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“His death and resurrection are but preliminary to a new era in which the Holy Spirit will call humanity to a godly way of life.”

CONTEXT

Chapter sixteen continues the discourses of Jesus with His disciples at the Last Supper. It continues to teach the disciples about life in the Holy Spirit after Jesus physically leaves them. The power of the words increases when one remembers that the teaching follows Jesus' humble example of washing the disciples feet (13:1-17) and His commandment that they love one another as He loved them (13:34).

Jesus began His final words with His disciples by offering them comfort as He announced His return to the Father and promised them the Holy Spirit (John 14). Chapter fifteen began (15:1-8) with a parable-like illustration uniting the Father, Jesus, and the disciples like a gardener, vine and branches respectively. Jesus repeats the command that disciples love one another (15:12) but then teaches the disciples that their love will be countered by the world's hate and persecution (15:18-26). Many of the promises and theological themes presented in chapters fourteen and fifteen are repeated in chapter sixteen. The repetition is to increase love and encouragement like a spouse repeating the words, "I love you," or a coach inspiring the team with the repeated encouragement, "You can do it." The importance of the teaching of chapters fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen will be underscored by the great prayer of Jesus in chapter seventeen. In the prayer, Jesus commits all the problems and promises of the farewell discourses to the Father to show that they are not empty speculations or idle words.

Chapter sixteen has three distinct parts. The first four verses are closely connected to chapter fifteen and explain why Jesus has told the disciples about the world's hatred. Then Jesus explains the power of the Holy Spirit which will enable them to face evil forces of the world (16:5-15). The chapter concludes with a description of the emotional roller coaster Christians experience as they wait for Jesus to return (16:16-33).

“Jesus’ warning about religious persecution prepares Christians to face suffering.”

TWO APPLICATIONS OF JESUS’ TEACHING – JOHN 16:1-4

Jesus had warned His disciples about the hatred of the world (15:18-25). In 16:2, He tells them that the hatred will even have religious support. People will think that killing a disciple of Jesus will be a religious service. The Acts of the Apostles gives us several examples of such misguided religious zeal. Religious people killed Stephen (Acts 7:57-58). The zealous religious man who was later to become the Apostle Paul approved the death of Stephen (Acts 8:1) and actively attacked Christ’s disciples (Acts 9:1-2, 22:3-5, 19-20, Galatians 1:13-14). On the other hand, Paul himself suffered at the hands of people who acted for religious reasons (Acts 9:23-26, 14:5, 19-20, 16:20, 23:12-21 and 24:1-8).

The teaching of Jesus in 16:1-4 can be applied in two ways. First, it should warn us of danger of hurting Christ’s disciples despite religious convictions. Second, it should encourage and strengthen disciples who suffer because they follow Jesus. Let us explore briefly those two applications.

On the basis of Jesus’ teaching, humbly examine your own faith and the practices of your congregation to see if you know of “religious” attacks on Christ’s disciples. A few examples may stimulate your thinking. I think with shame of how as teenagers we considered classmates “too pious” who prayed publicly before they ate in our public high school cafeteria. People with so-called “Charismatic” experiences sometimes are criticized by “regular” Christians as “too (hypocritically!) Godly” and on the other hand, sometimes “Charismatic” Christians suggest that “regular” Christians have “inadequate” faith. Stewardship programs may imply (correctly, at times!) that some Christians share their financial gifts of love in improper ways. Christian spouses sometimes make each other suffer as they “argue” about how much money to give to church and charity. I have heard Christians mock athletes who make the sign of the cross before taking a free throw or preparing to bat. In recent years, Christians bitterly attacked other Christians who were following their consciences in working for peace or racial equality. In

our present time, some Christians attack each other in God’s name for supporting or opposing giving “sanctuary” or protection to people who claim that their lives are in danger in their homeland but are unable to get documents for legal migration to the United States.

