

Ministry of the Helper

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[0 : 00] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles now for our reading this evening. You'll find it in John's Gospel, the fourth Gospel, and at chapter 16.

If you've got one of our Red Visitors Bibles, it's page 902. And we're continuing to read in these central chapters of John's Gospel, sometimes called the Farewell Discourses, where Jesus is teaching his innermost circle of disciples in the light of his imminent betrayal and his coming death.

And Phil Copeland has been preaching through these chapters to us, and we've come now to the beginning of chapter 16, or rather the section which is headed in our Bibles, the work of the Holy Spirit, the second half of verse 4.

So the Lord Jesus says, I did not say these things to you from the beginning because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me.

And none of you asks me, where are you going? But because I've said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth.

[1 : 16] It's 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.

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'll see me no longer. And concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. For he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears, he will speak.

And he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine.

[2 : 24] And therefore I say that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. Amen. And may God bless us and help us to understand this.

Well, good evening. And do please turn in your Bibles to John 16, which we'll find is all about the ministry of the helper.

When I was seven years old, my family were on holiday in St. Andrews, and we were playing a game of putting. And I think it was the first time I'd ever been given a full grown-up putter with a metal head on it.

And as a seven-year-old does, I wasn't using the putter properly. And I was pretending the putter was an axe. And as I was swinging it back and forward, behind me, I connected with my cousin's head.

And I split open his head. He had concussion and stitches. Oops. He'll be pleased to know that he's forgiven me and we've played many games of putting since. But I misused the putter.

- [3 : 39] I handled it the wrong way and the results were damaging and hurtful. Now, why am I telling you this? Well, of course, the same principle applies to the Bible, doesn't it?
- If we handle the Bible in the wrong way, then, friends, it can be dangerous. And we can actually hurt people. And here's the thing. These verses in John 16 have often been mishandled and misapplied.
- And as a result, many Christians have been misled in their understanding of the ministry of the helper, of the Holy Spirit, and how he guides the church today, especially verse 13.
- Look at that verse. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. And I can still remember listening to a talk on that very verse when I was a teenager.
- And the speaker's big application was that the Spirit would bring you direct messages from heaven into the back of your head about circumstantial guidance. I seem to remember saying, the speaker saying, the Spirit will tell you the name, for example, of whom you should get married to.
- [4 : 46] So you should have spaces of silence in your life so that you can listen out for that still, small voice talking to you. Well, friends, I'm very grateful that I had really good Bible teaching at Tron Youth from Agnes Brough.
- And I could tell that as I was listening to this speaker, what he was saying wasn't quite right and that the speaker wasn't handling Jesus' words carefully at all.
- For a start, and here's one of Willie's big necessary negatives, Jesus is not speaking these words directly to us today. Just look at what he says in verse 16.
- He says, a little while and you will see me no longer. It's just obvious, isn't it? Jesus isn't saying that to us today. No. He spoke all of these words to these 11 unique men who were with him in the flesh, who were with him from the very beginning of his public ministry.
- And so if we're going to understand these verses properly and handle them properly and apply them properly, we need to ask, what did Jesus' words about the Spirit mean for the apostles back then?
- [5 : 55] And only then can we start to think about the implication for our lives today as people who are Christians but not apostles. To put that simply, in order to understand Jesus properly, we need to realize that these words weren't spoken to us, but they have been written for us.
- Well, we'll get to chapter 16 in a moment but let me just recap what we've seen so far in this series. Remember, we're in the middle of a scene that runs from chapter 13 to 17 in John, sometimes called the Farewell Discourse.
- Jesus is approaching the cross, obediently and willingly going to die as the Lamb of God in order to save messed up people like you and I from our sin. And he is teaching his closest disciples, the 12 minus Judas who's gone off at this point to betray him.
- He's teaching these 11 men about everything that's coming ahead and how everything is going to change for them. So he tells them, I'm leaving you. I'm going to return to the Father.
- But in chapter 14 he speaks of sending them out into the world as his apostles to proclaim their eyewitness testimony about him being the Christ, the Son of God so that people may believe and find eternal life.
- [7 : 14] But he says, I will not leave you to do that by yourselves. I am going to, once I have ascended, send my Holy Spirit to take up permanent residence in you.
- Or to put it another way, the Spirit will come and bring the apostles into union with Christ. And just remember, if you're a Christian here this evening, then that's also true of you.
- Jesus isn't far off from you. Jesus doesn't draw alongside you from time to time only to disappear. Jesus is in you permanently. Always.

