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The Work of the Spirit in the World

John 16:8-11

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

We are continuing today talking about you and I living the resurrection life, the supernatural life, the life that is empowered by the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. Our subtitle of the series is Learning to Live in the Guidance and Power of the Holy Spirit of God.

We spent the first week talking about the work of the Spirit at large, who he is, and we talked about it being more like learning to surf than to water ski. And we have the emblem of a sailboat throughout this whole series. And when you think of surfing and sailing, you think more of an art that you learn, something that you pick up on, how to harness this force that is around you and, with the Holy Spirit, even within us.

How do we learn to move with the power of the Spirit, be led and instructed by the Spirit? And what's the art of doing this?

I highlighted three things that we need to pay attention to, to do this. One is to slow down. If you're going to get good at something, you have to be able to concentrate on it, get rid of other distractions. And in Jesus' day, of course, there were no cell phones. There were no social media posts. There wasn't any email. They didn't have automobiles. They walked places. Just the pace of their life was less interrupted, and it didn't have so much information flowing around it.

So how much more in our day? Jesus himself was led by the Spirit, the Bible says, and he often withdrew to lonely places to pray and connect with his Father in the midst of slowing down.

Then we need to be attentive, have our ears up. I don't know if any of you went outside this morning or yesterday when it was a little calmer, less windy, and you were quiet, and you could just hear the birds chirping and the sounds of spring. Somehow, for me, that just makes me attentive this time of year.

But to hear the Spirit of God and to be led of the Spirit of God, we need to slow down and be attentive, especially to the things of the Spirit, to know what the Spirit is doing and how the Spirit is working in the world. And of course, we know through revelation, the revelation of God's Word, what the Spirit is up to. And as we know what he's up to, we can pay attention for what he's doing in us and through us and then around us.

And so, in our lesson today, we see one of the things that the Spirit is doing very clearly. And the lesson would have come out of the passage in First Corinthians. In the Holy Spirit's great love for us, he is revealing to and reminding us of the eternal truths and the eternal wisdom of God.

Paul wrote this to the believers in Corinth:

"When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom. I was proclaiming to you the testimony of God. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, that your faith might not rest on human ingenuity. It might not be centered on the hope that humanity can offer itself. But your faith would rest on God's power.

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom, though it's not a message of street smarts or earthly wisdom. It is a message among the mature. It's not from this world. We declare," Paul said, "God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age," Paul said in his time, speaking of the religious leaders, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Roman leaders, "none of them understood the wisdom of God. For if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord Jesus."

However, for those that know Christ and grow in a relationship with him, this wisdom is available.

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard. No human mind can comprehend the things that God has prepared for those who love him."

And these things are revealed to us by God's Spirit.

The wisdom of God is available to you and I through His Spirit. James said, "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, and he gives to all men generously."

Where did Solomon get his wisdom? King Solomon, known as the wisest man to ever live before the time of Jesus, was given wisdom by God through a dream and interaction with God through the Spirit of God. He was infused with wisdom, and you and I can be given the wisdom of the scriptures as the Holy Spirit opens them to us. And you and I can be given wisdom for our own unique circumstances and challenges and trials that we face in life.

I remember the first time I really cried out to the Lord for wisdom after I proposed to a young lady and I was stepping into husbandry, and I realized that this was going to take more wisdom, more growth, more maturity than I ever dreamed to be a good husband.

And then, lo and behold, as I sought God for wisdom in that, we produced a child. And then I had a child to raise, a son. And not long after that, a daughter. And I remember when my son was born and I was videoing him, the camera started to shake because I realized they're going to send that young human

being home with us. And I said, "Lord, I'm going to need some help. I'm going to need some wisdom. I'm going to need some strength and some power."

Lo and behold, both of those children were different from each other.

The Bible instructs us to raise our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It's very clear, but it doesn't say specifically how to do that with each child. And my son was so different. And so I said, "God, how do we raise our son to be all that you've created him to be? What's your wisdom? You created him. You know him better. Would you give us, as his parents who are stewarding his life for a while, your wisdom on how to raise him?"

And then with our daughter, would you give us your wisdom on how to raise her in their uniqueness?

And when the Bible says in Proverbs, "Raise up a child in the way they should go," that means in the way of their uniqueness, in their special design by God. And God will impart his wisdom to parents who will seek him, cry out to him for wisdom and how to raise each child.

