:15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you forever—¹⁷the 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. ¹⁸I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

John 14:25 "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶But the Paraclete, 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 15:26 “When the Paraclete 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.

John 16:7 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.
⁸When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; ¹⁰in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

One of the great mysteries of the Christian faith is this: the one eternal, creator God has revealed himself in three persons—God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The first two of these we “get,” kind of, but the third person of the trinity—the Holy Spirit—is more mysterious to us. The Holy Spirit is not just some cosmic force or emanation. He is a person who can be grieved, quenched, rejected, received or blasphemed. We discover the Spirit at work in the earliest pages of the Bible. In Genesis 1.1 we read, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”

With that introduction, we watch as the Holy Spirit moves throughout the Old Testament: the story of creation, the fall, the call of Abraham, the deliverance of Moses, the conquest of the Promised Land, the leadership of the judges, the reign of the kings, the division of the tribes and ultimately, exile and destruction. In all these chapters of Israel’s history, we find the Holy Spirit at work. But here’s how the Holy Spirit worked in the Old Testament. [Light a candle; give it to someone] He came. [Take the candle away] And then he withdrew. [Light a candle; give it to someone] He descended... [Take the candle away] and then he departed.

For example, we are told that the Holy Spirit came upon King Saul... [Light a candle; give it to someone] but then, the Lord withdrew the Spirit from Saul. [Take the candle away] In Psalm 51, David [Light a candle; give it to someone] cried out to the Lord, “Take not thy spirit from me!” [Take the candle away] God sent the Holy Spirit selectively, [Light a candle; give it to someone] to certain people, for certain assignments... and then, when that work was done, [Take the candle away] the Spirit withdrew.

And even the way that the Holy Spirit was described as interacting with God’s people is different. Almost every time in the Old Testament, the Spirit is said to have “come upon” the person. [Hold a lit candle above someone’s head; then withdraw the candle] For a particular moment, for a particular purpose, the Holy Spirit would “come upon” [Hold a lit candle above someone’s head; then withdraw the candle] that person and empower him... until the appointed task was done. Then, He would be withdrawn until God wanted something else accomplished.

[Hold a lit candle above someone's head; then withdraw the candle] Then, again, the Spirit would "come upon."

Notice this: only certain people received this anointing—only for a certain time, only for a certain purpose. Joshua, David, Saul, Bezalel the carpenter, judges like Samson and Othniel—the Holy Spirit of God came upon them and brought power and blessing. But there was a sense that you had better make hay while the sun was shining, because just as quickly as the Spirit came to enable a prophecy or miracle or an act of leadership... just as quickly He would be withdrawn. Why did God choose to provide His Spirit in this fashion at this time... in fits and starts? We don't know. But the fact is, before the Messiah came to earth, there was no telling when, how, how long or for what reason the Spirit of the Lord would descend upon someone.

All of that is about to change. Jesus is preparing His disciples for His departure. After three years of living, eating, sleeping, journeying and ministering together... Jesus says he's going to leave them. He knows this will frighten them. That's why he says, "Let not your hearts be troubled," because their hearts are troubled. They don't want their Master to leave. And Jesus, understanding this, seeks to comfort them with this promise: *"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete to be with you forever... I will not leave you as orphans."* He repeats the promise in 26: *"...the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name..."* Again in 15:26 *"When the Paraclete comes, whom I will send to you from the Father..."* And again in 16:5 *"Now I am going to him who sent me... Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."*

What question first comes to mind? How could it possibly be good that Jesus was going away? Because, when Jesus came to earth in human form, he limited himself. He was God, yes, but he was the God-Man—limited by time and space. Even Jesus could only be in one place at one time. We saw that in the story of Lazarus. If Jesus was on the other side of the Jordan, he could not be with his dying friend in Bethany. There was only one of Him. And it took a toll on Jesus. There was a reason he escaped to the hills to pray. There was a reason that he got into a boat and sailed to the other side of the lake. Because there were thousands of people who wanted a piece of him... and there was only one of Him.

Jesus was about to send the disciples on a mission. They would separate, two by two, and travel all over the Roman Empire. Now if Jesus had stuck around, how exactly would they decide who got Jesus to be his partner? Rock, paper, scissors? "Rock crushes scissors. I win! I get the Son of God to join me on my missionary journey, and you don't! Good luck! Do your best! Go get 'em!"

But Jesus had a different plan. If he returned to the Father, then he could send His own Spirit—that's who the Holy Spirit is, the Spirit of Jesus—to every single

one of his followers. And here's what is different about this sending of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit will live in them forever, not just with them as in the Old Testament. Not just upon them; not just for a particular time and a specific task. No, after Jesus had gone to the cross, after he had risen from the dead he would return to the Father and send his Spirit to dwell in every believer, all the time, for evermore.

