

How to Keep from Stumbling
These Things are Written that You May Believe Series
John 16:1-15
Pastor Bryan Clark

There's a lot of talk these days about Big 10 football. So, will we play games or not? I guess we'll see. But if there is a season, do you think Coach Frost's goal will be to get through the season without anyone getting sick or to win? I don't think that's a difficult question. If the goal is for no one to get sick, don't play. I can assure you the goal is to win. Sounds a lot like the message Jesus was giving His disciples hours before His arrest.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to John, Chapter 16. If you're new with us, we've been working our way through the Gospel of John. We find ourselves in chapter 16, just hours away from Jesus' arrest. Jesus is giving His last teaching to His disciples before He's to be arrested and crucified. His disciples are fearful. They're confused; they're hurting; they're stressed out. In the midst of that He tells them, "You're going to be hated and persecuted!" Now that raises an interesting question. They're already stressed out enough; why would you tell them that? Well, He answers that in chapter 16, verse 1:

"These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you." (*NASB, John 16:1-4)

So Jesus tells them the reason He's telling them these things is so they will not stumble. That word **stumble** is a common word in the New Testament. It carries the idea of maybe being *surprised*, of being caught in a trap. I think we would probably say get *caught off guard*. It's the idea that you need to understand, "I haven't invited you onto a cruise ship. I've invited you onto a battleship. So don't be surprised when people start shooting." He tells them, "You are going to be kicked out—an outcast from the synagogue." While the temple was certainly the holiest place for a first century Jew, the everyday life of these communities happened around the synagogue. So the synagogue would have been the place in the different cities and communities where Jewish life really flowed out of, and so to be an outcast from the synagogue was basically to be rejected by your own town...your own people...your own family...your own community. It would have been a significant loss.

He goes on to say that these religious people will be so confused that they will actually think they are worshipping God by killing the disciples of the Messiah. He goes on in verse three and says the reason for this is because they do not know God. Now this has been a consistent message in the Gospel of John. The primary opposition has not been secular Rome; the primary opposition has been the zealous religious leaders of Israel. And there has been a consistent reminder that religion does not lead people to God. It actually becomes the very barrier to experiencing a relationship with Jesus.

So, the opposition that Jesus is talking about are the religious leaders and He specifically identifies the problem is they don't know God. If they knew God, they would know God's Son, and they would

understand this is the Messiah. So Jesus says they'll actually be so confused...that the Apostle Paul would be a good example of that. Before he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, as Saul, the Pharisee, he actually thought he was doing the right thing and worshiping God by killing the disciples of Jesus...until he encountered the resurrected Christ. In verse four Jesus tells them that He doesn't want them to be caught off guard, to be surprised, and to suddenly think something's gone wrong and to panic. Jesus says, "I didn't tell you this at the beginning because I was with you," and the idea that as long as Jesus was on earth, He was the focus of the persecution. But as soon as Jesus leaves, then *they* will become the focus of the persecution. That's why Jesus said, "They hated me; they're going to hate you. They persecuted me; they're going to persecute you."

Now, John is writing toward the end of the first century. This is the last of the four Gospels. So, the first readers would have been enduring persecution. I think part of John's motive here is reminding them what Jesus said. That shouldn't surprise them; it shouldn't catch them off guard; it's to be expected—it is what is going to happen.

I think for us as Americans, we struggle to identify with many of these New Testament passages that talk about persecution, because that simply hasn't been our story. It's been remarkable the level of freedom that we've had. Historically, you're much more likely to be celebrated than persecuted for declaring the message of Jesus. But as we've been saying now for years, the winds of change are upon us. We have fundamentally changed as a nation. We are a long way down the road to secularism. It is not a couple of voting cycles that are going to turn this around. The likelihood that in the future the message of Jesus will be met with far more hostility than celebration is very real. We should not be caught off guard by that; we should not be surprised by that. Jesus told us this is going to happen. For most Christians over the last two thousand years, that has been their story. So, to think it's not going to happen here is really naive. We hear the words of Jesus and we understand that. But the message of Jesus to His disciples was not, "Men, you need to figure out how to survive until you die. So, they're coming to get me. Flee into the mountains, and never come back." That wasn't the message. The mission was not to survive. The mission was to proclaim the message of Jesus to change the world! These men would literally die for the cause of Christ. They were called to be proclaimers of the message of Jesus. Verse 5:

"But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart." (Vs. 5-6)

So again, I think at the core of the fear of these disciples is that they have learned to be dependent upon Jesus. "As long as Jesus is with us, everything's going to be okay." But now Jesus has told them, "By the way, I know it's gotten really tense, and I'm leaving," and that has created a sense of panic, a sense of fear and sorrow.