There is so much wisdom available to God. Paul was overwhelmed by it when he was writing to the believers in Rome. Near the end of his expounding on God's wisdom, he just launched into a sort of treatise on God's wisdom.

"Oh," he said, "the depth and the riches and the wisdom of the knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments, how inscrutable his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has been his counselor? Who has been given a gift that they should give back to him? For from him, and through him, and to him are all things."

He is the source of all wisdom and all truth, and he wants to dispense it to us by His Spirit as we journey along, charting our ways in this world. Not the foolish wisdom of this world, but the insightful wisdom of Almighty God.

And that's sort of an overarching umbrella of what he wants to do for us. But in his wisdom and his love, our gospel reading highlights three more things.

He is also, by His Spirit, in love for all humanity, convicting all people everywhere, if they'll listen, of our enduring sinfulness, convincing us that we fall short of his standards, convincing us that we missed the mark that he intended for us, convincing us that our sin has separated us from him, and we're not in fellowship, in harmony with him.

"When the Spirit comes, he says he will convict or convince the world concerning sin."

Now, we speak quite a bit about sin here. We confess our sins every Sunday morning. But it's worth noting that the Holy Spirit is constantly trying to convict individuals of enduring sinfulness in their lives.

I don't know about you, but I've been in purification before the Lord since I was eight years old. That's when I confirmed my faith. And over the years, as I've gone, I've been surprised at the numerous different sins that God has pointed out to me.

And as I've gotten older and older, I've just become overwhelmed with the sense of how sinful I am. I am a selfish man in the core of my being. I have a lust that comes from my eyes, from my flesh, and a pride of life. And the Holy Spirit disarms me as he shows me these things.

And in love he's doing this, showing me that I fall short of God's standards.

I had a gentleman come in my office this week, and he wanted to come in because he really felt the need to confess some sin. He's in his 80s, and as he confessed it, he confessed being worried about not being free from this sin. And then he said this:

"But I am so thankful he is still convicting me, making me uncomfortable with my sin. Because if he ever stops doing that, I know I'm in real trouble."

In love, God's Spirit convicts us of selfishness, self-indulgence, and other deceitful things in our hearts.

But we don't necessarily always know what sin is unless we know what righteousness is. We don't look for an antidote for our sin unless we really know we're sinful, and then we sometimes don't understand our sinfulness if we don't contrast it with righteousness.

The Bible says when we compare ourselves with each other, we're not being wise. So if you compare yourself with some mass murderer, you're not being wise in the end. That is not the comparison that will happen. The comparison that will go between us and God is a comparison between his righteousness and our sinfulness.

And so not only is the Holy Spirit in love showing us how we fall short, he is also holding up a standard of righteousness, a plumb line, a measuring stick against which we should measure ourselves.

"When he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."

Concerning righteousness, because Jesus said, "I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer."

Of all the people who have walked the earth, there's only one who is perfectly righteous, sinless in nature. Even though he was tempted, he never sinned in any way. He is the standard. He is the plumb line.

When we compare ourselves against anyone, it should be against the righteousness of Christ. And God has lifted up Christ as a righteous being, perfectly pure, perfectly holy. And that is the standard for which we will be measured against.

And Jesus said, because we were going to see him no longer, the Holy Spirit was going to come and lift up that standard of righteousness for us so we could have a correct comparison against what we're going to be measured against in the end.

Concerning righteousness, because the yardstick, the plumb line, was leaving the earth and we would see him no longer. And so now the Spirit holds up a standard of righteousness for us. He is the chief cornerstone. Jesus was the plumb line of all that's good in the world.

And then finally John says, Jesus said the Holy Spirit would help people. As they're convicted of sin, measured against God's eternal righteousness, they will cry out for a Saviour, open their heart to have their sins forgiven. As we confessed earlier, placing our faith in Christ, our sins will not be counted against us and we will be on our way to eternity.

But even as we approach eternity, the Holy Spirit is working to help us understand that our whole lives are eternally accountable.

"When he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."

And then he said this:

"Concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged already."

This is Satan, the prince of the air. His destiny is determined. But for you and I, the judgment is yet to come. It is appointed unto each person, the Bible says, once to die and then to face the judgment.

