

“When the Helper Arrives”

John 14:1-18

Down through the centuries, sailors who traverse the high seas have dreaded a region which they referred to as ‘The Doldrums.’ Modern day climatologists have come up with a fancy term for it known as The Intertropical Convergence Zone. It is a band of low pressure that encircles the globe five degrees above and below the Equator. From space, it appears as a band of clouds along the earth’s equator and, in the water, it’s not a good place if your boat relies only on sail power to get it under way. Because of the collision of the Northern Hemisphere and the Southern Hemisphere’s weather, the air pressure is such that there is virtually no wind and you can also get some of the world’s heaviest precipitation. In the past, sailors would say it was worse to be in ‘The Doldrums’ than to be in the Bermuda Triangle. When ships were caught in ‘The Doldrums,’ they could be there for days or weeks on end. And with little or no wind, their crews would often perish for lack of fresh water and food. Without wind, a sailing vessel is dead in the water.

Now, somewhere in all of that is a fitting illustration for our experience in life. I know I’ve been rendered motionless at points of trial in my life. I’ve felt stuck in the Doldrums for whatever reason. When God created Adam, Genesis 2:7 says that God formed him from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, so that the man became a living soul. That is, he wasn’t alive until God’s breath filled his lungs and animated every part of him. God breathes life—physical, mental, and spiritual—into the man He created to bear His image. Were it not for the ‘wind’ of God, man would be lifeless and dead. Elsewhere, the Hebrew word for wind is ‘ruach.’ It is an important word that refers to the Holy Spirit. ‘Ruach’ is the life-giving breath of God’s Spirit. In John 20:22, Jesus breathed on His disciples and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” The word there is ‘pneuma.’ In Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost, the believers were assembled together in one place. Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the sound of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting. God gave the Wind to the vessel. And now as a believer in Jesus, I can call out to Him and ask for help. For He has graciously given His Holy Spirit to help. When I feel like a

lonely little ship, with no wind in my sails, it is refreshing to know that regardless of how I may feel, I've been given the wind of God's Spirit to come to my aid! Which means I'm not abandoned in the Doldrums of life, unable to move forward or without hope.

This morning we are beginning a brand new sermon series which I'm calling, "The Helper." In the coming weeks, we'll consider what the Bible has to say concerning the person and work of the Holy Spirit. There is a lot of mystery and even some confusion that surrounds the subject of the Holy Spirit. I heard a funny story about a Sunday school teacher that was trying to teach all of her children the familiar creed known as the Apostles' Creed. It goes back to the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD, and it is a summary statement of the Christian faith. But this Sunday school teacher thought that all of her kids should know the Apostles' Creed, at least the basics of it. So one Sunday, it was decided that one child would stand up and recite one section of it, then sit down. The next child would stand up and give the next section of it, and so on. Well, on the day they were all supposed to recite it, the first little boy stood up and said, "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of Heaven and Earth." He got it right, and he sat down. And then a little girl stood up and said, "I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord," and she sat down. Then there was a long and awkward silence where nothing was said. And finally, a little girl in the back of the room said, "I'm sorry, teacher, but the boy who believes in the Holy Spirit is absent today."

Now, I wonder if that might be more true than we realize in so much of the church. We believe in God the Father. We believe in God the Son. And we believe in God the Holy Spirit, and yet it is also true that for so many, He remains a mystery. Who is He exactly, what is His primary purpose, and what has He come to do in the believer's life? Sadly, for a lot of believers the Christian life boils down to simply trying hard and doing the best they can. They live with the impression that if any good is to come from their lives, it will depend upon their own determination or sheer will power. So life for them consists of a cycle of frustration—they try hard, get discouraged, and try some more. And it leads a lot of Christians to see life as one long string of joys and sorrows with the distant promise of heaven at the end. It results in a disconnect in the expression of their worship on Sunday and the experience of their life come Monday. The fact of the matter

is that there are bills that need to be paid, kids that need help with homework, doctor's visits, or caring for aging parents. On and on life goes. But what if I told you that even in the midst of life with all of its pressure, there is a profound sense of closeness and intimacy with God that can be experienced only through the Holy Spirit? If you and I are going to live a victorious Christian life, then it is absolutely essential that we understand the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. And it means that we must work our way through some of the mystery and confusion that surrounds Him.