One of the things that's always interesting is to see the things that commentators feel the need to make lots of comments about, and sometimes they're quite surprising. So, in this case, we know that both Thomas and Peter asked Jesus in the Upper Room, "Where are you going?" But Jesus says here, "*No one has asked,*" and so that sends the commentators on pages and pages and pages and pages of discussion, leading to some of the craziest ideas about what's going on here, when in reality, it's rather simple. Jesus already said that they've been controlled by their sorrow. D.A. Carson uses the illustration of a child who is planning to go fishing with his dad. At the last minute his dad is called away and the little boy asked, "Dad, where are you going?" He's not asking specifically, "Where are you going?" It's flowing out of his disappointment because his dad is leaving. It's the same thing. The disciples were simply asking out of their sorrow, "Jesus, why are You leaving?" What Jesus is saying

is, “You really haven't even asked, ‘Where am I going and why am I leaving?’” and so He's going to explain that to them. Verse 7:

“But I tell you the truth, it is 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 He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment;” (Vs. 7-8)

Now Jesus has talked about this already in the Upper Room in chapter 14. The word **Helper** is the Greek word *paraclete*. It's a legal term—an advocate or a counselor—and carries the idea of someone that will be right at your side every step of the way. Jesus said, “I'm not going to leave you as orphans, but rather, I'm going to return to you in My Spirit and My Spirit will dwell within you, and I promise I'll be with you forever.”

So imagine if, at the core of your fear, is this idea that Jesus is leaving. What you've just been told is that actually, “It's to your advantage that I leave, because My Spirit will come back and will live in you forever. You'll never be alone again.” There is this remarkable reality—for us living in the New Covenant—that the moment we trust Jesus as Savior, the Spirit of Jesus comes and lives within us, and there will never be another moment for the rest of eternity where we will ever take one step alone.

So, think of it this way. If Jesus sent the disciples on a mission and they go eleven different ways, Jesus, as it was in chapters 15 and 16, could only go with one of them. So the others would go alone. What Jesus is saying is, “What will be different is when I go to the Father, I'll send my Spirit and when I send you out on the mission, I will go with every single one of you all the way to the finish line.” So that's why Jesus says **it is to your advantage**. He says the Helper, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, will come and **will convict the world**. Again, that's a legal term. The idea of **convict** carried the idea of something *that's declared in a court of law that is both clearly defined and settled*. So, the Holy Spirit is going to come, and part of His job is to convict the world about certain things that are clear and settled in the court of God. He identifies three of them: **sin, righteousness, and judgment**. Verse 9:

“...concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me;”

This is the most common word for **sin**, *to miss the mark, to not measure up*. God has established the standard. None of us keeps the standard perfectly. Therefore, we're sinners in need of a savior. But the problem with the first century religious people is they were not willing to face their sin. They thought through their good works, through their religious activity, they could make themselves right before God. “I don't have a sin problem and, as long as there's no sin problem, there's no need for a savior.” Jesus has talked to them about this multiple times. The Holy Spirit has come to convince people there *is* a sin problem. Unless you are utterly perfect every moment of every day, your entire life, you have a problem. It's called a sin problem. It's a failure to hit the mark. No amount of religion, no amount of good works, makes that go away. But we live in a culture where we don't want to hear this. We don't want to face our sin and, as long as we're deceived into thinking I don't have a sin problem, I don't need a savior. So, the Spirit has come to convict people, “You do have a sin problem. Therefore, you do need a savior.” Second of all, verse 10:

“...concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me.”

