

The Triple Conviction of the World By The Holy Spirit.

Text: John 16:5-11

1) Of sin

Suggested Hymns:

2) Of righteousness

163, 134, 127, 296

3) Of judgement

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 16:5-11, ⁵ *“But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’* ⁶ *“But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.* ⁷ *“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the [Comforter] will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.* ⁸ *“And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹ “of sin, because they do not believe in Me. ¹⁰ “of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; ¹¹ “of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The subject of the church in this season is gradually turned from Easter to Ascension. It turns from a joyful contemplation of the open grave to a wondering, upward look at the clouds that surround the ascending Saviour.

Our text describes the Lord’s task of preparing His disciples for living through that awesome transitional period from Good Friday to Ascension. He had to make them strong for the faith-shaking events of Good Friday, patient for the glorious revelation on Easter, and ready for His inevitable parting on Ascension Day.

The first two verses of our text portray the bewilderment and sorrow that grips the disciples as Jesus tells them, for perhaps the first time, in a clear and unmistakable way that He must return to His Father. We read, ⁵ *“But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’* ⁶ *“But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.* The thought of Jesus’ parting, mingled with the warnings of persecution and

tribulation, filled the disciples' minds that their tongues could find no words for comment or question.

Jesus therefore addresses them gently. He says, ⁷ ***“Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.*** Jesus calmly insists that His departure and the disruption of their blessed three-year relationship will be compensated for, by something both wonderful and necessary.

This wonderful and necessary “something” with which Jesus clinches His argument is the triple conquest of the Holy Spirit after Ascension Day. The threefold “conquest” or “conviction” which the Holy Spirit will make is the point of the main body of our text.

Furthermore, this is the encouragement which the disciples needed for their task and which the church in all time needs for its activity until the return of Christ. Let us therefore, consider this conquest or conviction by the Holy Spirit in more detail. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Holy Spirit Convicts The World Of Sin

Our text says, ⁸ ***And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, ...⁹ of sin, because they do not believe in Me.*** The Holy Spirit, will reprove, or convict, the world of its guilt with regard to sin; not just any sin, but of the sin of sins — that people did not receive Jesus Christ for what He claimed to be, the Son of God and the Saviour of mankind. In other words unbelief.

How often our Lord was distressed with the unbelief of people and specifically with their rejection of Him! Again and again He was rebuffed and deserted. At one time Jesus' even turned to the disciples and said, ***“Do you also want to go away?”¹*** With anguish He shook His head as He viewed Jerusalem from afar and cried, ***“but you were not willing!”²*** He was despised and rejected by men.

On the other hand, the Saviour does not want to use His absolute power to force people to give allegiance to Him. Jesus does not want to make people His slaves by force or conquest. He wants people to be His children, His brothers

and sisters by faith alone. Jesus wants people to come to faith through the foolishness of preaching.³

This meant that they were to have another chance after Christ had departed from the world, after He had taken His visible presence from them. This plan involved the work of the Holy Spirit, who searches the hearts of people and turns them from unbelief to faith.

Also involved in this plan of God and Christ were the disciples. They were to continue to proclaim the ‘good news’ after the Ascension. But people could not be convinced, or convicted, of their guilt through the force of logical arguments or through powerful presentations. The disciples would, first of all, need *“the Spirit of truth”* to lead them into all truth, but they would also need the Holy Spirit who is the only one who can convince people that the sin of sins is the rejection of Jesus Christ. This was the Christ whom so many had seen perform miracles.

This conquest of the hearts and souls of people through the persuasion of the Gospel could be accomplished only through the Holy Spirit, who Jesus would not send until after His Ascension.

Have you, as a confessing Christian, ever felt the need of the Holy Spirit’s help in witnessing your faith? As you talk to somebody about your faith and your hope of eternal life, how hard it is to find the right words. But how gloriously the Holy Spirit uses even these words. Even though we may not see the results, what wonderful conquests of the hearts of people He makes, even through us, as inept as we are!

We cannot of ourselves convince anyone. This is the field of conquest of the Holy Spirit to make people know both the greatness of the sin of unbelief, and also the full atonement made for sin by Jesus Christ. This is the first part of His threefold post-ascension work.

2. The Holy Spirit Convicts The World Of Its Guilt Regarding Christ’s Righteousness

Our text says, ⁸ *And when He has come, He will convict the world ... of righteousness ...* ¹⁰ *of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more.*

The Saviour on Ascension Day departs from the world because His task is finished. He now gives to the Holy Spirit the honour of carrying on the next phase of the conflict.

