

The Indwelling Presence of the Lord

John 14:15-31

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Advantage. There is nothing like having an advantage—whether in life or in sports, at war. We often long to have an advantage. Jesus, in the passage which we will look at this morning, tells us of our great advantage—that the Spirit of the Living God, preceding from the Father and preceding from the Son, would take up his residence in us, and not merely just with us. What advantage could there be to that? Hear now God’s Word, John 14:15-31.

“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”

Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, “But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?”

Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

“You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

“Come now; let us leave.”

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me this morning?

Heavenly Father, we now pray according to the promise that was given through your Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, that when the Holy Spirit comes, he would lead us into all truth. And I, in your Name, stand before your people to proclaim your Word. Without your presence, by your Spirit, I am without hope—we are without hope. But according to that promise, now, we pray, guide us into all truth by your Spirit, that we may be equipped, that we may be strengthened, that we may experience your peace. In Jesus’ mighty name we pray. Amen.

This message came across the military wires seventy years ago this summer: “Enemy machine gun nest on your right. Destroy.” Seventy years ago this past week marked what would become one of the key advantages that the allied forces would have in the Pacific region during World War II. Thirteen feverish weeks seventy years ago this summer, the prospect of allied victory in the Pacific region was increasingly uncertain. But that message which I just read to you was code-talk. It was the first message sent by Chester Nez, who passed away last year at the age of ninety-three. He was apart of the famous code-talkers, the Navajo code-talkers, who would then have an oral code, which, according to military history, is the only military code that has never been broken. It was an absolute victory, because it was our absolute advantage.

We can have all the mighty weapons, but without the right code, our messages going to the military unit could be deciphered and broken. But not so with these Navajo code-talkers. As one military historian said this past week, “What the code-talkers did was to provide absolute security for the information we transmitted on the radios, denying to the enemy vital information that we were picking up from their communications.” And so Chester Nez, in an interview, recalled that first message: “Enemy machine gun nest on your right. Destroy.” Receiving the message, the American forces eliminated the threat. It was to our great advantage that these Navajo code-talkers were on our side. Every single one of you, and myself included, are benefactors of that advantage. Without it, would the allies have won World War II? Was it to our advantage? Thanks be to God.

When we speak about the presence of the Holy Spirit, do we see the Holy Spirit as our advantage? We’ve spent the last number of weeks looking at the key doctrines of the gospel, praying for—as I, along with your elders, have been praying—for gospel renewal in our midst. Because as Luther said, as a drunkard trying to ride a horse, we fall off to the left, we get back on, and then we fall off to the right. We forget the gospel every day. Therefore, we need to be reminded every day. And we’ve been looking at the key doctrines of the Bible. We began with justification. We then looked at adoption. And then these last two weeks we looked at sanctification. Now we’re going to spend two weeks looking at the very agent of our advantage that enables God to carry out his sovereign, salvific, rich purposes in the life of the human being, in the life of the believer—and that is the advantage of the agent of the Holy Spirit.

And so this week we’re going to look at that which is most often glossed over so that we can run to the thing we most want to know about, and that is the power of the Holy Spirit. But today, we’re going to begin with that which precedes his power, and that is his presence. What advantage is the presence of the Living God in his Holy Spirit for you and for me? We’re going to look at it first in two ways—that the Holy Spirit is present, and then we’re going to look at the so what, our great advantage, that the Holy Spirit—God the Father has sent his Spirit, God the Son has sent the Spirit, so that we might have from this passage and all that it represents a great advantage. Let’s look together.

First, two ways. The first two ways is a matter of, perhaps, theological minutiae. But it is not a minute point, because this point caused the split of the church between the west and the east, between the Orthodox church and the Protestant church. What was it? First, that the Holy Spirit precedes from the Father, as we learn in this passage, John 14. And then in John 16, we learn that the Spirit doesn’t just precede from the Father—he also precedes from Christ. It is the Spirit, and it is called the filioque clause in the Nicene Creed, which was the creed which the eastern church could not abide by, because it says that the Spirit precedes from the Father and from the Son. Filioque means “from the son.” That it is God’s intention that his Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, precedes from himself as a gift to his people, as the gift of his presence. So Jesus would speak of it as his presence, his Spirit.