The idea of **righteousness** is the idea that there is a standard of right and wrong. It is rooted into the character of God. We've been deceived into thinking that morality is relative and I'm free to decide

for myself what's right and wrong. But the truth that's settled in the court of God—that is the message of the Holy Spirit—is that there is righteousness, there is a standard, a definition of right and wrong. That's why we, as the people of God, choose to follow Jesus—because we believe this is the right way. The idea of *because He goes to the Father*, carries the idea that anyone can say that they determine right and wrong or good and evil. But what's unique about Jesus is He rose from the dead; He ascended to the Father; He's seated at the right hand of the Father. He clearly was God in the flesh. Therefore, God defines right and wrong. Third is:

...concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.” (Vs. 11)

The ruler of this world is a liar. Jesus identifies him as the *father of lies*. His primary weapon is deception, getting people to believe things that are not true. This goes all the way back to Genesis, chapter three. This is where the story begins. The liar lies. “You can be God. Life will be better with you in charge. You can decide what's right and wrong and you surely will not die. There's no judgment; there is no consequences to sin.” It's the same lies that he's always used. So, God has sent the Spirit of Jesus—the Holy Spirit—into the world in order to tell the world these things are settled in the court of God. There is **sin**. If there was no sin, there'd be no reason for Jesus to come and die on the cross. You have a sin problem. There is such a thing as **righteousness**, and that is the standard of God, and that is the way to life. And the ruler of this world is a liar and a deceiver. But he's already **judged**. He's already condemned and, ultimately, only Jesus wins.

So think of it this way. Let's imagine that you have a financial advisor and you give this financial advisor your life savings. The financial advisor continually tells you, “You're doing really, really well. You're becoming extremely wealthy.” Some of the people around you share some concerns, but you're rich. But then one evening you're watching the nightly news and lo and behold, there's your financial advisor in handcuffs, coming out of his office with the police, and you realize he's busted. He was nothing more than a con man, a liar, and a deceiver—and your money is gone!

That's essentially the scene that Jesus is setting up. Millions of people listen to the lies of the deceiver and live their lives their own way. “I don't have a sin problem. I can decide what's right and wrong. There's not going to be any judgment in the end.” Lo and behold, we get to the end of the story, and on the nightly news, there he is—the liar, the deceiver—in handcuffs...busted...because he's condemned by God—and only Jesus wins.

So God has sent His Spirit to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The majority of people sitting in this room this morning have experienced that conviction, which is what led to your decision to trust Jesus as your Savior. Verse 12,

“I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear *them* now. But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. (Vs. 12-15)

This is what Jesus just said. There's much more you need to know and believe in order to follow Me. But it's way too much for you right now. So I'm going to send my Spirit—the Spirit of Truth—and He will teach you what you need to know. And because the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are

in perfect alignment, the *message* of the Father, the *message* of Jesus, and the *message* of the Spirit are all perfectly aligned. Now this is very important to understand.

Essentially what Jesus was referring to was, the rest of the New Testament would come through the Spirit of God inspiring writers to write the very words of God, of the truth we need to know to live out our new lives in Christ. From time to time you listen to people talk, and some people seem to think that the words of Jesus have more authority than the words of Paul or Peter or James—the New Testament writers. I was talking to someone who considers themselves a believer several years ago and he said to me, “Well, that's just Paul's opinion.”

That's a failure of the most basic understanding that we believe. The New Testament is the authoritative, inspired Word of God. That's why Jesus said the message goes from the Father to the Son to the Spirit. The rest of the New Testament is not more or less authoritative than the words of Jesus. It's critically important to understand that the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—are actually under the old covenant. The old covenant goes all the way up until the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. That's why there's still a temple. That's why there's still a sacrificial system. That's why there's still a Sabbath. That's why there are still feasts. The Gospels are under the old covenant. It isn't until the new covenant is ushered in—Jesus Himself in the Upper Room identified His broken body and His shed blood is what would usher in the new covenant. “This is the new covenant in My blood.” One of the distinctives of the new covenant would be that the very Spirit of Jesus Himself would come and indwell every single believer. Therefore, we need to understand that the new covenant is not an extension of the old covenant. The two covenants do not run parallel. One doesn't just blend into the other. It's not a mixture of both. The old covenant has come to an end. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3: “It's faded away; it's done!” In Hebrews 8 and 9 it says the old covenant is obsolete, replaced by a new covenant.

How do we abide in Christ as Jesus taught His disciples in chapter 15? How do we get through this? By abiding in the Vine, abiding in Christ. How do we do this? Supernaturally, we've been filled with the very Spirit of Jesus. That's how we abide in Christ. The Spirit of Jesus lives in us, and we're to do this together. How do we do this together? We do this together supernaturally, because every single believer has within him or her the very Spirit of Jesus, and this is what supernaturally brings us together in a way the unbelieving world could never experience. What brings us together is not whether we're rich or poor. It's not whether we're male or female. It's not whether we're black or white, or Middle Eastern or Asian. What brings us together as the people of God is that each one of us has within us, the very presence of the Spirit of Jesus. That supernaturally brings us together as the people of God, not to merely survive. Jesus did not say, “Once you have your ticket to heaven, head for the hills and see how long you can survive.” He said, “I've called you on a mission, to be proclaimers of the life-changing message of Jesus. You'll be hated. You'll be rejected. You'll be persecuted, and some of you will be put to death. But ultimately, that's our calling.”