Now, the Holy Spirit is often approached from one of two extremes. Either we know very little about Him and try to ignore Him, or we make Him into a celebrity and someone we think we know but don't really know at all. Some in the church have avoided all conversation about the Spirit out of fear they will be accused of charismatic excess. (There are a lot of things that have been done in the name of the Spirit that I'm not so sure He has been anywhere near.) While it is true that certain abuses in the name of the Holy Spirit have been done, in no way does that mean we ignore the Spirit or avoid Him altogether. Neither of these extremes is where we want to be. We must avoid sensationalizing Him on one hand, making Him the star of the show. But then we must also avoid marginalizing Him on the other hand, so as to minimize His importance. His role in your life is the number one factor in determining whether or not you bear spiritual fruit as a Christian. The Holy Spirit has come to live within every person who places their trust in Jesus. 1 Corinthians 6:19 says that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit, the house in which He dwells. You can be led by the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, enabled by the Spirit, gifted by the Spirit, taught by the Spirit, and comforted by the Spirit.

And so in the coming weeks, I want to deal specifically with the subject of the Holy Spirit. Who is He, what does He do, and why is His ministry so very important? I want to cover three main areas—the person of the Spirit, the work of the Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit. Obviously, when taking on such a subject, you wonder where to begin. The Bible is filled with mentions of the Holy Spirit. He is mentioned 90 times in the Old Testament by several designations. And He is mentioned 260 times in the New Testament, either directly or symbolically. So from cover to cover, the Holy Spirit is

everywhere in the pages of God's Word. From the very first time He is mentioned in Genesis 1:2 as the Spirit of God hovering over the waters at creation, to the very last few verses of the Bible in Revelation 22:17 where both the Spirit and the Bride issue the invitation to salvation.

The most foundational passage in the New Testament for understanding both the person and work of the Holy Spirit is found in the gospel of John, chapters 14, 15, and 16. It is known as the 'Upper Room Discourse' where Jesus shares some intimate truth with His disciples about His own departure and the Spirit's coming. And one of the most remarkable statements in the entire Bible is recorded in John 16:7 where Jesus says to His disciples, "It is to your advantage that I go away. Unless I go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you." In other words, Jesus said that it would be better for them for Him to leave so that He can send the Holy Spirit, whom He refers to as the 'Comforter' or the 'Helper.' And so with this in mind, allow me to direct your attention this morning to the fourteenth chapter of John where we will begin reading at verse 1. (Read)

These verses are some of the most familiar verses in the entire New Testament. But we must not let their familiarity keep us from an understanding of just how shocking they were to the disciples at the time. Jesus is giving His final address to the disciples, preparing them for His arrest and impending death on the cross. Try to put yourself into their shoes. You have just spent the last three and a half years of your life with the Son of God. You have left everything behind to follow Him. You know that He is the Messiah, the One whose coming was foretold by the prophets, the One who will sit on the throne of David and usher in His glorious kingdom. But rather than triumphantly ushering in the kingdom, He tells them He is leaving. In fact, these are His words:

John 13:33—"Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek Me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'"

Obviously, this was a troubling statement. It cast a somber tone for the whole evening. It was the elephant in the room that was on all of their minds. Not to mention the fact

that Jesus also said one of them would betray Him. Judas had left in the middle of supper without explanation. And now add to that the words of Jesus, saying that He is leaving for somewhere they cannot come. Whatever does He mean? Which is why Peter goes on to ask the obvious question in verse 36, “Lord, where are You going?” It was a statement that they didn’t understand. They love Him, they believe in Him, but they are profoundly confused. The kingdom hope they had was vanishing and collapsing in all around them. They had left everything to follow Jesus, and now He says that He is leaving. But it was in that uncertain atmosphere that Jesus gives to them some much needed reassurance in verse 1, “Let not your hearts be troubled.” And then in verse 16, He gives them a wonderful promise, “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.” In these chapters, no less than four separate times does He refer to the ‘Helper’ or ‘Comforter.’ Within the passage, Jesus gives the disciples the assurance that though He was leaving, they would not be left alone. There would be another divine Person who would take His place in their midst. He would be with them just as Jesus had been with them physically for truth, for comfort, and for strength. Jesus had been beside them, but the Spirit would be inside them.

1 – The PROBLEM to be addressed (14:1-7)

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.’ Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him.”