Now, what difference that makes we’ll get to in the second point. But it is something to be pondered, and not something to gloss over, when Jesus says, “I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you.” Christ will come to us, he’s saying, by his Spirit. The Father comes to us by his Spirit. That’s the first way to understand the two ways—from the Father and from the Son. And the second is that the Spirit’s presence in the Scriptures, in the New Testament, is understood first to be received, first,

corporately, and individually. By first, I do not mean by priority. By first, I do not mean by mode. So I'll get there in a few minutes.

But first, corporately. When Jesus says to his disciples in John 14, "If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever," that is not "you" singular. That is "you" plural. In fact, this entire passage is talking about how God and his Spirit and the Spirit of Christ will come and make his presence with the people of God corporately. This is the ground and the foundation upon which Paul would go to great lengths in his letters to the church to talk about how the Spirit comes—God and Jesus Christ—comes to be present with his people first corporately in what he calls "making his temple with us."

And there, Paul as a Jew, Jesus as a Jew, understood this—that this is drawing on the great, rich tapestry of the Old Testament, what we call "temple language." That when God was present with his people corporately meant that God came to literally tabernacle in their midst. He did so by being present in the Ten Commandments and that being gathered together in the tabernacle itself. And then during Solomon's reign and the building of the temple to the Lord, by Solomon's hand and his workers, that tabernacle was placed in the innermost sanctuary of the temple. And there it was said that God resides with his people. That people—not according to their strength, but even because of their weakness. God chose a weak people, Israel, to make his presence with them. This is what distinguished them from the Egyptians when they were in slavery in Egypt. By what means did God preserve his people corporately? His corporate presence.

But then, there would be a promise—a promise that would link the presence of God by his Spirit with the corporate gathering of his people in Israel. It would be a promise through the prophet Isaiah. The prophet Isaiah says in chapter sixty-three:

"Surely they are my people,
children who will be true to me";
and so he became their Savior.
In all their distress he too was distressed,
and the angel of his presence saved them.
In his love and mercy he redeemed them;
he lifted them up and carried them
all the days of old.
Yet they rebelled
and grieved his Holy Spirit.
So he turned and became their enemy
and he himself fought against them.
Then his people recalled^[b] the days of old,
the days of Moses and his people—
where is he who brought them through the sea,
with the shepherd of his flock?
Where is he who set
his Holy Spirit among them,
who sent his glorious arm of power
to be at Moses' right hand,

who divided the waters before them,
to gain for himself everlasting renown,
who led them through the depths?
Like a horse in open country,
they did not stumble;
like cattle that go down to the plain,
they were given rest by the Spirit of the LORD.
This is how you guided your people
to make for yourself a glorious name.”

Isaiah said that it was the Holy Spirit who held up the strong right arm of Moses. It was the Holy Spirit who went before the corporate people of God to divide the Red Sea. It was the Holy Spirit who protected them, who gave them God’s presence corporately to be a mighty nation, surrounded by enemies. God is present corporately.

Secondly, God is present individually. God is present individually by his Spirit, because we know that he draws us individually, first to make a people. When Jesus says to them—Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him, making our home with him. The holy counselor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” He saying, first, yes, corporately—but here, anyone who obeys what I have said loves me, and he who loves me, individually, I and the Father will come to make our home with him.

You see, the first location—the great New Testament scholar Gordon Fee says the first location of God’s presence is in the individual, sanctifying their present existence and stamping it with his eternity. Last week we looked at God’s work of sanctification, meaning that when he comes into the heart of the believer who says “I receive the gift of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ,” they are set apart, sanctified—literally set apart—for Christ. The Holy Spirit comes into them individually, makes his tabernacle, makes his home. This is the language the Paul would pick up on. Four times, Paul talks about how the Holy Spirit comes to make his presence known, two of those four times with the gathered people of God, and then two of the four are talking about how the Holy Spirit comes in to tabernacle individually in the believer. He does so because the believer, who believes by faith in the work of Christ, are set apart definitively, then experientially, as the Christian seeks to grow up and in to the gospel itself. By what presence is that made possible? God’s Holy Spirit’s presence in the individual.