And at the start of chapter 15, Jesus gives an illustration of what he means. He says, I am the true vine and you are the branches. That is how close we will be when the Spirit comes.

And just as the life-giving sap of the vine flows into the branch to give it life, strength, and the ability to grow, so too will my life flow into you to give you life, strength, and the ability to grow, says Jesus.

[8 : 16] He says, this union has come about completely 100% by grace. The 11 have done nothing to deserve this. It's such a gift. But at the same time, Jesus says that these 11 apostles have the 100% responsibility of abiding in him.

That is, they must go on believing Jesus' word, obeying Jesus' commands, and loving one another as he has loved them. Abide thus in me, says Jesus, and you will bear much fruit.

That is, Jesus' life, character, and behavior will show itself in their lives. And bearing fruit also means effective evangelism. When the people of the world see the Christ-like fruit in your life and hear you speak of me, some of them will come to believe in me as a result.

They will turn away from their lives of sin and they will be engrafted into me, says Jesus, and abide alongside you. What a wonderful thing that is. But as we saw last Sunday, Jesus said some sobering words to the 11, just in case they think that their future mission is going to be a prosperous picnic.

He says at the beginning of chapter 16, the world is going to hate you in the same way that it has hated me. It is true, some will believe you're teaching about me, but many won't respond like that.

[9 : 37] As you share the gospel light into people's lives, it will expose their sin and expose the fact that they do not know the Father and as a result they will hate you. And that hatred could turn into violent persecution.

In fact, the time is coming when the world will put you to death simply because you're my apostles. I'm telling you this now so that when the time comes you will not be disheartened and fall away from me.

Well, now we come on to our focus for tonight and it seems that what Jesus has just said and what I've just summarized in that recap there, well, it has gone through one ear and out the other with his 11 men.

Please look at verse 5. But now I'm going to him who sent me and none of you asks me where are you going? But because I've said these things to you sorrow has filled your heart.

Now verse 5 puzzles some people because actually back in chapter 13 verse 36 Simon Peter said to Jesus Lord, where are you going? He asked that question and Thomas asks a similar question in chapter 14.

[10 : 49] But Jesus isn't contradicting himself here. When those disciples previously asked Jesus, where are you going? They were really just expressing their kind of selfish grief and concern that Jesus was leaving them.

It wasn't where are you going? It was where are you going? How can you leave us? Just imagine a father speaks to his son Johnny on a Friday night and says, Johnny, tomorrow morning it's a Saturday I'm off work I'm going to take you swimming.

Saturday dawns and the phone rings to inform the dad that some emergency has exploded at work and he has to drop everything, go into work and fix the problem and it's going to take at least 12 hours.

So no sooner does dad attempt to explain the change of plans to Johnny than Johnny responds with a whining question Oh dad, where are you going? See Johnny doesn't care about his dad's destination he's just grumbling about his dad's departure.

Well the 11 disciples are just like that. As Don Carson says here, they are so concerned with their own problems, their feeling of abandonment, their sense of impending crisis and doom that they do not really listen at all.

[12 : 05] They love themselves much and their master little and therefore neither rejoice with him in his prospect of returning to the father nor mourn with him in his prospect of the cross.

They grieve only for themselves and regardless of how they are phrased, their questions are self-centered. But friends, you know Jesus is so gracious even with self-absorbed and spiritually dull disciples.

He goes on to assure them that his departure really is for their good. Please look at verse 7. I tell you the truth it is to your advantage that I go away.

For as I do not go away, the helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. So if Jesus doesn't return to the father via the cross and the grave, then the spirit will not be poured out.

Friends, this is a theme that runs all the way through the gospel of John. Just think of John the Baptist at the start of the gospel in chapter 1. he saw Jesus and he said, look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[13 : 18] And immediately, John the Baptist then goes on to tell of the promise of God that the man on whom you see the spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

And John says, look, it's Jesus. This is the man. You see how those two things go together? He's the Lamb of God and the spirit of God. They are inseparable from each other.