And in love the Holy Spirit is working to prepare us for that day.

We're utterly prepared through the forgiveness of our sins, through faith in Christ. When we admit we're sinful and we confess our sin, and we see God's work of atoning for our sin on Jesus, place our faith in him, God imputes to us, brings to us, the righteousness of Christ, and then we're free, non condemned, adopted into God's family forever.

The Confirmands are here today confirming their faith in Christ. They're saying publicly, "I've placed my faith in Jesus and now I am a child of God forever."

But even then, we have time on the earth before we stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

The Bible says this even about believers. Second Corinthians, chapter five, verse ten:

"We must all appear before the"—it's called Bema Seat—"it's the judgment seat of Christ, that we may each receive what is due us for things done while in the body."

And there's only two categories. We're going to be evaluated on sin and righteousness, good and bad.

Each person, the Holy Spirit testifies to us, each person in the world, sinful, doesn't measure up to God's standards, needs a Savior, and can cast forth treasure to heaven by doing good works under the power of the Spirit, as God teaches us here.

Some of our works, if they're done with a selfish bent or not out of the abiding of God, will burn up and be sloughed off like chaff. But some of our works will come forth as gold and silver, refined by God, and they will bring reward for us for all eternity.

Now, when the Bible speaks of judgment, it has sort of this broad sense of judgment of the nations. It has an end times judgment of whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. And then it has sort of this judgment of Jesus, of his people, for what rewards we get.

It's debated about whether all of this judgment, when we say in the Apostles Creed, "He will come again to judge the living and the dead," it's disagreeable among Christians whether that's all in one judgment or three separate judgments.

But the fact of the matter is, the first judgment is made based on whether we placed our faith in Christ or not. Anyone who does not have Christ does not have life, and they will be separated from God for all eternity, cast into the eternal lake of Fire.

Of all the things going on in the world, friends, this is the most significant. Eternity is at stake. Judgment is coming to all humankind.

Can you feel it in your spirit? His Spirit testifies with our spirit. We all have a sense that justice needs to be served.

And there is that end times judgment of who gets to be with God forever and who doesn't. And the dividing line on that is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Savior and hope of the world, the atonement for sin.

And then after that, there is the judgment of those who knew Christ, how they served him here on the earth, what they did in their body, whether good or bad.

And one of the things I love about what's happening here this morning is that you all who are being confirmed have had three years of instruction on this biblical worldview. And literally, it's the only worldview that makes sense.

If you hear a worldview that doesn't include sin, righteousness, and holiness and eternal judgment with the gift of Christ available, then throw it out. For this is the revelation of God, and this is what our Confirmands are confirming their faith in today, the gift of God in Christ as our hope, and then the potential with your lives to store up an enormous amount of treasure in heaven through your service to our great King.

And we want to cheer you on in that.

The Bible says:

"This is what we speak, not in words of human wisdom, but words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words."

If you are a believer, do you not know you are God's temple and the Holy Spirit lives within you?

The person without the Spirit, they cannot accept these things that come from the Spirit, but they consider them foolishness and they can't understand them because they're discerned only through the Spirit.

And the person with the Spirit can make judgments about all things. He reveals to us and reminds us of the eternal truths and wisdom of God, not of this world. He convicts us of our enduring sinfulness before him. He holds up a standard of righteousness for us to see our failings and cry out for a Savior. And then he wants to help us be prepared for all eternity in our service and in our faith to God.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for this chance to gather in this room and let Your Holy Spirit speak to us. Give us ears to hear what you're saying to us. Help us see the wisdom of this world as folly and foolishness, and help us see your wisdom, your revelations, the work of your Spirit, as what we really need and what we long for.

I pray now, as we celebrate the faith of these young adults here, as they come up to the front, I pray that you would confirm in their spirits their confidence in their belief in you, and that over the course of their lives you would bear much fruit through them.

And Father, as there are many of us sitting here today, family and friends and guests and visitors, I do pray that your Spirit would continue speaking to us wherever we're at in our faith journey.

May you, by your Spirit, help us see our sinfulness. Help us see how we fall short and draw us to the glorious gift of Jesus, and help us transfer our confidence from ourselves to him and prepare us, all of us, Father, for that appointment we have with you, that day in the future when we stand before you.

Make us ready, Father.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.