But what's with this nickname that Jesus gave the Spirit—Paraclete? This is a mysterious name of two parts. "Para" means "alongside" and "kletos" means "called." Paraclete is the "One called alongside"... particularly in times of trouble when you need help. Paraclete was a legal term. Kind of like a lawyer who stood beside you in the courtroom to defend you and help make your case—to offer helpful testimony on your behalf. If you have ever been in a court or been deposed—and I have—you know that it can be frightening. It is a great comfort to have someone who soothes you, stands with you, walks you through that stressful time.

Paraclete is translated "Counselor" in the NIV, but there are other translations for it: Comforter, Advocate, Helper, Encourager, True Friend. All of them capture a nuance of the name, and all of them offer incredible comfort to men who think they are about to be abandoned like orphans. "Never," Jesus says. "Never! You are frightened because I am leaving you, but in fact, when I do, I will return to you in Spirit and I won't just hang around with you I will dwell inside of you. I will live in you forever. And there—inside of you—I will be what you need, especially in the hard times that life dishes out. I will be your comforter, your advocate, your defender, your helper, your encourager. I will be your true friend."

So, Jesus teaches that he will send the Paraclete to live in the disciples all the time, forever. And here are some of the things that Jesus tells them Paraclete will do.

Paraclete:

Will tell you the truth...

Will empower you to do greater things than I have done...

Will enable you to obey my teachings...

Will remind you of everything I have said to you...

Will provide you peace...

Will enable you to bear spiritual fruit...

Will empower you to witness for me...

Will bring glory to Christ...

Will proclaim that Christ has won, the devil is crushed and the world is lost apart from Jesus...

This is what Jesus promised, and he kept His promise. Three nights later, after his resurrection, Jesus met them again—perhaps in this same room—and he gave them a down payment on his promise. He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit" and then,

he did this... [Blow] He blew on them. Remember? But that was only a taste test. Then came Pentecost, and Paraclete descended with power, amidst tongues of fire, to indwell every disciple forever. They were emboldened and gifted, and the Church was off and running.

So... so what? Fascinating story, but what difference does it make to us this morning? Well, here it is: You have that same Holy Spirit living in you. If you belong to Jesus—if you have prayed, “Jesus, I need you; I cannot do this on my own. Take away my sin, make me clean, save me, use me...”—if you have prayed that prayer, how do you think Jesus answered it? By sending Paraclete... the Comforter, the Counselor, the Advocate, the True Friend. Not just to be with you, but to live inside of you! The Spirit of Jesus—the Spirit that the Old Testament saints only saw spurts of, the very Spirit that hovered over the face of the deep and created all things—now lives inside of you! What does that mean? It means:

Every time you say, “I’m all alone,” Paraclete says, “Oh no you’re not!”
It means every time you say, “I can’t,” Paraclete says, “Oh, but you can!”
It means every time you say, “I’m weak,” Paraclete says, “But I am very strong!”
It means every time you say, “I am so afraid,” Paraclete says, “I am your peace!”

Last week a man who has been worshipping with us for a long time, who has attended Christianity Explored but never bowed before Jesus... Last week, he could resist the Paraclete no longer. He realized Truth when he experienced it, he bowed his head and he surrendered. He received the Spirit of Jesus. He knew that something had happened in that moment, because he told us about it.

But he doesn’t have a clue of all that has happened, and we don’t either... not any of us. If we really believed what Jesus taught—if we really believed his Spirit lives within us, guides and empowers and comforts and protects and equips and sends... if we really believed and received that—every person here would be radically different... myself included. I am facing a difficult personal challenge—one wakes me up at night, worrying—which means, I don’t entirely believe in Pentecost myself! If I did... if we did, we would talk and live and love and give and pray and serve with a power that could touch and transform every person we meet, starting with ourselves.

We don’t believe it, yet, not entirely, but that’s why we come to church! That’s why we celebrate Pentecost and sing Christmas carols and light candles... to remind us that Christ has come again in power. To remind us of what we already possess... to remind us to live in the power of the Spirit of Christ who lives within us! Imagine that! So we will light our own little tongues of fire to remind us that we carry the light of Christ within. Believe it! Receive it! [Light candles, invite help]

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. What does "Paraclete" mean? How many ways can you remember to translate this word? Do you find it helpful in describing the Holy Spirit?
 2. What is the primary task of the Holy Spirit on earth?
 3. How many of the various functions of the Holy Spirit can you recall? How have you seen the Holy Spirit at work specifically in your life?