Why does that matter? Why does it matter that we be faithful to our calling, as a church? I'll give you 10 reasons, and they are the names of the 10 people whose lives have been radically changed by the power of Jesus. They will give testimony to that this weekend, declaring themselves publicly to be followers of Jesus. As you watch these baptisms, don't forget, every one of these people will spend forever somewhere, and because of their faith in Jesus, Jesus has promised that they will spend forever with Him in the glorious new heaven and earth. That is why the mission matters!

Our Father, we're thankful that when we were lost in our sin, You sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. Lord, we celebrate these lives this morning that have been radically changed by the power of Jesus. In His name we pray, Amen.

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Fall 2020 // WEEK 2

Life Group Questions

That You May Believe, John // September 19-20, 2020

How to Keep from Stumbling // John 16:1-15

Introduction

Welcome to week two of the Fall Session!

This week, we learned a lot about the Helper and the reasons why Jesus sent him. It's our prayer that, in these murky times, you feel and hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. Through the application questions this week, look for ways you can live counter to the practices of this world!

Getting to Know Each Other *(Suggested time: 30 min)*

Here are some suggestions to get your conversation started:

- 1) What's the farthest you have traveled to experience the people, places, or things you love (favorite band, vacation spot, artwork, sacred space, etc.)?

- 2) If you have to make a significant decision, what family member or friend do you turn to for advice and wisdom?

Getting Started

Begin to transition into group discussion.

- 1) Open group description with prayer. Here are a few potential prayer items:
 - a. For the Spirit of God to lead you in truth
 - b. For openness to what you're learning together
 - c. For friendships to deepen and grow
 - 2) Invite someone (or a couple of people) to read John 16:1-15 to the group.
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Study Questions *(Suggested time: 40 min)*

Please complete these questions before your group meets.

- 1) Did any part of Bryan's sermon stand out or resonate with you? How so?

- 2) After seeing so many people flock to Jesus throughout His entire ministry, the thought of losing Him was devastating to the disciples. However, in verse 7, we learn the "Helper" will be more advantageous to the disciples than Jesus living with them.

Read Galatians 5:13-18. (Tip: You'll return to this chapter in the next question, so keep this chapter bookmarked.)

- a. Where or what do you turn to in your moments of fear, failure, confusion, and defeat? Can you think of a recent example that you would be willing to share with the group?

 - b. In these moments, if you turn to something other than the Holy Spirit, what keeps you from turning to Him?
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- 3) Last week, we learned that the world loves its own. However, we were chosen out of the world, and we are hated for it. This is because people don't want their rats exposed to the light, but in verses 8-11, Jesus says the Helper will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness.

Read Galatians 5:19-26.

- a. In what ways (actions or beliefs) or places (environments or gatherings) do you find yourself falling more in step with the culture than the Spirit?

- b. What are the reasons you find yourself doing that? (Fear of persecution, wanting to be liked, avoid conflict, lack of belief, etc.)

- c. What would it look like in these moments to follow the Helper and not the current of the culture?

4) Even though we were called out of this world, liberated from the ways of our flesh, and provided the scriptures, it can still be hard to know the will of God. Everything seems so murky! Making decisions can be hard when the cultural narrative and the desires of our flesh are so loud. But in John 16:13-15, Jesus says the Spirit of truth will help bring clarity.

- a. What would look different if the Holy Spirit suddenly left you?

- b. What do you feel is missing in your relationship and dependence on the Spirit? What's one thing you can do this week to become more dependent on the Spirit?

Prayer *(Suggested time: 10 min)*

Take a few moments to prepare a prayer request.

A significant part of relying on the Spirit is following His leading even when it is scary or uncomfortable. Praying with a group of people may be a new experience for you, or it may be familiar. Try trusting the Spirit if he is leading you to share. Either way, whether you feel led to verbalize your prayer or not, you can pray for both yourself and your group throughout the week.