

## “The Advocate”

John 14: 15-31

September 4, 2022

Read John 14:15-31

This is the Word of the LORD

“You know, Christ was raised from the dead almost 2,000 years ago. What has he done for us lately?” As outrageous as that sounds, it is something I have been asked a number of times during my career in ministry. That’s what we are going to talk about today: what *has* God done for us since Jesus’ resurrection and ascension? It is actually a fairly outrageous question – yet in our “me-centric” world, it comes up all the time. Why is it outrageous?

**First**, it is an outrageous question because God is God; and we are not. We have no authority over God to hold God accountable for whether he is doing a good job being God or not. It is outrageous to think we have any standing, any position, or any authority over God to insist He do what we think God should do – whether for us or anyone else. Really. Remember: God is the potter, and we are the clay.

**Second**, it is an outrageous question because God owes us nothing. Never has, never will. Anything we have we receive by grace. By grace. Everything we have – from each breath, to the time, to the clothes we are wearing, the food we eat, the work we pursue, the enjoyment we experience – everything we have is a gift of grace. It is outrageous how quickly we (at least, I) forget that and begin to take credit for something I have received by grace.

**Third**, it is an outrageous question because – by the grace of God – there is actually a positive answer. Even though God owes us nothing and even though God does not have to do anything more for us than what He has done in Jesus; God *has* covenanted to be our king and God *has* adopted us to be His children. God *has* done and continues do things for us – including lately – by working through the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised the disciples.

Today we are looking at the Holy Spirit. During his last night with his disciples, Jesus talked about the things that really matter. He gave them words of encouragement, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” He was direct about his identity, “Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?” Jesus’ purpose, his mission, his life were all coming to a decisive point.

This is where Jesus introduced the disciples to the Holy Spirit. During those last hours with the disciples before his arrest, Jesus talked about the Holy Spirit four times – twice in our passage, again in 15:26-27, and again in 16:7-15. Why now? Why did Jesus make such a big deal about the Holy Spirit on this night?

**A. God does not leave us alone.**

There is an important first lesson in Jesus' words introducing the Holy Spirit: God does not leave us alone. Never. Not for a moment. Not even for a little bit. Jesus said it this way: "I will not leave you orphaned." God loves us as children. One of the greatest fears of children is not knowing who will take care of them. On this night where the disciples would experience Jesus being taken away from them – although in the bigger picture it was God's plan and not man's – Jesus told the disciples before it happened that God would not leave them alone. God would take care of them.

For the disciples, this is something they knew, but it is something they did not always *feel*. Remember when they were on the boat and afraid for their lives in the storm? It is such a great illustration:

Jesus was with them,  
they knew he was with them,  
they were counting on him to be with them, and then  
they got scared because he was not doing what they thought he should be doing because it did not *feel* like he was doing what he should be doing.

It is true for us, too; intellectually, we know that God is with us, but often we feel as if he is not. When things are difficult or seem overwhelming, when things are broken and no help is in sight, we wonder why God allows it and where God could be.

Yet, the reality was: God *had always been* with the disciples. The commandments, the covenants, the law and the prophets all bear witness to God's presence. God *was* with them. For the disciples, it was even in Jesus' name: he was Emmanuel, God with us. God *would always be* with them. "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." Jesus promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to be with them – forever.

### **1. The Absentee God**

And the reality is: God *is* present with us, all the time. This concrete promise stands in contrast to many impressions that people – even some believers – have about God.

For example, some people believe that God created everything, spun it off into motion, and then took a break. They *feel* like God is distant and absent and not very interested in the creation he has made. Oh, He checks in every now and then, but most of the time His interest lies elsewhere. Otherwise, goes the thinking, why would this world have so many problems? All of the wars, and crime, and disease, and poverty, and injustice, and so on – how could all these exist with a God who cares and is present?

Let me try to explain it this way: Jen and I have been watching a lot of San Diego Padres baseball games this season. It is a fun team to watch. They are – at times, like Friday night – exhilarating and spectacular. They are – at other times, like last night – exasperating and exhausting.

