

“Who Spoke by the Prophets”

February 20, 2022

Nehemiah 9

Psalm 143

John 15:18-16:15

Nehemiah tells us that God gave his good Spirit to instruct Israel in the wilderness.

The pillar of cloud by day and fire by night led Israel to Mt. Sinai.

And at Mt. Sinai, fifty days after the Passover in Egypt,

the LORD spoke his Ten Commandments to Israel from the cloud.

For Israel, the feast of Pentecost was always about the giving of the Law.

And Nehemiah says that this is about the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, in verse 30, we hear that God warned Israel “by your Spirit through your prophets.”

This is a regular feature that we find throughout the OT –

the Holy Spirit “spoke by the prophets.”

So the Spirit *led* Israel through the wilderness –

and *spoke* by the prophets – teaching Israel the ways of the LORD.

Our Psalm of response, Psalm 143, uses “spirit” three times.

The first two times, it speaks of *my spirit* –

“my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled.”

“My spirit fails! Hide not your face from me,

lest I be like those who go down to the pit”

The problem is that our spirits are weak.

My spirit faints.

My spirit fails.

And so the Psalmist prays,

“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God!

Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!”

Again, the Holy Spirit is portrayed as *leading* and *teaching* –

the same two things that Nehemiah spoke of!

Sing Psalm 143A

Read John 15:18-16:15

And once again – the Spirit leads and the Spirit speaks.

That’s what he does!

He guides the church into all truth.

And he takes what belongs to the Son and declares it to us!

He is the Spirit of *truth*.

In the Apostles' Creed we simply say,
"I believe in the Holy Spirit."

But in the Nicene Creed we say a little more!
"the Lord and giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son;
who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified;
who spoke by the prophets."

1. The Holy Spirit Proceeds from the Father and the Son (John 15:18-27)

In John 15:18-27,
Jesus shows how the Spirit proceeds from the Father
and bears witness about the Son.

Jesus says, "if the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."
Jesus had already told them that "a servant is not greater than his master." (13:16)
Now he explains what this will mean for their future.
In his death, the world will be judged.
In his death, the ruler of this world will be cast out.
Therefore the world will hate Jesus,
and all who belong to him.
Jesus has come to challenge everything that the world holds dear.
He has come to establish a kingdom that is not of this world.
It is not an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly kingdom.
Therefore it levels a fundamental challenge against all earthly kingdoms.
Jesus tells his disciples that if they were of the world,
the world would love them as its own.
But instead the world will hate them.
Why?
Because Jesus has chosen them out of the world.

There are two ways of talking about election.
One way is by saying that God saves the world,
but condemns those who refuse to believe in Jesus.
In John 3:16, we hear that God loved the world in this way,
that he gave his only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish
but have eternal life.
John tells us that "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,
but in order that the world might be saved through him....
Whoever does not believe is condemned already,
because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."

So that's one way of saying it:
God saves the world;
therefore those who refuse to believe in Jesus
are "removed" from the world, as it were.

The other way of talking about election is that God condemns the world,
and saves the elect out of it.
That is the way that Jesus speaks here in John 15.
"I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." (15:19)

In John 3 Jesus says that he came to save the world.
In John 15 Jesus says that the disciples are chosen "out of the world."

Both perspectives are correct.
John 3 is looking at election from an eschatological perspective.
In the end, the world will be saved.
The purpose and goal of Jesus' coming is to save the world.

But John 15-16 is looking at election from the vantage point of the present age.
"In this world you will have trouble,
but take heart, I have overcome the world" (16:33)
Jesus will cast out the ruler of this world in his death and resurrection,
but this world has not yet been recreated into the world to come.

The salvation of the world is the goal,
but until that goal is achieved,
the world is a hostile place.
The citizens of this world do not confess Jesus as Lord.
They do not recognize him as King of kings.
Therefore they hate him—and all those who belong to his kingdom.

The world will hate you because the world does not want to be saved.
They love darkness, and hate the light.

But (v20)
²⁰ *Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.'*

Jesus had said this back in chapter 13 – when he was teaching them to wash each other's feet.
Now he is explaining what it means to wash each other's feet!

No greater love is there than a man lays down his life for his friends.
But if that is what your master does – then you must do it to!

So Jesus goes on (verses 20-21)
to point out that if the world persecuted Jesus, then it will persecute his disciples.

How they respond to Jesus will be how they respond to you.

Which also means that if they kept *Jesus's* word, they will also keep yours.

It's not all negative!

But just – don't be surprised when they treat you like they treat Jesus!