In modern warfare armies engaged in conflict spend part of the time in reserve. One army will be directly engaged with the enemy while one is in reserve. But this does not mean that they are completely withdrawn from the conflict. They have their special responsibilities even in reserve.

Similarly, Christ takes His visible presence away from people, having determined not to use His physical presence or His divine majesty to sway people but to accomplish the conversion and sanctification of them through the special activity of the Holy Spirit.

The second conquest of the Spirit involves convincing people with regard to righteousness. Christ was Himself righteous in everything He did, also in leaving the world at Ascension. But He also, as it were, leaves behind “righteousness” as something that can become the possession of any person who believes in Him. Jesus can go to the Father in righteousness because He has fully completed the work which the Father had given Him to do. On Calvary, Jesus cried out, “*It is finished.*” The atonement for peoples’ sins was complete. We read in Hebrews 9:12, ¹² *Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption* [for us].

On Easter Day Christ could throw off the bonds of death because the Father approved all that His Son had done. On Ascension Day Christ could mount victoriously the steps of heaven because He had provided righteousness for everyone. Thus Jesus went to the Father by way of His crucifixion, resurrection, and redemption. Now people can have forgiveness and eternal life without money and without price. Now it is not necessary for people to see Him any more. Now there is needed only the proclamation of this available righteousness through the ceaseless activity of the Holy Spirit.

Christ goes to His Father and is seen no more, but the Holy Spirit takes up the ceaseless struggle for the minds, the hearts, and the souls of people. Christians must understand that this is the struggle that will go on until the end of the world.

An example of this was rise of Nazism in Germany before World War II. There were of course many phases of it, but the most significant revelation of its aims was made in the book, *It's Your Souls We Want*. The author made it clear that such a movement drives deep into the souls of people and finally becomes not only anti-Christian but pro-Satan. Communism and many other "isms" are very similar.

We can't imagine Christians being unconcerned about the outcome of this struggle, the struggle for your soul. A quick look at many of the people on the 'current affairs' programs on TV shows people who are controlled by the devil rather than the Holy Spirit. Many blatantly show contempt for the law, not to mention moral values and Christianity. This illustrates to us a long list of defeats, of battles lost, of souls convinced by the devil rather than by the Holy Spirit.

Some people read Revelation 20 and doubt that Satan has been bound and that Christ has really won the victory. But take comfort, for Satan is bound so far as any believer in Christ is concerned.

If your trust for forgiveness and life everlasting is wholly in Christ, Satan cannot harm you in the least where these are concerned. He may torment and plague you in temporal things, but the final joyful outcome is secure. Christ did not ascend into heaven until all was complete. And now the victory is assured, for the Holy Spirit will convict the world regarding righteousness, of Christ's righteousness. This is His second conquest.

3. The Holy Spirit Convicts The World Of Judgment

Our text says, ⁸ *And when He has come, He will convict the world ... of judgment ...* ¹¹ *of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged*. The final phase of the Holy Spirit's triple conquest is that He will convict the world of Judgement. Several times the Gospel of John quotes Jesus to the effect, *the ruler of this world is judged*.⁴ The ruler of this world refers to the devil.

Calvary was the final battleground on which the war was fought. The picture of the dead Christ upon the cross gives no hint that Satan, with his crushed head, lies prostrate beneath that cross, but it is so. Christ overcame the unholy trinity, sin, death, and the devil, on the cross. The victory is clear from the actions of the people who came to Calvary.

A Roman centurion, against all the laws of likelihood and probability, cries out, “*Truly this was the Son of God.*”⁵ Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus in the hour of Christ’s death overcome the last remnants of doubt and fear, and stand up to be counted as followers of Jesus the Christ by laying Jesus’ body in the new tomb. On the third day Christ parades in triumphal procession through the courts of hell, and every last evil spirit knows that Satan, the prince of this world, is judged.

There are, of course, a lot of unconvinced people in the world. Millions of people are serving Satan, as if his, was a winning cause and as if they were striving to obtain his favour. Though Satan is bound with respect to the believers in Christ, he is still unlimited in his power to deceive those who do not trust in Christ.

Therefore the false prophet may stand in high regard. The man who flouts the clearest words of Scripture may achieve a great measure of earthly attention and success. Certain kinds of immorality, such as adultery, not merely may be condoned but may even be glorified. Yet Jesus’ words are clear, *the ruler of this world is judged.*

Let us not forget that in that judgment our actions are included. Every act of unfaithfulness and disloyalty, every jealousy, every refusal to help our neighbour, every idle word, is stamped for what it is: sin — a product of Satan.