I have to confess that I am a bit more passive as a fan than I was as a younger person. There are a number of reasons for that: I am older, meaning that if the game goes any later than 9:30 p.m., I am

not going to see the end of it. I am a bit wiser (I would like to think) and have tried to be amused rather than frustrated by their failures. And, I have a few other things going on in my life so that spending a lot of energy invested in the outcome of the Padres is a little frivolous. So, last night, when the commercial came on at the end of an inning and the Padres were down 6-0, I took the remote and flipped to something else.

And that's how I am different than God. (It's not the only way, but illustrative for this point.)

God does not look at our world with a remote control. He does not blip in for a moment, check on the score, see what is happening, lose interest and move onto something else. He does not get frustrated and walk away. No, God is with us always. He hears the cries of his people. He is with them in their times of loss and pain. He hurts with them over injustice. Even on his way to the cross, Jesus made it clear that God would not leave believers alone. "I will ask the Father," Jesus said, "and He will send you another Counselor to be with you always."

## **2. The Angry God.**

The flip side of the erroneous indifferent God is the erroneous intensely aggressive God. God always being with us can be intimidating. The intensely aggressive God is the angry man in the clouds with lightning bolts in his hand just waiting for us to make a mistake so that he can smite us.

Although judgment is serious and God's holiness is certain, the vindictive "Big Brother" perception of God does not match the Bible's revelation of God. God does not keep himself separate from us. He does not maintain a "naughty" or "nice" list to determine who deserves presents or who deserves coal – because none are righteous, not even one. God takes no pleasure in our failure and rebellion against him. **But:** he does something about it. God does something about it – that is the whole point of the good news.

Everything we have been preaching about in the gospel of John points to God's doing something about our failures and rebellion – my failures and rebellion – specifically, Jesus. The confusing thing was that Jesus' coming to us looked very different than the expressions of power we expected; he came to us in weakness, in the power of the one who was crucified, in the still small voice that speaks to us.

Jesus was Emmanuel, God with us. He lived with the disciples, walked with them, ate with them, laughed and cried with them. The Bible tells us that he came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. The Bible tells us that he who knew no sin became sin for our benefit so that sin could be destroyed on the cross. And Jesus told the disciples during this last night, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. He said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." How did he give that peace? He gave that peace by means of the Holy Spirit.

### **B. There is conflict between the world and God.**

Though the Holy Spirit is how we have Jesus' peace, Jesus' introduction of the Holy Spirit revealed another important reality: that the world is still in rebellion against God. Jesus said it this way, "This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him."

Consider what was happening as Jesus spoke to the disciples those words; what was happening to him right then and right there. He was speaking in the last moments before his arrest. The world did not receive Jesus; it rejected, betrayed, condemned, and crucified him. It did not see him for who he was. And so it is with the Holy Spirit The world continues to not see the Holy Spirit and continues to find any way to ignore, reject, or subvert the meaning of the resurrection. The world continues to be hostile to God.

**Hostility to God** comes in many forms: some outright rejection, others apathetic. Many of us have experienced the fear of outright rejection – that not only will someone be offended by our mentioning Jesus, but that we will lose our friendship with them. We will suggest restaurants, we will suggest activities, we will suggest shopping opportunities or great deals; but when it comes to sharing the only news of eternal value – we experience that fear, “they don’t want me imposing my beliefs on them.” Where do we get that fear? It is not unfounded: when we follow the lead of the Holy Spirit, we can expect the same reaction. It should not surprise us that we experience rejection and hostility for talking about Jesus. “This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.”

**Apathy** is the other thing we encounter. Apathy is the hostility of affluence. It occurs when we believe we do not need God. In a society where shelter, food, and water are all available – even at a high price – the problems that require God may seem far away. In our summer series about *Walking With God Through The Desert*, we went to Deuteronomy 8 a number of times,

Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness, an arid wasteland with poisonous snakes and scorpions. He made water flow for you from flint rock, and fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know, to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good. Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. If you do forget the LORD your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.

Moses warned of the dangers of apathy. Do you see that happening today? Can you see where our culture has forgotten the LORD our God, and boasted about the power and might of our own hands getting us our wealth? Can you see where we have followed other gods – Wall Street, Washington, Hollywood, or Silicone Valley – to our detriment? The disinterest towards God has put us on a path where the consequences we see are inevitable – and told to us ahead of time. We are headed towards perishing by our own hand unless we repent and seek God’s mercy. The only way that will happen is by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It has been my experience – and perhaps it has been yours, too – that when people have big problems (health, relationships, family issues), they want to talk to a person of faith even if they do not have a faith themselves. They know they need something the world cannot provide. How much more comforting, then, to know the truth *before* those crises occur than to be looking for it *after*.