In this text, Jesus is encouraging the troubled hearts of His disciples. The word ‘troubled’ in verse 1 translates a word which means to be stirred up or agitated. It is what fear will do to our minds. Have you ever been paralyzed by the fear of something? You can’t think straight. You can’t eat. You are consumed by it. That’s what it means to

be troubled in the depths of your heart. This is what Jesus wants to free His disciples from so that they don't cave in under pressure and fear. The key is found in the rest of verse 1—"Believe in God, believe also in Me." Their faith is to overrule their feelings. And to fortify their faith, pay attention to what He goes on to say in verse 2:

"In My Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going."

He addresses the issue of His departure

Jesus says, "I am leaving, but don't let that thought fill you with fear, for I am preparing a place for you in My Father's house." In other words, He is saying, "I want you all to be where I am." And so for that reason, He says, "I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am you may be also." That's a promise, one that you should hold near to your heart. Jesus is coming again, my friend! But then notice that Thomas, the one who always has a hard time reconciling his faith with his feelings, he speaks up for the group and asks about the future in verse 5, "Lord, we don't know where You are going. How can we know the way?" Lord, how can we get to where You are going if we don't know where that is? Especially if You're leaving us! How will we know what to do, where to go, or which way to turn? Where do we even start? Thomas was a doubter, he was someone who wanted all of the details upfront before the journey began. He wanted a roadmap with the route well marked and all the stops highlighted. Now, I can't be too hard on him because I can identify. We want to know how a thing will turn out before we step out in faith. But listen to how Jesus answers him in verse 6:

"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

He addresses the issue of their direction

Jesus was leaving, He was going back to the Father, going to prepare a place for His disciples, and now they needed direction. Jesus had held their hand for three and a half

years. He had been their Shepherd and faithful Guide. He had taught them the truth and answered their questions. He had been the Source of their instruction, the Fountain of their wisdom, the Arm of their strength, and the Supreme Object of all their hope. For three and a half years, the Son of God incarnate had been right there beside them every single step of the way. They watched Him work miracles, go toe to toe with the religious establishment. They saw Him up close, spoke with Him, interacted with Him. But up until this point, they've lived by sight.

John MacArthur — *“In a sense, it's pretty easy to live by sight, right? You wake up every morning and Jesus is there. Wherever you are in the traveling group for three years, you wake up every morning and Jesus wakes up probably earlier than you, and He's there.”*

In the face of every difficulty you encounter along the way, He's right there. But now He is leaving, which in their own minds means they will be without His direction. The reality is that it is to their advantage that He goes away. He even says as much a bit later on in chapter 16:

John 16:7 — **“Nevertheless, 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.”**

The word means ‘profitable.’ If Jesus had stayed with them and if His departure was not to happen, then He could not send the Holy Spirit who is coming to live on the inside of them. Notice a second thing:

2—The PRINCIPLE to be expressed (14:8-11)

“Philip said to Him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know Me, Philip? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own authority, but the Father who dwells in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.”

Jesus tells them that He is going to the Father, but it does not mean that they will be left alone. He's going to prepare a place for them, and He is the way to that place. No one comes to the Father but through Him. To know Him is to know the Father also. Philip speaks up in verse 8 and says to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." In other words, we want to see God. You're leaving us, but we need a revelation. God is going to have to show up.

- Abraham had a divine visitor (Gen. 18)
- Jacob wrestled with God (Gen. 32)
- Moses spoke to God face to face (Ex. 33)
- Israel had the pillar of cloud and fire (Ex. 40)

We think we need a God we can see, One we can touch, One we can handle, or we're never going to be successful. Much like Thomas later on will say, "Unless I see, I won't believe." Go back through this passage and underline the number of times you come across the word 'believe,' which is used for a total of seven times in the chapter. In fact, the apostle John uses the word 96 times in his gospel. These disciples are still trying to walk by sight, but Jesus tells them to believe. He says in verse 9, "Have I been with you so long and you still do not know Me, Philip? Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father." He came to reveal the Father. So that to know Jesus is to know the Father.

Hebrews 1:3—"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature."

Colossians 1:15—"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."

