

The Gospel of John

Text: John 16

Reading: *Daring Faith*, pp. 135–147

“It Is To Your Advantage That I Go Away” (John 16)

Background: There are subtle yet important distinctions to the way the farewell theme is handled in John 14 and 16. John 14 introduces the theme of absence and departure and focuses on words of assurance and consolation. It is as if Jesus is assuring the disciples that the future is possible *even though* he is leaving them. John 16, by contrast, brings Jesus’ farewell instructions to a conclusion and focuses less on assurance and more on the shape of the future itself. In these verses, Jesus is showing his disciples that his departure is necessary *so that* they can fully embrace the future. He repeatedly points them to the benefits of his departure (16:7, 22–27, 33).

A. THE WORK OF THE ADVOCATE (16:4–11)

In 16:6, Jesus turns the disciples’ attention away from their “sorrow” that his words occasion. Instead, his words emphasize the necessity of his departure and its benefits for them (v. 7).

1. Jesus’ departure benefits the disciples primarily because he will send the Spirit to them after he goes (v. 7). Jesus’ departure is a prerequisite for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit’s ministry is to make Jesus and his work present and available for the community in Jesus’ absence.
2. **John 16:7–11 contains the fourth promise of the Holy Spirit in John.** In these verses, the Holy Spirit has the role of **prosecuting attorney**: “he will prove the world wrong” (v. 8). One could translate this phrase “he will *expose* the world.” Like Jesus’ words and actions, the Spirit brings to light and clarifies what sin, righteousness, and judgment really are. The world is the defendant on trial, standing before the believing community.¹
3. Verse 8 introduces a vivid picture of the Holy Spirit’s activity in the world. To say that the Holy Spirit will expose the world regarding **sin, righteousness, and judgment** means that he will bring out into the open the true meaning of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and hold the world accountable to those standards. The Holy Spirit, like Jesus before him, speaks openly and plainly, exposing, or bringing to the light, the impact of Jesus’ ministry for the world.
 - A. Verse 9 states something we have noted before in John: that sin is a theological term (broken relationship with God, refusal to believe in Jesus), not a moral term (a laundry list of immoral actions). **The Holy Spirit exposes sin** by making clear who does and does not believe.
 - B. The world assumes that Jesus’ death is defeat, but verse 10 states that **the Holy Spirit reveals how Jesus’ death demonstrates the “rightness” of God** because his death and departure are victory (16:33) and the completion of his work.
 - C. Finally, verse 11 states that **the Holy Spirit proves the world wrong about judgment** by exposing how in Jesus’ life and death, the ruler of the world, the power of evil, is judged (12:31; 14:30). In Jesus’ life and death, evil is shown to be powerless before God.

¹ Note the distinction between the legal roles of the Holy Spirit in 15:26-27 and 16:8-11. In 15:26-27, the Holy Spirit’s role is that of the **defense counsel**, bearing witness with and for the community in the world’s case against it.

Discussion Questions (16:1–11)

1. The opening verses of this chapter say what has been said before, adding new emphases. What is repeated and what are some of these new emphases we find in verses 1-7?
2. What is your reaction to Jesus' statement that it is for the disciples good that he goes away? Why is this a good thing, and what good comes from Jesus' departure?
3. In what ways will the Spirit—acting as the advocate—prove the world to be wrong in their assumptions and accusations regarding Jesus and his followers (vv. 8-11)? How does this promise give courage and confidence to the community of believers today?

B. THE PROMISE OF REVELATION (16:12–15)

The fifth and final promise of the Holy Spirit turns to the role of the Spirit for the disciples. The Holy Spirit will bring Jesus' teaching forward into the future life of the community.

1. The verb "bear" (v. 12) is normally used to refer to the physical act of supporting or bearing a heavy load (Matt 3:11; 20:12; Mk 14:13). Here it is used metaphorically to point to the burden of the disciples' future. The future will test the disciples in ways that they cannot now anticipate; Jesus, therefore, cannot teach them anything more about the future in the present moment. The disciples will be living into a succession of ever-changing present moments, for which they will need a continuing revelation at those times, to meet those needs and demands.
2. Jesus words encourage the disciples to approach the future as he does—with faith. We have no certitude when it comes to facing the future, because the future cannot be planned or charted. If the disciples knew all the crises that they would face, that their communities would face, they could not bear it. Nor could they bear the gospel revelation from Jesus that they will need to move with faith and confidence into those crises.
3. The simplest way to illustrate the heart of Jesus' teaching is to think about the human life span. If a person received at the beginning of one's life all of the gospel that one would need for all that life has in store in the future, the gospel would be simultaneously unbearable and incomprehensible. The gospel that one will need to face life at 40 years of age would be unbearable at the age of 15, just as the gospel that one will need to face life at 70 years of age would be unbearable at age 40.
4. Jesus' promise of the Holy Spirit in this passage is that the Holy Spirit will carry the promises of Jesus forward into the ever-changing situations of life that lie in store for people of faith. That means that as life changes, as new sufferings and new hopes emerge, you will receive a fresh promise and word from Jesus, conveyed to the community through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit.
5. "The Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you" (vv. 14-15). Without the Spirit constantly and compassionately unpacking the things of God, we settle for a small understanding of God. Without the Spirit, faith shrinks into a weekly ritual, devoid of true worship. We go through the motions. We check the boxes. We jump through the hoops. Transformation, now as then, remains an essential work that only the Spirit can accomplish. The bold witness of the Holy Spirit, through which he carries Jesus' teachings into the future, will ensure that the disciples do not face the future alone, unequipped with the necessary words of Jesus.
6. Jesus' words are not locked away in the disciples' past, restricted to a particular historical moment. Jesus' promise here is that the ongoing, continuous presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the community will ensure that all believers' futures are open to fresh proclamations of Jesus' words.