Jesus’ warning about religious persecution prepares Christians to face suffering. There is a false optimism among Christians sometimes. Some think that the problems of life will disappear when one accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior. Certainly it is true that Christ solves the ultimate problems of eternal salvation. But it is equally true that becoming a Christian may make life now more difficult because one does not surrender to evil and is attacked by it. Peers may mock moral behavior. Business associates may demand dishonesty. Jesus’ words of warning are comparable to a parent warning a child about the danger of crossing a busy street, a teacher urging students to study hard because the next test will be very difficult, a pre-marital counselor helping young romantics become more realistic, or a financial advisor talking to middle aged people about retirement plans. “Being forewarned is being forearmed,” is a slogan I often heard as a child. Meditate on how Jesus’ words of warning prepare you to struggle against evil. You may want to reread John 15:1-16 to recall the power and purpose of discipleship. Ephesians 6:10-18 gives vivid guidance for the struggle. Romans 8, especially 8:28-39, gives great comfort and confidence in the struggle. List practical ways by which you may respond to Jesus’ warning. Such practical things may include more effort in study of God’s Word, more time in prayer, more fellowship with the communion of saints, avoiding tempting situations, or asking God to remove suspicious or judgmental attitudes from your heart. It may be as simple as deciding not to watch certain movies or television programs or as difficult as publicly opposing denigration of people in ethnic jokes.

JESUS LEAVES – THE HOLY SPIRIT COMES – JOHN 16:5-15

The most astounding statement in this section is Jesus’ proclamation that it is to the disciples advantage that He leave (16:7). Reflect upon that statement and you will realize that there are two general reasons for the statement. First, Jesus can leave because His work is complete. Jesus last words from the cross (19:30) will be, “It is finished.” Second, His leaving gives meaning to our

lives. Jesus gives us the responsibility to continue what He began in His life and ministry. After the resurrection, Jesus will tell His disciples, “As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.” The victory of Jesus over death moves humanity into the era of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps the meaning is clearer if we compare life after Jesus’ departure to the life of a young married couple after they leave their parental homes. The love established by parents provides a model and basis for their “independent” relationship.

The second major teaching in this section comes in 16:8-11. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment?

The Holy Spirit convicts the world of sin because, despite the Spirit’s power, people refuse to believe. Jesus’ departure or death becomes the focal point of the Holy Spirit’s eternal struggle with sin. The Holy Spirit in Scripture exposes the religious leaders, Pilate, and the mob as hypocritical, lying, inconsistent, blood-thirsty sinners because they do not accept Jesus’ teachings. The Holy Spirit continues such exposure today. 1 John 4:1-6 tells Christians to try the spirits, meaning they should ask for God’s Spirit to test what is right and wrong, good or evil. Jesus will send the Holy Spirit giving disciples the gift of discernment (1 Corinthians 2:14, 12:1-3).

Galatians 5:16-25 lists specific ways in which the Spirit life stands demonstrably different from an ordinary life. Those who do not believe in Jesus are guided by self-interest which accepts such obvious sins as fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like (Galatians 5:19-21). The Spirit shows that there is an alternative by giving the power to practice love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, no self-conceit, no provoking one another, and not envy of one another (Galatians 5:22-23 & 26). Jesus promises a simple truth that becomes obvious in the life of every Christian. People who believe in Jesus have a spirit which leads them to reject sinful practices that other people tolerate or practice. The Holy Spirit inspires Jesus’ disciples to recognize their own sin and need for a gracious Savior and, after believing, to struggle to live a Christ-like life.

“His death and resurrection become the heart of the Gospel used by the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the sinful nature of people and the loving nature of God.”

The Holy Spirit also convicts the world of righteousness because Jesus goes to the Father and will be seen no more (16:10). The departure of Jesus shows righteousness both in the sense of God’s gift and also in the simple sense of human justice. The trial or “departure” scenes about to be told in John’s Gospel reveal the love and obedience of Jesus to the Father’s righteous plan of salvation. The events also reveal how the world does not demand even basic human justice. The religious leaders, Pilate, and the mob openly pursue unrighteousness! Jesus’ “departure,” that is, His death and resurrection become the heart of the Gospel used by the Holy Spirit to demonstrate the sinful nature of people and the loving nature of God.

Jesus promises His disciples that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of the judgment because the ruler of this world is judged. The Ruler of this world supports the power of sin and death. The Holy Spirit stands for love and life. 1 John 3:11-12 gives a vivid example of living under the power of this world’s ruler. Cain lived under that ruler and killed his brother. Jesus’ victory enables us to love!