It also has been my experience that people apathetic towards God come seeking when they have obtained or attained their worldly goal. They cannot shake the emptiness their self-centered pursuit of fulfillment. They find emptiness and lostness rather than any lasting satisfaction and joy. They seem to sense it and come to believers to ask questions. They often try not to let on that they are experiencing doubts and ask questions to test believers. For me, the times when I have seen this happen most is when I have returned from a mission trip. People will ask, “Why would you spend your vacation doing that? What was in it for you?” Ah, the open door! Even then, Jesus’ words come back to me, “the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.”

### **C. The Holy Spirit confirms, teaches, and builds up believers in the faith.**

If Jesus meant that God always would be with us, and if the world will not receive him, what is the Holy Spirit does while he is with us?

Jesus told the disciples, “He lives with you and will be in you.” In other words, the Holy Spirit’s work on us is ongoing. He is more than Jiminy Cricket or a little version of yourself in an angel costume sitting on your shoulder. The Spirit lives *within* you, abides *with* you, works *on* you, and *for* you on your behalf. The desire to be a disciple of Jesus? It is the work of the Holy Spirit. The desire to be a part of a Bible study? It is the work of the Holy Spirit. The compelling discernment between right and wrong? It is the work of the Holy Spirit. The sustaining grace to persevere through trial? It is the work of the Holy Spirit. The redeeming welcoming home after failure – again, and again – is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit takes an active role in developing us to be part of the Kingdom of God. His work involves both sanctification and deepening our love for God. The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus calls “the Counselor,” is sent from the Father and the Son to “teach you all things” and “to remind you of everything I have said.” Many people grew up memorizing Scripture verses. Do any of those come back to you in the midst of conversation? It is the work of the Holy Spirit reminding you.

Let me stop here for a moment: often times, when we start talking about the Holy Spirit in believer’s lives, there is a sense in which we enter into the realm of the wacky and uncontrollable. There are sensational manifestations of the Holy Spirit that spook many believers: crying, shaking, speaking in tongues, falling down (also known as being “slain in the Spirit”) and other things. I know those things can make people uncomfortable – how do you know whether those things are real or are someone putting on an act? We will talk about those things later in the series.

For now, let me just say that we do not have a complete understanding of the relationship of the Holy Spirit and the Son and the Father; the inner working of the trinity is a mystery beyond our comprehension. We do know – because God has revealed it – that the Spirit participated in creation, was present with Jesus at his baptism, was integral in raising Jesus from dead, and inspired

the disciples on Pentecost, forming the early church. The Spirit has been active in the development of the Scriptures we have, in which – what? – we are taught all things and reminded of everything Jesus has said.

It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we gather around this table today. Christians have been gathering around this table – celebrating this meal, remembering what God has done for us in Jesus Christ – for almost 2,000 years . Christians have been gathering around this table, keeping Jesus’ command, because of the power and work of the Holy Spirit.

As we transition to the Lord’s Supper, I want you to hear this simple message: God is always with you. You are not alone. The Holy Spirit has come, manifesting God’s love for you and training you up in God’s righteousness. The same God who created you, the same God who redeemed you through the blood of Jesus Christ, the same God who promises you eternal life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ; that same God comes to you and lives in you by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So, as we ask the impertinent and outrageous question, “What have you done for me lately, God?” we can have confidence that the answer is, “More than you can know or see.” Amen? Amen.

Prayer

Invitation to Table/Lord’s Supper

Hymn: There Is A Redeemer

Questions:

1. What is your experience of the Holy Spirit? Do you trust Jesus’ promise that the Advocate will be with you forever, or does it feel episodic (as in: sometimes yes, sometimes no)?
2. How do you know the Holy Spirit is working?
3. How do you deal with the world’s rejection of Jesus? How do you deal with Jesus’ statement that “the world *cannot* receive him, because it neither sees him nor knows him”?