Jesus is the one who will be enabled to pour out the personal spirit of God into the hearts of human beings when they're born again only because he is also the Lamb of God who takes away their sins.

You can't have one without the other. Or think of John 4 when Jesus makes a tantalizing offer to the Samaritan woman. He offers a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

In John 7, Jesus makes the same tantalizing offer to everyone. He says this, if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within.

[14 : 21] And John the Apostle then puts in this little explanatory comment. He says this, by this, talking about water, Jesus meant the spirit whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Up to that time, the spirit had not been given since Jesus had not yet been glorified. And friends, where in John's gospel is Jesus glorified?

Answer, when he is lifted up on the cross to pay the price for our sins. And this is why he says to his disciples here in verse 7, it is for your advantage that I am leaving you to go to the cross, to die, to rise, and ascend in victory to the Father because when that happens I can then pour out the spirit into you.

If I do not leave you for the cross, that cannot happen. Listen to Sinclair Ferguson on this point. This is marvelous. It is through Jesus' death that the spirit is seen as coming to the church.

From his side both water and blood flow, the blood of forgiveness and the water of the spirit. As he died on the cross he becomes the thirsty one under God's covenant curse so that those who are thirsty to those who are thirsty he may hand over his thirst quenching spirit.

[15 : 44] Friends, let me ask you this question. Are you thankful that we don't have Jesus here with us in physical bodily form this evening? It's easy to wish that he were still here in bodily form on earth but actually friends you and I should be incredibly thank you that Jesus has departed and he's not with us in the flesh here tonight for if he hadn't left there living that night then we the church would not be here.

We would not have Jesus living in us through the spirit permanently. So give thanks that Jesus departed because in doing so he was glorified and he's poured out his spirit upon people like you and I bringing us bringing our humanity into saving union with his humanity.

well now in verse 8 to 15 Jesus speaks about two special ministries of the spirit and we need to spend the rest of our time unpacking these in verse 8 to 15 and remember as we think carefully about Jesus' words we're going to think first of all about what they meant for the apostles back then and then only after we've done that can we think about what they mean for us today as people who are not apostles.

So here's the first thing the first special ministry of the helper in verse 8 to 11 the spirit will convict the world of the truth.

Look at verse 8 and when he the spirit comes he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. So what will the spirit do?

[17 : 19] Well he's going to take the objective historical apostolic testimony to Jesus and he's going to place it against unbelieving hearts of men and women.

Like a successful prosecutor he will bring home to the heart that awful sinking feeling of being wrong. Like the feeling that a motorist gets when he sees a flashing blue light in his rear view mirror while speeding.

And notice three specific things that the spirit will convict the world of. Firstly Jesus says he will bring conviction of sin verse 9 because they do not believe in me.

Now this probably means not just the unbelief in Jesus is a sin though it is but the unbelief in Jesus proves and exposes sin. If a prophet speaks to me I can always find some reason for rejecting what he says because he's a sinner.

Always there is something wrong with the preacher or the messenger and so I can find myself an excuse for not listening to them but when a perfect man comes and preaches to me and I reject and hate him I show that I have no excuse and my sin is exposed.

[18 : 33] Secondly Jesus says that the helper will convict the world about righteousness. Verse 10 because I go to the father and you will see me no longer.

I take it this most likely means that when God raises Jesus from the dead he reverses the world's verdict upon Jesus. You see the world thought Jesus was unrighteous and that is why they were about to crucify him but when he goes to the father the world's verdict is turned upside down and it is publicly seen that Jesus is righteous he's justified in the sight of all by his resurrection and the spirit convicts the world that Jesus is righteous and therefore by implication we are not by nature.

Thirdly Jesus says the Holy Spirit will convict the world about judgment because verse 11 the ruler of this world is judged. The ruler of this world Satan who stands at the pinnacle of all of this world's value systems is shown to be utterly evil and condemned when he crucifies the righteous Jesus.

The spirit will bring conviction of this into unbelieving hearts. By nature everyone thinks that the world's value systems are valid and by nature everyone takes their values from the world.

Well the spirit will come to unbelieving hearts and convince them of how utterly wrong they've been. So friends to sum up when the spirit comes he will come to unbelieving hearts to convict them that by nature they are not okay at all.