The Holy Spirit presents in the Gospel a vivid choice. Jesus faced human sin and died because of it. But the story continues. Jesus trusted the Father, loved people, and was raised from the dead. Since Jesus’ victory, the Holy Spirit has an “example” of how we need not accept, fatalistically, sin and death as the ultimate forces in life. Jesus’ departure shows that this world’s dominant force is broken. The powerful words in 1 Corinthians 15 explains how Christ’s resurrection gives believers the divine victory. The Ruler of this world deals with matters perishable, dishonorable, weak and physical. The Holy Spirit leads people to a resurrection faith in the victory of the imperishable, honorable, powerful, and spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Jesus concludes His teaching by again promising the Holy Spirit and describing His work (16:12-15).

Jesus wants the illustration to prepare the disciples for the painful times ahead to enable them to persevere in confidence of the joy to come.

In summary, Jesus' departure means that the Holy Spirit can call us to trust that Christ's life was for us. Using Christ's death and resurrection as the ultimate expression of God's love, we are called to see the goodness and power of God and the evil and destruction of the ruler of this world.

JESUS OFFERS JOY – JOHN 16:16-33

This section begins with the disciples questioning what Jesus means with His talk about leaving (16:16-17). Their comments illustrate the need for the Holy Spirit which Jesus has just promised (16:13). Jesus addresses their confusion immediately by using an illustration about labor pains (16:21). Joy can follow sorrow. Jesus wants the illustration to prepare the disciples for the painful times ahead to enable them to persevere in confidence of the joy to come. Joy becomes Jesus' most important teaching in this section. He tells the disciples to ask that their joy would be full (16:24) and to be of good cheer because He has overcome the world (16:33). Jesus' invitation to joy stands in stark comparison to the self-confidence of the disciples which painfully reveals their ignorance. They think that they know it all (16:29-30)! Their hollow comment reveals the need for Jesus' suffering hour of labor so that they can be born into the joy of the Spirit-led discipleship.

SUMMARY

Jesus warns His disciples about the power of the world but promises them a greater power in His departure. His death and resurrection are but preliminary to a new era in which the Holy Spirit will call humanity to a godly way of life. The disciples' confusion reveals our own need for such continued love and guidance.

PERSONAL APPLICATION – JOHN 17:1-26

Pray that Jesus' prayer for His disciples will inspire, comfort and guide you.

1. Read carefully John 17 and note how Jesus' prayer has three concerns:

For whom does Jesus pray in 17:1-5?

For whom does He pray in 17:6-19?

For whom does He pray in 17:20-26?

2. Do Jesus' three prayerful concerns give guidance to the focus of your prayers? If so, explain how.

John 17:1-5

3. How will Jesus glorify the Father?

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4. How do you seek to "glorify" God?

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5. Another way to think about how we "glorify God" is to ask the question, "What do you 'brag about' (or "glorify") when you ask people to become a Christian, to join your church, or even to join Living Way Bible Study?" How does it compare with the way Jesus glorified the Father?

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6. What does Jesus mean by "eternal life?" In your answer, consider also 3:16-21, 5:24-29, 6:40, 44, 47, 51, 54, and 11:25-26).

John 17:6-19

7. According to 17:6-8, what has Jesus done for His disciples?

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8. What does Jesus ask for His disciples in 17:10-17?

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9. Apply Jesus' prayer to yourself. What does Jesus want for you and what does He not want?
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10. Do you ever reverse Jesus' prayer and want "escape" but not holiness? If so, explain when, why, and how you reverse Jesus' prayer.

11. What does Jesus mean by "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (17:17)? (John 8:31-32)

12. Explain how we can be "in the world" but "not of the world." (Romans 12:1-2)

John 17:20-26

13. What is the major concern of Jesus' prayer in 17:20-23?

What do you think Jesus' prayer means for: Your congregation?

Your Living Way Bible Study group?

Your denomination?

14. How can God's word lead us to know that God blesses diversity in personalities, talents and perspectives by creating unity in Christ? (Ephesians 5:1-16, 1 Corinthians 12:4-31)

15. What does 17:24 mean to you?

16. Christian mission is often described as "inreach" and "outreach." What do Jesus' words in 17:25-26 teach about "inreach" and "outreach?"

17. Read John 17 again. It is often called "Jesus' High Priestly Prayer." Do you think that is a good title? (Hebrews 5:5-6) Explain why or why not.

18. In summary, what does Jesus' prayer in this chapter mean to you?