And they will do these things to them,

“on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.” (16:21)

The name of Jesus is going to cost the disciples dearly.

The world will treat you badly because they do not know the Father –

they do not know him who sent me.

The next set of “ifs” in verses 22-25 explains why the world hates Jesus.

“If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin,”

Literally, “they would not have sin.”

This is a sobering thought.

With greater light comes greater darkness.

The coming of the Savior of the world pushes people off the fence.

The incarnate Word of God came to his own,

and his own did not receive him.

Prior to Christ's coming, Judaism had its parties and divisions,

but after his coming,

there is a clear fault line dividing between those who believe in Jesus,
and those who don't.

Or, as Jesus puts it in verse 23,

between those who love the Father, and those who hate the Father.

Jesus goes so far as to say,

“If I had not done among them the works that no one else did,
they would not have sin.”

The chief priests and Pharisees might well have been faithful Jews
if Jesus hadn't come.

You see, to believe in predestination does not mean to believe in fatalism.

Jesus is saying that if I hadn't come, then things would have been different.

My coming creates a new division that didn't formerly exist.

Before I came, it was the Jews and the Gentiles.

But my coming is bringing a new creation.

“Now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.”

But, Jesus adds, this is simply what the Law had said:

“The word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled:

‘They hated me without a cause.’” (15:25)

This is why the coming of the Holy Spirit is so important.
The Mosaic age is coming to an end:
the priesthood, the temple, the sacrifices.
Those who believe in Jesus and his Father are being constituted
as a kingdom not of this world.
But how can the kingdom come, if the king is absent?
Jesus promised his disciples that he would not leave them alone.

Jesus has told his disciples that whoever believes in him will do greater works
because he is going to the Father.
He will go to the Father, and send the Holy Spirit,
and in the coming of the Holy Spirit, Christ will be present with his church.
Therefore the church is the means that Christ uses to do his greatest work,
by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father,
the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father,
he will bear witness about me.
And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning.”

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father.
We confess this in the Nicene Creed.
What does it mean “to proceed” from the Father?

The basic idea is “to go out from.”
When we talk about the Trinity,
we talk about “perichoresis” –
how the persons of the Trinity all mutually indwell one another.
How the Son is “in” the Father – and the Father is “in” the Son.”

The Holy Spirit is also “in” the Father and the Son.
That is why Jesus says that the Spirit *proceeds* from the Father.
He goes forth from the Father because he is *in* the Father.

This is also why the western church confesses in the Nicene Creed,
that the Spirit proceeds “from the Father and the Son” –
as a way of emphasizing the mutual indwelling
of the persons of the Trinity.

The eastern church – Eastern Orthodoxy – is really nervous about this,
because they hear it as having the Spirit proceed from two sources –
the Father is one source, and the Son is the other.

But that’s not what we mean!

We say that the Spirit proceeds from the Father –
but because the Son is in the Father,
therefore it is also correct to say that the Spirit proceeds
from the Father and the Son.

(There was an attempt many centuries ago to say “from the Father through the Son” –
which, I suspect, could be a solution.
I don’t think that the Western Church *should have* altered the Creed
without the consent of the eastern church –
but I also do not think that the PCA by herself should try to go it alone!
And I certainly disagree with those pastors who alter the Creed on their own authority!)

But also remember how this connects to us:
the Father is in the Son – the Son is in the Father –
and now *we* are *in him* – and *he* is in us.
In Christ, we become partakers of the divine life –
and thus when the Helper comes – when the Spirit of truth comes –
who proceeds from the Father –
he will bear witness about Jesus.

To put it simply, if the Holy Spirit is not God himself
then we have no real connection to God.
Jesus says that he will come to us – but if the Holy Spirit is not God,
then it is merely a creature who comes to us.

If the Holy Spirit is not God, then there is no *uncreated grace!*
There is nothing that truly joins us to the life of God himself!

But because the Holy Spirit is truly God – therefore when the Spirit is given to the disciples –
the kingdom of God will come through the preaching of the eleven.

They will bear witness about Jesus, together with the Holy Spirit,
and through that preaching the kingdom of God will be established.

It is really important to start with the 11.
The whole church is rooted in the apostles’ preaching.
Without the apostles, there would be no church!

Why has Jesus said all this?

2. The Holy Spirit Spoke by the Prophets (John 16:1-11)

Chapter 16, verse 1 – “To keep you from falling away.”
Because your hour is coming.
If the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified,

and if that glory is revealed in his death on the cross,
then the disciples can rest assured that their hour will also come.
They too must face the cross.

