

Explore the Bible: When the Spirit Comes

April 3, 2023

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for April 16 focuses on John 15:26-67; 16:7-15.*

When we think about “The Great Commission,” our minds often go to Matthew 28:19. However, the Gospel of Matthew is not the only place where we can find Jesus instructing the disciples to testify to the world about him.

Some would argue we find a great commission here in John’s Gospel as well: “And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:27). Thus, Jesus sends his disciples on mission to tell the world about the truth of Jesus—who he is, what he taught, and what his work of salvation accomplished for the world.

The mission of God is characterized by God’s act of sending. The word “mission” is rooted in the Latin *missio*, which means “sending.” We find in John’s Gospel this understanding that God’s mission is enacted by God the Father sending the Son, the Father and the Son sending the Spirit, and the Spirit sending the disciples (also see Acts 1:8).

As we continue into John 16, we discover the personal benefit of the Spirit in the life of the disciple and the practical function of the Spirit in the mission of the disciple.

It is for your good that I am going away (John 16:7)

Jesus' physical departure from the earth is good for his disciples for several reasons, two of which are: (1) his salvific work of defeating sin and death has been completed and (2) the Spirit will come to support them in their ongoing mission to testify about Jesus. There are other reasons worthy of exploration, but these are the two apparent reasons in John's Gospel.

To expound on the latter reason, as the Spirit comes to indwell the disciples, their experience of Jesus' presence through the Spirit's presence will be greater than the physical presence they experienced before his ascension. It is understandable the disciples are distraught by this news and even confused by Jesus' encouragement that his leaving is good news for them (see John 16:5-6).

It makes sense they would prefer to have their leader physically present to guide them in their mission. Yet, the promise of the Spirit's presence is greater, because they will no longer rely on external leadership. Rather, the leadership will come from within through the indwelling presence of the Spirit.

The Spirit will continue to teach the disciples of Jesus much more than what was already understood at the time of his departure (John 16:12-13). Moreover, the experience of this presence will be richer than a mere physical one.

He will prove the world to be in the wrong (John 16:8)

It is vital that we do not misappropriate what Jesus says here about how the

Spirit “will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment” to the effect that we make our mission about proving others wrong. In fact, we are not to appropriate these words in any regard. The point is not that we force the work of the Spirit upon our practices, but we allow the Spirit to guide us in our practices to the effect that the Spirit’s work is accomplished.

In the context of the disciples, the Spirit was to come and prove wrong the ones who would “put out” the disciples from the synagogue and who would “kill” the disciples while believing “they are offering a service to God” (John 16:2). Here, the religious persecutors of the disciples—that is, those who belong to “the world” and not to Christ—are clearly wrong about sin, righteousness and judgement. They believe the disciples are sinning by claiming Jesus, that their actions are righteous/just by killing the disciples, and their judgment of the disciples is justified.

Through the work of the Spirit, however, God would reveal to the world: (1) the ones who “do not believe in [Jesus]” are the ones in sin for their wrongful actions toward Jesus and his followers, (2) their efforts to enact righteousness/justice by killing those who belong to Jesus are flawed because, rather than performing a service to God, the final verdict is Jesus rising from death and “going to the Father,” and (3) rather than Jesus and his followers being judged, “the prince of this world now stands condemned” (see John 16:9-11).

Thus, our mission is not to prove people wrong about sin, righteousness and judgment—the Spirit will do that however the Spirit will. Moreover, our mission is to “testify” about Jesus—referring again to John 15:27. Through this testimony, the Spirit may bring conviction to the hearts of those who oppose Jesus and/or lack understanding about Jesus as God’s Son. We only need to rely on the Spirit to guide us in understanding and speaking the truth of Jesus with hope that it leads to conviction and belief (see John 16:13-15).

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