This, for Jesus, is our great advantage—so much so that in John chapter sixteen, Jesus says these words, speaking of his Holy Spirit. He began in fourteen, talking about the vine imagery, and chapter fifteen. And then he finishes with these words, verse eight—verse seven, rather: “But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” What Jesus is saying is, the word there translated in the NIV is “it is for your good that I am going away.” In the English Standard Version, it is a better translation where it says, “it is to your advantage that I leave you.” Now, think of that. Jesus is saying, it is to your advantage that I am no longer with you in the flesh. Why? Because Jesus’ body was resurrected, and when it was resurrected, it was raised into the flesh.

So therefore, where Jesus is present in one place, his body cannot be present in another. So Jesus, if he’s in Chicago, he can’t be in Columbia, Maryland. But his Spirit can. That’s the advantage. So Jesus is at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. But he has sent his Spirit, the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son, to make his corporate presence in the gathering of his people and in the individual believer. This is to our great advantage—so much so, Jesus says, “it is better that I leave you.” Otherwise, the Spirit

will not come to you. Therefore, the Holy Spirit's presence, for Christ's teaching to us, is that he went and left so that the Spirit will come—not leaving us as orphans, but giving us the presence of the Living God.

Now, in case your soul is not electrified yet, let me state this as we move into the second point. We can desire to want to know Jesus, and we can desire to have his presence, but the reality is this. We cannot treat Jesus like a customer call service, calling in the promises of God on a warranty, where we can ask for all the benefits of the promises, and not have the one who promised it. We cannot have the power of the Holy Spirit—we cannot have the power of Christ—unless we first have his presence.

So, then, what is our great advantage to have the Holy Spirit with us corporately and individually? Jesus tells us in this passage. He says that he will come to make his home with us. What does home represent to you? I would argue that what home is to be in its best sense is a place of protection. A place of protection. And if he is with us by his Spirit corporately and individually—if he makes his home with us, we can then call on, by his Spirit, his protection. Consider Isaiah when he says, "Behold, I have created a smith who blows the fire of coals and produces a weapon for its purpose. I have also created the ravager to destroy. No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed, and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their vindication from me, declares the Lord." No weapon formed against you shall prosper. If the Lord has made his home with you, by his presence, both corporately and individually, you have been protected in a way no army could ever protect you. Because they might be able to kill the body, but they cannot kill the soul. The Lord has made his home with you.

You, Christian, have the greatest protection, because it was the Old Testament believers who said, "Unless you go up before us, we cannot go." And every time they attempted to go without the presence of God going before them and going behind them and going with them, they were not protected. They were defeated. And where we learn in the Old Testament that God would give his Spirit to some and not to others, he would give his Spirit for a time and then he would withdraw—do you know that because of the work of Christ, when Jesus says, "I will come to make my home with you," that is an eternal home? That his stamp on you is his home, his abode? You bet you're protected.

But what about courage? Do you know that if you are protected by God's presence, that you ought to have great courage? Do you remember the opening ten verses of Joshua? If you don't, go back and read. He says to Joshua as he's preparing to lead the people of God to the Promised Land—he says, be strong and courageous. Be strong and courageous. Be very strong and courageous. But what's interesting about that—not promise—that imperative, is that that chapter begins and then after he says be strong and courageous—it has two great bookends. "I will be with you."

I don't like saying this, because it's a beaver, but because the Holy Spirit is in the life of the believer, and because the Holy Spirit is in the gathered presence of God's people, I say in the name of your Savior, be strong and courageous, calling on the presence of God against the accusations of the evil one, against the criticisms of those around you. Are you crushed by the criticisms of another? Do you feel lonely and wonder if you'll ever be married? Do you wonder where your next paycheck is going to come from? I say to you, I have no idea how God is going to unfold that, but I can say to you today—"I am with you," says the Lord. Therefore, be strong and courageous. No criticism then can touch you. No future threat can truly threaten your soul. Be strong and courageous.

What about hope? Are we not to be a people of hope? Is our hope in the United States of America and its future, or of any country in the world? Kingdoms come and they rise and they fall. Fifty years from now, you and I might be living in the shell of what used to be called the United States of America. But this I know—our hope is not in this country, or of any man-made kingdom. Our hope is that the Lord is with us. He said to Moses, "Tell Pharaoh to let my people go, and I will save my people." Was his hope crushed at times? You bet it was. But what did God continue to demonstrate? "I am with you." You today, Christian, have a reason for hope.