Discussion Questions (16:12–15)

1. What is your reaction to the illustration [see point 3] of the Holy Spirit’s gradual revealing of Jesus words and guidance over the course of our lives?
2. How have you experienced this work of the Spirit—leading you with the words of Jesus in the changing circumstances of your life? What have you learned at your current age that otherwise would have been unbearable or incomprehensible 10 to 15 years ago?
3. Given Jesus’ promise in 16:12-15, what role does the Spirit play in the life of our community? How does the Spirit help us face the challenges of day-to-day life in 2016?
4. What is your biggest take-away (or something you learned) from hearing Jesus’ promises of the Holy Spirit in John 14–16? Which role of the Holy Spirit is most meaningful to you?

C. “I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD” (16:16–33)

Jesus turns again to the subject of his imminent departure in **verse 16**. As usual, the disciples understand only part of what Jesus is saying. They understand that he speaks of his departure but fail to grasp what that means. Their confusion shows their difficulty in understanding what Jesus is teaching in advance of his death, resurrection, and ascension.

Jesus speaks of the time of birth as the woman’s **hour**, connecting the labor and birth to the events of his own **hour** (**vv. 20-22**). The childbirth image illustrates how the disciples’ pain and sorrow at Jesus’ death are temporary and will be transformed into permanent joy.

The joy the disciples will experience is related to the questions they ask. “On that day” of their rejoicing, they will ask Jesus no question (**v. 23**). The disciples’ questions will cease, yet they will continue to ask things of God in Jesus’ name. Prayer asked and answered in Jesus’ name is an occasion for joy because it is a sign that the disciples share fully in Jesus’ relationship with God. **Verses 26-27** continue this subject, placing prayer in the context of God’s love for the community and the community’s love for Jesus.

Verse 28 summarizes many of the themes of this chapter and of the Gospel as a whole. Jesus was with God from the beginning; he came from God to reveal God in the world. His death and return to God will complete his work in the world and make possible the gift of the Holy Spirit and the disciples’ joy.

The disciples now claim to understand Jesus’ speech. Their confession, “we believe that you came from God” (**v. 30**), reflects Jesus’ words of verse 28 and is evidence that they do understand to some extent. However, Jesus knows that the disciples’ faith will be tested by the events of the hour. The disciples “will be scattered” (**v. 32**), yet Jesus is not left alone.

Even in the face of their abandonment, the discourse ends on a note of triumph (**vv. 32-33**). The Father remains with Jesus, even in this hour. Likewise, Jesus has claimed that he will not abandon the disciples when their own hour of need comes. His gift of peace empowers the community as they face persecution. His call to the disciples to “take courage” is based on his prior victory; “I have conquered the world” (**v. 33**). This assertion shapes the readers understanding of the events that follow.

Thus, the last word here isn't a word of warning. It's one of good cheer. **Love defeats the power of death, and because of this, even in the worst that is to come, the disciples can have a peace that will carry them through.** The peace doesn't come from a detached perspective of life in this world. It isn't a matter of saying, "Oh well, these things happen." It isn't a shrug of the shoulders, resigning yourself to the world being a nasty place and there being nothing much you can do about it. It's a matter of standing on the ground that Jesus is going to win—indeed that he claims to have won already. **"You will have trouble in the world; but cheer up, I've overcome the world!"**

Discussion Questions (16:16–33)

1. Jesus' followers have instant, immediate, direct, and valued access into the very presence of the living God. Why does Jesus say this is so (v. 27)?
2. How do Jesus' words about the character of the Father and his actions toward us challenge the way that God is often characterized (vv. 23, 26-27)?
3. How do the disciples respond to Jesus' teaching about the Father at the end of this discourse (v. 29)? Why is it crucial for the disciples to be able to glimpse at least a bit of the truth at this point?
4. How does knowing that Jesus has overcome (v. 33) affect the way you view the trouble and suffering that come your way in life?

Sources:

Gail O'Day, *The Gospel of John*

Gail O'Day and Susan Hylen, *John*

N.T. Wright, *The Gospel of John*