Jesus is explaining the principle that His followers do not live by sight, but by faith. Seeing is not a prerequisite for believing, but believing is a prerequisite for seeing. So that our prayer is not, "Show me God, show me Jesus, or show me the miraculous," and so on. Rather, our prayer ought to be, "Lord, increase my faith!" These disciples are going to have to go from sight living to faith living. Third, notice:

3—The PROMISE to be assessed (14:12-14)

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”

The problem? He’s leaving and they need direction. The principle? They must believe before they see. And what about the promise? Look at what Jesus tells them in verse 12, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will also do the works that I do.” That is an amazing statement by itself. But notice that He continues, “And greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.” It may seem shocking to you, but Jesus plainly says the one who believes in Him will do greater works. Now obviously, we need to unpack that a bit.

The potential of greater works

What were the works that Jesus did? Well, the Bible says that He healed the sick, made the lame to walk, caused the blind to see, and raised the dead to life. He preached good news to the poor and glorified God the Father in everything He said and did. So that He now says to His disciples, “I’m leaving, but those who believe in Me will also do the works that I do. And not only will he do these works that I do, but greater works than these will he do because I am going to the Father.” The works are not greater in kind but rather in extent. In other words, there will be a dynamic power at work in the lives of those who believe in Me, so that they will do what I do and live as I live. And this will only happen because I am going to the Father. That’s what Jesus is saying. After His death and resurrection, Jesus will ascend to the Father’s right hand and will pour out His Spirit in the lives of those who trust in Him. The greater works that He is referring to here will be dependent upon Him physically leaving and sending His Spirit, works which He will come to accomplish through our lives. What will this involve? Through the power of the Spirit, it will involve:

- The message we declare

As those who live on this side of the cross, we declare the redemptive plan of God revealed in the gospel. And now that we live on this side of Pentecost, we declare this good news in the power of the Spirit. There is a very noticeable difference in the lives of the disciples before versus after the Lord's resurrection and ascension. Before, they could not seem to get it together. Peter cowers in fear before a servant girl and denies knowing Jesus. But after the Lord is resurrected and ascended and sends His Spirit, Peter is bold to declare the gospel and 3,000 are saved.

- The ministry we develop

Jesus never traveled beyond 60 miles of the place of His birth. If you've ever been to Israel, you know that it is not a very big place at all. And everything He did during three and half years of His earthly ministry were done right there in that tiny piece of real estate. However, when the Holy Spirit comes, His disciples would be commissioned to go far beyond those borders and take the gospel and spread the ministry of the church into the uttermost parts of the earth! Jesus Himself said so:

Acts 1:8—“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Martin Luther — *“Christ took but a little corner for Himself to preach and to work miracles, and but a little time; [but] the apostles and their followers have spread themselves through the whole world.”*

Jesus committed the gospel to this small group of eleven men so that they might carry it to the ends of the earth, but not in their own strength. And at that time, the whole world was in the grip of pagan darkness and unbelief. But within three hundred years, Christianity would shut down virtually all the temples of the old pagan Roman Empire and would number its converts by the millions. So that today, there is a Christian witness that is extending all around the world.

- The miracle we demonstrate

One more way that I'll mention involves the miracle that a Christian man or woman truly is. You are a greater work of power than the creation of the stars, my friend. So that any person who has come to know Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit is a much greater miracle than any temporary manifestation. The Christian is someone who has passed from death to life, someone who has been seated with the Lord Jesus in heavenly places, someone who was once dead in sins and trespasses but has now been born again into the family of God. And all of this is a 'greater work' of the Spirit!

Dr. Henry Morris — *“A person who is a closed system spiritually, utterly inadequate and self-centered, suddenly becomes an open system, integrated, and with his life centered in the omnipotent Creator. He who was spiritually deteriorating day after day, as a matter of fact ‘already dead while he liveth,’ through the power of the Holy Spirit, and he becomes quickened together with Jesus Christ. His life was a chaos, and now is a cosmos, with order, meaning, and goal. He is born again, a miracle of grace, a living testimony to the great Power of creation, who also is the God of salvation.”*

We do greater works in terms of the message we declare, the ministry we develop, and the miracle we demonstrate. And how is all done? Notice:

The power of greater works

Verse 13 says, “Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do...” Then in verse 14, “If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.” In other words, these greater works will be done through His power in response to their praying. Prayer that is offered in Jesus' name is the greater work. Notice what He is saying. It's not that we pray in order that we might do the work. Rather, the Lord Jesus says, “Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do.” We get fatigued in the Christian life because we forget this. We think that God wants us to do His work for Him. My friend, that has never been the case. Not one time has He ever asked or expected me to do His work for Him. I could never do God's work for Him no matter how hard I try. I can no more save a soul than I could create a star!