Thanks be to God, the Holy Spirit will convict the world of judgment, because *the ruler of this world is judged!* This is His third conquest. In every heart that God has chosen to be His own forever, this assurance is created by the Holy Spirit: Satan and all his are judged, and they cannot deceive the elect of God, though they be garbed as angels of light. Scripture says in Matthew 24:22 ²² “*And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.*” And two verses later, ²⁴ “*For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*” It shows a mighty struggle but the elect are safe.

Up until the Day of Judgment the Holy Spirit will enlighten those who believe. What a day of wrath and despair the Day of Judgment will be for Satan, the lovers of sin, and the false prophets. Then the veils are torn away, and to

every eye it is revealed that Satan is judged and that Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords forever.

William Tyndale, a translator of the Holy Scriptures, burned at the stake for his activity, is said to have prayed: “*Lord, open the King of England’s eyes.*” We may well pray today, *O Holy Spirit, open people’s eyes that they may see that Satan is judged and may cling to Christ alone.*

This is the activity of the threefold conquest of the Holy Spirit, that ceaseless victorious warfare which He will wage down through the centuries until the second coming of Christ. The world will be convinced of sin, of Christ’s righteousness, and that the devil is judged.

So let us recap this three-fold conviction. Firstly, the Holy Spirit convicts the world in regard to sin because the people of the world do not believe in Jesus. The Holy Spirit teaches people about Jesus through His Word. In Jesus they receive forgiveness of all sins. But when the world’s followers reject the testimony of the Holy Spirit through the Word and refuse to believe in Jesus, they lose His forgiveness. Therefore they stand convicted in their sin. In contrast, John has been exhorting his readers to believe and live, forgiven of all sins.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit convicts the world in regard to righteousness because Jesus has gone to the Father and we don’t see Him any longer. Those who have no Saviour from sin have to earn God’s favour, if they can, by their righteousness. But the Lord demands a righteousness that is equal to the perfection of the Father.⁶ Mere human beings cannot claim that righteousness for themselves since Adam’s fall.

But Jesus lived the perfect life for us. He followed the Father’s plan for our salvation to the letter. He returned to the Father in glory, having triumphed over sin, death, and hell. Now each person who believes in Jesus is robed in His righteousness. The Father counts the Son’s perfect life as ours because all has been fulfilled in Him.

However, the world’s sons and daughters, who reject Jesus, are left to their own righteousness. Therefore they stand convicted. Again, we can apply the keynote of this Gospel: believe and live, robed in Christ’s righteousness.

Thirdly, the Holy Spirit convicts the world in regard to judgment because the prince of this world now stands condemned. In Jesus’ death and resurrection, He

sealed Satan's doom. Those who reject Jesus actually choose this world's prince, Satan, for their leader,⁷ and they share their leader's judgment. They stand condemned. But those who believe in Jesus live. The situation is either or. Either faith or unbelief. Either declared righteous or condemned. Either life or death. Either heaven or hell. There can be no mixing of the two.

Finally, the threefold conquest of the Holy Spirit is also a glorious testimony to the unity of the Holy Trinity as we heard in the Gospel lesson before, John 16:13-15, ¹³ *However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.* ¹⁴ *He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you.* ¹⁵ *All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you.*

This text describes the harmonious, co-operative functioning of the Holy Trinity. The present time is the time of the special activity of the Holy Spirit converting and sanctifying, just as Jesus' 33 years on earth was the special time of His redemptive work. Yet the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and the Spirit of the Father.

At the same time Christ has all things which the Father has, and the Holy Spirit takes what is the Father's and the Son's and shows it to us. Our salvation is sure under the ceaseless guidance of the *Three in One!*

The rockets which send satellites into outer space are made in three stages. One rocket fires first, afterwards a second rocket gives impetus for the second stage of the journey, and finally, a third rocket pushes forth into space. It is an imperfect allegory, indeed, for rockets are beset with failures and malfunctions; but in a threefold fashion we reach our eternal goal.

First, the Father set in motion the plan for our redemption; then the Son carried out to the last detail the plan of redemption; and finally the Holy Spirit in the wonderful way described in our text guides us safely to our eternal home. Yet, we must always bear in mind that there is but one God and that therefore all three Persons have participated, or still participate, in all these actions.

Therefore, let us conclude: Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, for our great salvation! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 6:67

² Matthew 23:37

³ 1 Corinthians 1:21

⁴ John 12: 31, John 14:30, John 16:11,

⁵ Matthew 27:54

⁶ Matthew 5:48

⁷ John 8:44