[20 : 19] The spirit makes people put up their hands and admit that Jesus is the only righteous person who has ever lived and that the world is walking on its head. He convicts us of our sin of Jesus righteousness and of the world's judgment.

Now friends think about this when the spirit of Christ was poured out at the day of Pentecost in the book of Acts what happened? Well the spirit took the apostles testimony and brought it to the hearts of unbelievers just as Jesus said it would here.

The Jews who were listening were all convicted of these exact same three things that Jesus lists here. If you were to read Acts 2 later on which I recommend you do when you go home you'll read that Peter who was filled with the spirit preached to all of those unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem all of those people heard Peter's testimony about Jesus' exaltation and were told that all of them were cut to the heart.

The spirit moved powerfully and brought deep conviction within them and were told that many repented. Jesus' words here find their fulfillment in Acts 2.

But what about us today? Well the same spirit that was on the apostles at Pentecost is the same spirit who lives in you and I. And I think we can find great comfort and courage and boldness in knowing that as we seek to share the gospel here today in Glasgow he will carry out his ministry of convicting and converting members of the non-Christian society round about us.

[21 : 57] I've got into a chat with a number of you recently and you've told me that you've got into good conversations with some of the people at work some of your colleagues but it's interesting every single one of you has said to me that at some point as the conversation went on you started to feel incredibly inadequate and you started to clam up and you ran out of courage and boldness well friends the next time you feel like that because I feel like that a lot the next time you feel inadequate like that let's remember who's living in us let's remember that the Holy Spirit of Christ is in us and in fact time and again throughout church history he has used inadequate people like us very powerfully indeed so don't lose heart but also knowing about this ministry of the Spirit I think it should humble us as well because if someone has turned to Christ because of us sharing the gospel with them well we can't take credit for what has happened ultimately it also means that if we're preparing to preach or to teach or lead a Bible study or read one-to-one with someone we should always be turning to the

Lord in prayer beforehand asking him to help us through the Spirit you and I could deliver the best Bible talk or Bible study ever and yet without the convicting work of the Spirit it will be for nothing it is the Spirit alone who will convict the world of the truth so that is the first special ministry of the Spirit that Jesus teaches the 11 about here well here is the second one and it's this the Spirit will lead the apostles in the truth that they have already received let me say that again the Spirit will lead the apostles in the truth that they have already received please look at verse 12 I still have many things to say to you apostles but you apostles cannot bear them now when the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all the truth so as I said earlier

Jesus is not saying these words directly to us today the Spirit will lead you into all truth he promised that to the apostles that he would lead them into all the truth and really Jesus is referring back to a promise that he made them back in 14 verse 26 have a look at that if you want to chapter 14 verse 26 but the helper the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you please flick back over to chapter 16 so when the Spirit comes to live in the apostles he will lead them into the truth that they have already received from Jesus whilst he was with them in the flesh the Spirit is not going to lead them into extra truth that Jesus has not yet revealed to them you might be thinking hang on a minute Phil what about 16 verse 12 when Jesus says I still have many things to say to you but you can't bear them now does that not imply that

Jesus is going to give them more revelation through the Spirit well we must read these verses in context we know from chapter 15 verse 15 the end of that verse that Jesus has passed on to the apostles all that he has learned from his father he didn't hold anything back so given that he has revealed all to them about the father how can Jesus then turn to them and say in 16 verse 12 I've got much more to say to you well the point of 15 verse 15 is this it's one of open relationship of trust Jesus doesn't hold back any secret things from them these apostles have as it were the highest level of security clearance of access to God's truth but although they have this security clearance they simply cannot cope with it all at once they cannot bear it it's too much and too heavy for them it's rather like when you see I wonder if you've ever seen pictures of a fraud squad raid someone's company or offices and we see them on the

TV carrying out boxes and boxes and loads and loads of papers perhaps thousands even millions of papers with information on it in one sense the fraud squad has all of the information from that day on but they can't bear it yet and it will take many months maybe even years of unpacking and working through the material before they can issue their final report it's simply too much to absorb at once and in a similar way it is not that Jesus gradually gives the apostles more and more access to the revelation of the father no rather it is that the process of learning all that Jesus has already revealed to them will take a lifetime to get their heads around and therefore they need a lifetime tutor as they as it were work through the revelation of the father that they've seen and heard in Jesus it will not be sufficient for Jesus to give them some initial tuition and then to leave them to get on with it themselves no they need a replacement teacher and the spirit is that lifetime tutor so in verse 13