The rulers of the Jews “will put you out of the synagogues.”
You will be isolated from friends and family.
All that was once dear to you will be stripped away.

But Jesus says that “they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me.
But I have said these things to you,
that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you.

John 13-17 consists of Jesus final words to his disciples.
They are intensely personal.
They have a very focused point.
And that focus is on the eleven.

Because the same Spirit who spoke by the Prophets
will now speak by the Apostles!

In John 17, Jesus begins by praying for the eleven,
but then in verse 20 he adds, “I do not ask for these only,
but also for those who will believe in me through their word.”

Not every statement can be applied literally.
We are not likely to be put out of the synagogue
Neither are we likely to be killed by a Jew who thinks he doing it in service to God.

But the whole point is that your hour will come.
A servant is not greater than his master.
The apostles were the greatest servants that Jesus ever had.
And so if they were persecuted for Christ’s sake,
then we should not expect anything less for ourselves.
The world will always hate those who belong to Christ.
They will always seek to destroy you.

But when your hour comes,
and the world attacks with all its fury,
do not be afraid, because you will not be alone.

Because our Lord Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and because he has anointed us with his Spirit!

Jesus says that he will go to the Father, and send the Holy Spirit,
and in the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Son will be present with his church.
Therefore the church is the means that Christ uses to do his greatest work,

by the power of his Holy Spirit.

Through the apostles' preaching *you* are gathered here today.
It may have taken nearly 2,000 years to get here – but what is happening today
is the fulfillment of what Jesus promised.

Throughout John's gospel Jesus speaks of how *his* hour will come.
And *his* hour is the hour of suffering –
the hour when he will endure the wrath and curse of God against sin.

And even so, your hour is the hour of suffering.
But even as your hour will come,
so also the Holy Spirit will come.
Your hour of trial and temptation is also the Spirit's hour
to help and assist you in speaking the word of Christ.

Jesus has said certain things—but he has more to say.

But once Jesus goes to the Father,
how will he communicate with his church?
And remember that the primary focus here is how will Jesus communicate with the eleven.
After all, it is the eleven who have been with Jesus “from the beginning” (15:27).
They have been with him from the beginning,
and as they will be the source of all Christian teaching,
it is crucial that they bear witness to the truth.
Because if the apostles get it wrong,
then the whole church will get it wrong!
Therefore, in these last hours before his death,
Jesus speaks to the eleven of their foundational role in bearing witness to him.

Jesus is saying that the coming of the Holy Spirit has a special meaning for the apostles—
those who had been with Jesus since the beginning.
This is how the kingdom can come even though the King is in heaven—
because the Spirit of truth will bear witness through the apostles.
We often think of this in the writing of Scripture,
and that is certainly important.
But only a handful of the apostles actually wrote the New Testament,
and even those who wrote spent relatively little time writing.
The central purpose of the coming of the Helper— the Spirit of truth—
was to bear witness to Christ,
through the apostolic *preaching*.

The first generation of Christians didn't have the NT.
How could they know what to believe?
They knew from Jesus that they could rely upon the teaching of the apostles.

That's why they started collecting the books of the NT.
They knew that the apostolic teaching had a unique status,
and so they looked for those writings
that contained what they had heard from the apostles.
That's why a book like Hebrews was included,
even though they weren't sure who wrote it.
It so obviously contained the apostolic teaching, that they had to include it.

In John 13-17 Jesus is speaking primarily to the eleven.
But that doesn't mean that it is irrelevant for us.
The way that it is important for us is primarily to show us
that we can trust the apostles' teaching.
Jesus himself promised that he would send the Holy Spirit to teach them all things.
And because Jesus has taught his apostles by his Spirit,
therefore he also teaches us through them.

In the hour of persecution—
in the hour when the eleven are thrown out of the synagogue and attacked—
in that hour, they will remember what Jesus said.

The Spirit will come when Jesus goes to the Father.
The disciples are sorrowful (v6),
because they finally understand that Jesus is going away.
But Jesus says that it is “for your advantage that I go away,
for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you.” (v7)

In the Old Testament,
the Holy Spirit dwelt in the midst of the people of God.
The glory-cloud descended upon the tabernacle—and later the temple—
and so the Spirit dwelt in the midst of the people,
but not yet in the people.

The Holy Spirit still spoke by the prophets
and worked salvation in the hearts of the people of God,
but he could not yet dwell in them as the presence of the living God,
because sin had not yet been fully dealt with.