John 6:63 — **“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.”**

What Jesus saying to His disciples is this: when we pray, God is going to do His work through us so that you and I become channels for His power. Which is why everything that we attempt to do by way of ministry must be bathed in prayer. In chapter 15, Jesus makes this statement—“Apart from Me you can do nothing.” He didn’t say, “You can do a few things.” No, without Him we can do nothing. Period.

The priority of greater works

Jesus says, “Whatever you ask in My name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” The priority of a Spirit-filled life that makes its prayer in Jesus’ name is the glory of God the Father. It should call to mind the verse in Matthew 5, “Let your light so shine before men so that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” The Holy Spirit is concerned for God’s glory.

4—The PERSON to be possessed (14:15-18)

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

The problem? Jesus is going away. The principle? The disciples must walk by faith. The promise? They would do greater works in Jesus’ name? And this would only be possible because of the Person whom they would inwardly possess. Notice how all of their fears and anxieties about Jesus not being with them physically are confronted and dispelled in what He now says. He says, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. But don’t think that I’m leaving you to do all of this in your own effort and strength. I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper.” The Holy Spirit is not merely an addendum to the Christian faith. He is at the heart and core of it. Nor is He merely a force or an influence. Rather, He is the third person of the Trinity who must be related to personally. And so before anything else, the first thing you and I need to understand about the Holy Spirit is that He is a person and not a ‘thing.’ Which is why we don’t refer to the Holy Spirit as an ‘it.’ The Spirit is spoken of in terms of ‘He’ and ‘Him.’ He is not an impersonal force, but is the third Person of the Trinity. And He

comes to live within and indwell every believer as their resident Helper. We'll pick it back up here next time...

Sometimes I can't help but imagine how wonderful it must have been for the disciples to spend those three and half years with Jesus, walking with Him and talking with Him. But the fact of the matter is that you and I are in a much better position now on this side of the cross than they were. Jesus was physically beside them, but now He spiritually resides in us through the Holy Spirit. And that is something which Jesus said is far better and to our advantage. Jesus said that our Helper will be us forever. Which is wonderful news because it means we are never alone. For when you came to know Christ, He took up residence within you and began living inside your heart. He who gave His life for you now lives His life through you by His Spirit. Which means I am not without strength, I am not without comfort, and I am not without guidance. As One who is called alongside of us to help, the Holy Spirit:

- Enables you to face today's trials
- Empowers you to meet tomorrow's demands
- Encourages you despite yesterday's failures

He is there when you feel like you can't make it another step. He is there when the bottom falls out of life and you don't know which way to turn. He is your wisdom and help in times of trouble. He will get you past the marital conflict. He will guide you to the right school or career path. He is with you when you're heading into the O.R. or if you're waiting on a diagnosis. He is with you as you're trying to raise children and provide for a family. He goes with you to the funeral home and the cemetery as you grieve the death of a loved one. Whether it is Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, or Saturday. Whether it is winter, spring, summer, or fall. Whether you're in your teens, twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, and so on. No matter the season of life, no matter the experience of life, no matter the successes or the failures. Wherever you are—hospital room, dorm room, at home all by yourself, in a difficult work environment, with a sick child, with an aging parent, standing by a fresh grave—my

friend, if you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have been given an inner Helper. He has been sent to be alongside you and will be with you forever. He can comfort you as no one else can. He loves you and will never leave you. He will support and strengthen you for whatever you face. I'll say more about this later on, but were it not for the Holy Spirit, you and I couldn't be saved. The whole Trinity was involved in salvation. It was God the Father who planned it from eternity past, it was God the Son who accomplished it through His redemptive work, and is it God the Holy Spirit who applies it to your life as a believer. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sin and convinces us that Christ is the Savior. He is the One who makes us uncomfortable by moving us away from self-reliance, moving us toward the cross, and toward salvation, where we start to realize, "I'm empty on the inside! I need Jesus." It is the Holy Spirit who brings us into such realization. And it may be what He doing right now for some of you. If so, then come to Jesus today!