[27 : 26] Jesus is not saying that the spirit will give the apostles new spiritual material in the sense of things that are unrelated to what Jesus has already given them no friends what the spirit will do is gradually unpack all that is revealed in Jesus all that they've seen in him all that they've already heard and the spirit will teach them the implications of that for what is still to come after his resurrection in the gospel age that is what he means when he says he will declare to you the things that are to come verse 13 for as you know in Hebrews 1 we're told that Jesus is the last and the complete word of the father and so the spirit will not and does not add to the final word of Jesus rather he unpacks that final word to the apostles and through the apostles for us which is the new testament so do you see to suggest that the spirit gives believers today completely new words of revelation directly into their minds is really to say that the revelation of the father and

Christ doesn't suffice we need something more so let's be totally clear on this folks the spirit does not lead us into any new revelation for to do so would be to demean Christ so when the spirit came on the apostles he really did tutor them in the truth that they had already received go home later tonight and grab a highlighter and work your way through John and underline every instance where Jesus says something or does something and John adds this little comment where he says at the time we didn't understand what Jesus was talking about but now we do now we do that comment comes up again and again through John quite frequently because the spirit really did lead them into all the truth that they'd already received well friends our time is gone but let me just close by asking what are the implications for verse 12 to 15 for our lives today well surely the big point of application for us from these amazing verses is this these verses should give us huge and unshakable confidence in the new testament well the new testament is the primary fulfillment of these promises that Jesus made about the spirit he would lead the apostles into the whole truth about them so that they would pass it on and they did and that is what the new testament is it's the recorded testimony and actions of the apostles who were led by the spirit into all truth so friends the new testament is utterly trustworthy and totally sufficient testimony to

Jesus to lead us today into the knowledge of Jesus and therefore to make us known make the father known to us today and I think it's safe to say that we can also have confidence that the spirit will be at work in us to help us understand and remember the truths that they have written down for us the spirit reminded the apostles of what Jesus had spoken from the father and the spirit now teaches us and reminds us of what they have written you see it is true that the spirit does lead people the people of God in every generation to walk in the truth but the truth that he leads us into today is precisely the same truth into which he led the apostles back then the Jesus he leads us to know is exactly the same Jesus that he led them to know and thus the father that he makes known back then is precisely the same father today just listen to David

Jackman on this the spirit does not reveal new truth but leads us into whole truth which is really set forth in Jesus above whom there could be no fuller revelation of God's truth the Holy Spirit does not set us free to wander into new realms of revelation secretly or privately given for the power of the spirit is not revealed in secret mystical messages given to a few super spiritual people no his power is seen in the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the way the truth and the life so if some Christian friend ever comes up to you as they've come up to me in the past and accused you of lacking something of being a second rate Christian and that what you need is to receive special new direct messages of guidance in your life from the spirit well just remember Jesus words to the apostles here you need not ever feel you have an inadequate revelation of God's spirit you certainly can be guided into all truth but to do so you need to look no further than the sure and certain words of the Holy

Spirit here in the open pages of the Bible which is open to all given to all so that none of us will ever be excluded from the deepest and fullest truths of God's complete revelation to man in Christ Jesus our Lord do not be ashamed of being a Bible believing Christian in these pages you have all the words of the spirit that you could ever need well friends let's bow our heads close our eyes and I'll pray for it so why don't we take a moment before I pray just to respond to the word of God in your own heart and then I'll pray heavenly father we praise you that we can know you because your son came into this world and made you known we praise you that after you glorified your son after he returned to you you sent his spirit the spirit of all truth to remind and to lead the apostles and that by that spirit their teaching abides with us forever today so help us to truly trust in their sure and certain word so that by the power of your spirit you will use us and your words also as we proclaim the revealing truth of their words so that here in Glasgow many will turn in repentance and faith to Christ we pray we pray this in his precious name and for his sake amen amen