Wisdom. Jesus says here, “The Spirit will lead you in all truth.” What is that truth but the Word of God? Who will lead us in that truth? The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in the life and in the gathered people of God’s people, the church, and works in the life of the Christian, that as we read the Scripture we can pray for the presence of the Holy Spirit to give us wisdom and discernment to apply and to work that out amongst God’s people and as we seek to follow him in his life. Jesus does not leave us without instruction. He gave us his truth, and then he gave us his Holy Spirit who works together with the truth—not outside the truth, not beside the truth, but in the truth, in front of the truth, behind the truth, and in you. The Spirit of the Living God guides us in the Word, and he will bring that Word to your mind. Exercise with the Spirit in the Word of God. As you flex the muscles of your own walk with Christ, as we flex the muscles of our own church, as we walk through the Scriptures together, it is the Holy Spirit taking that Word and applying it to our lives. Are you open to the Spirit guiding you in the truth?

What about love? Jesus says here, “The love of the Father and my love are with you.” “Greater love has no man than this, that he would lay down his life for another.” For a good man, someone might surely die. But what about for a wicked man? For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. While we were yet his enemies, Christ died for us because of his love for the Father, and the Father’s love for him, and his love for the world—that God so loved the world that whoever should believe in him should have eternal life, who believes in the Son of the Living God. The love of the Father is in Christ. The love of Christ is in the Father. And those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ receive the love of the triune God through the presence of God’s Spirit. And that’s what Jesus prays for. What should characterize the fellowship of God’s people is the love of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

But finally, because of time, I need to tell you the final advantage: peace. Jesus says here in this passage, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” Courage, protection, hope, love, but then peace. “My peace I give you,” which Paul would say, “A peace which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts.” That peace is intricately connected with the promise of God’s Spirit to be with his people corporately and individually. But he says, “I do not give to you as the world gives.” Jesus was saying that under the rule of the Pax Romana, the Roman peace. How is the Pax Romana retained? It is through the sword. If you came up against Rome—the sword. Jesus takes that whole idea of peace and turns it upside down.

Can the world give us peace? Yes, for a time. And that peace, which we then become junkies for, we try to find another way to peace—vacations, pursuits, jobs, hopefully obedient children, degrees, good-paying jobs—we look for all that stuff to give us peace. And you know what? In the short run, they often work. But oftentimes we’re just one paycheck, we’re just one day away from all of that so quickly being taken away, because we cannot mistake the gift for the giver. Those are all gifts. They were never meant to be the marrow out of which we suck peace. The only peace is the peace that does not come by the sword turned outward. God says, I will take the Pax Romana and turn it on myself. The only way to gain peace is if he would allow the sword to be turned on himself. Jesus gave a peace which transcends all understanding, because he brings peace and reconciliation between sinful humanity and a Holy God by coming to the cross to turn violence on himself, to embrace that violence, and bring it close, so that he could then be the giver of a peace which he attained by his body and his blood. And when he rises on the third day, he is the Son of God the Father who has said to his disciples and he says to us: “I give you my Spirit. It is to your advantage that I go. Because when I do, I will send the Holy Counselor to you. I will not leave you as orphans, but I will give you my presence, and I will make a home with you.”

And if Christ has done this, what then can we say in response? If that is the peace which Christ has attained for you, what can we say? Well, as we prepare to come to the Lord’s Supper, I think there’s only one thing that we can say. And I can’t say it better than Paul himself.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has

chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died--more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And so I say to you, what advantage have you not been given? The presence. Let’s pray.

Everywhere your presence has come, change is in the offing. Where your Spirit came, Moses and the people of God were victorious, seas were parted, the Promised Land enjoyed, the Lord tabernacled in the temple. But now, Father, your Son, our Savior, has said that he would send the Spirit of the Living God into us individually and corporately. That says to me, what we need most is your presence. We want to thank you for your presence here this morning. And may your presence fall fresh upon us. And may you enable us this morning to experience our great advantage for your glory and for our growth. Amen.