As Jesus puts it, the Helper could not come because Jesus had not yet gone to the Father.
So until Jesus brings the sacrifice of himself to the Father,
the Spirit of God could not be poured out upon all flesh.
The coming of the Holy Spirit is intimately connected with the exaltation of Jesus.

But what happens when the Spirit comes?
What happens to the world?
Remember that Jesus has been speaking of the world

in terms of that realm that is under the power of the devil.
When the Spirit comes “he will convict the world
concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”

Jesus goes on to spell out each of these:

1) “concerning sin, because they do not believe in me.”

Just as Jesus has forced a division in the world “by showing that what it does is evil (7:7; 15:22),
so the Paraclete [Spirit] continues this work.” (Carson, 537).

When the Spirit comes, he convicts the world of sin because they do not believe in Jesus.
The point here is that you need to stop being “the world”!

Believe in Jesus!

Turn to him in faith.

So long as you remain in unbelief, you will remain under this conviction.

2) “concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer”

It might seem strange to say that the Spirit convicts the world of *righteousness*.

You might think it better to say “unrighteousness”!

But Jesus is not saying that the Spirit will convict the world of “being righteous”!

Rather, the Spirit convicts the world *concerning righteousness*.

Look at the reason – the ground for the conviction: “because I go to the Father.”

Jesus will be ruling in righteousness at the right hand of God.

Jesus will no longer be preaching that the kingdom of God is “at hand.”

Now the kingdom of God *is here*.

Because the King is sitting on his heavenly throne.

3) “concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

You can see a progression in this sequence:

the sin of the world,

the righteousness of the judge,

and the judgment of the devil and all that belong to him.

The world will hate you,

but the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment.

This will then either result in the conversion or the destruction of the wicked.

The world will be saved,

and all who refuse the convicting call of the Holy Spirit will be condemned,
because they do not believe in the name of Jesus.

3. The Holy Spirit Is Worshiped and Glorified with the Father and the Son (John 16:12-15)

But the Spirit is not only going to speak to the world,
the Spirit will especially speak to the church—and even more particularly, to the apostles.
Because Jesus still has many things to say to them.
They do not yet understand fully all that God is doing in Jesus.
He cannot explain everything to them
The Holy Spirit must come and guide them into the truth.

Earlier, in John 5, Jesus said that he did all that he heard from his Father.
Now he says that the Spirit will do the same.
“Whatever he hears he will speak,
and he will declare to you the things that are to come.
He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” (v14)
The Spirit will bring to completion the work of the Son.

All through the central chapters of John’s gospel,
Jesus was explaining the relationship between the Father and the Son.
The Father has given the Son to have life in himself (5:26)
The Son speaks with the authority of the Father (8:28)
I and the Father are one (10:30)
The Father is in me and I am in the Father (10:38)

Now Jesus explains how the Holy Spirit is related to the Son and the Father.
The Spirit takes all that belongs to the Son and declares it to the church.
“All that the Father has is mine;
therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

All that is Christ’s is ours.
But how is it ours?
How do we partake of the benefits of Christ?
Through the Holy Spirit.

And while Jesus is speaking first to the eleven here,
he speaks through them to us.
After all, it is John—the beloved disciple—who wrote these words to us.
Why did the Holy Spirit declare the things of Christ to the apostles?
Was it not for our sakes?
So that we might know the truth?

We have a tendency to want to be the center of the universe.
It’s easy to see in our children.
All that matters is what I want!!!
But you are just as selfish.

You may know theoretically that the world does not revolve around you,
but you still act like it.

We want the Holy Spirit to revolve around us too.

Even our Bible study can become focused on “what does the Bible say to me?”

This is one reason why John’s gospel is so useful.

Because it is so obviously *not about you*.

It’s about Jesus.

You need to understand that the Word of God is so powerful

because it reorients us.

It reminds us, “Oh, that’s right! My life is not about me!”

After all, look at the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is God.

The third person of the Holy Trinity.

And yet Jesus that when he comes, “he will not speak on his own authority.”

Even the Holy Spirit is not focused on himself!

(And remember—neither was Jesus,

for he insisted that he did not speak on his own authority,

but spoke simply what he heard from His Father)

The Spirit glorifies the Son.

The Spirit takes the things of the Son and declares them to us.

John points us to how the Spirit glorifies the Son – and that glory is the glory of the Father –
but then again the Spirit is the one who proceeds from the Father (and the Son),

and so when you worship and glorify the Son

you worship and glorify the Father (and the Holy Spirit).