

## John 16:12–15

### Introduction

Last week, Jesus told His disciples that if He didn't go away, the Advocate (the Holy Spirit who would advocate for them) would not come to them; but if He did go, then He would send the Advocate to them.

The Advocate would deal with the world that hates and persecutes Jesus' disciples by convicting the world, as in a court of law, concerning its sin (inasmuch as they do not believe in Jesus), and concerning its righteousness (inasmuch as Jesus has been proved to be the truly righteous one by His resurrection and ascension to the Father), and concerning its guilt and liability to judgment (inasmuch as the ruler of this world has already been judged). While the disciples' preaching of the Gospel will bring upon them the world's condemnation, they should know that the Advocate will, in fact, be convicting the world through their preaching so that it's the unbelieving world that stands under condemnation.

This work of the Spirit *in relation to the world* (convicting) is still ultimately the Spirit's work in advocating for the disciples. In other words, the Spirit doesn't advocate for "the world." The Spirit advocates only for Jesus' disciples. Jesus doesn't send the Advocate to the world. Jesus sends the Advocate only to His disciples. Therefore, the Spirit's work of convicting the world (a "negative" work) is just a *part* of His work in advocating for us (positive). And so in the Spirit's work as our Advocate, we see the reality that God is for us. And if God is for us, who can be against us (Rom. 8:31)?

This morning, Jesus turns to a different way that the Spirit will advocate for His disciples—this time not in terms of His relation to the world, but of His relation directly with Jesus' disciples.

**I. John 16:12** — "I still have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."

Jesus has been with the disciples for close to three years. During all that time together He's been constantly teaching, and instructing, and discipling. And yet here at the end, with only a few hours remaining before the cross, Jesus says that He has "*many more*" things to say them. How can this be, when only a few minutes earlier, Jesus said to His disciples:

➤ John 15:15 — "No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for *all things* that I have heard from My Father *I have made known to you.*"

If Jesus has already made known to the disciples *all things* that He heard from His Father, how can He say now, "I still have *many more things* to say to you?" What are these things that Jesus still has to say?

"I still have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them *now.*" The problem is not that there hasn't been enough time – that if the cross could have been postponed for a little while longer, Jesus could have got everything in. The "problem"—if we can call it that—is the date on

the calendar. “You cannot bear them *now*.” “Now” refers to the time that’s before the full in-breaking of Messiah’s kingdom. “Now” is the time before the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father, and before the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. As of that “date” on God’s redemptive-historical calendar, the disciples could not bear the “*many things*” that Jesus still had to say to them. They couldn’t take it in. They couldn’t ultimately even conceive of the things that Jesus still has to say to them – even were He to say them. They might be on the very eve of the day when they could, but that day still had not come.

So what are these “many more things” that Jesus still has to say to His disciples? We can see that they must *all* have to do with the fullness of redemption in Jesus – with the summing up of all things in Him. But, again, hasn’t Jesus already made known to His disciples “all things” that He heard from His Father? So how can He say that there are still “many more things” that remain to be said? This begs another question: If the disciples cannot bear the things that Jesus still has to say to them, have they even been able to “bear” the things that He’s said already? And what, exactly, will the difference be?

- John 13:7–10 — Jesus... said to [Peter], “What I do [washing your feet] *you do not realize now*, but *you will understand hereafter*.” Peter said to Him, “Never shall You wash my feet!” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.” Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, then wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.” Jesus said to him, “He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean...”

What we need to see is that this isn’t just a matter, for Peter, of bare knowledge. Neither is this simply a matter of stubborn obstinacy. Peter doesn’t *understand* because His *faith* is not yet fully formed. And his faith cannot possibly be fully formed until the great redemptive realities that are the substance of our faith have been fully accomplished. That’s why Peter cannot yet understand. But couldn’t Jesus also have spoken more plainly?

- John 13:36–38 — Simon Peter said to [Jesus], “Lord, where are You going?” Jesus answered, “Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later.” Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You.” Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.”

In chapter fourteen, Jesus said to the disciples:

- John 14:4–10 — “You know the way where I am going.” Thomas said to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.” Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who 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?”

There's rebuke in Jesus' words: "Do you not *believe*...?" Which is *also* to say, "Do you not *understand* (with the understanding of *faith*)?" That Peter will deny Jesus three times will be a failing on his part. And yet for all the disciples were accountable for, there was still the inevitable reality that they *could not* understand, and this because their faith had not yet been fully formed, and this because the great redemptive realities that are the substance of our faith had not yet been fully accomplished. Notice Jesus doesn't tell His disciples that they *don't* believe. He simply challenges them to believe more fully—to the extent that they were then able—and so to understand more fully ("Do you not believe...").

- John 14:22 — Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?"

That's a fair question, isn't it? But even though Jesus answers the question, Judas will be left feeling like he's still missing something. Even though Jesus answers the question, Judas will not be able to believe and understand *fully* until later. But the fault is not in Jesus' answer. And neither is the fault entirely in Judas.

- John 16:17–18 — Some of His disciples then said to one another, "What is this thing He is telling us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" So they were saying, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is talking about."

Later, when the disciples express some confidence in what they *have* believed and what they *have* understood, Jesus challenges them. The disciples said to Jesus:

- John 16:30–32 — "We know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God." Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."

The disciples confess that they have understood and that they have believed. Jesus responds not by telling them that they don't believe, but rather by questioning *how fully* they have believed and therefore *how much* they truly understand ("*Do you now believe?*"). That the disciples will all be scattered will be a failing on their part. And yet for all they were accountable for, there was still the inevitable reality that they *could not* understand, and this because their faith had not yet been fully formed, and this because the great redemptive realities that are the substance of our faith had not yet been fully accomplished. Jesus will acknowledge this when He says just a few verses later in this chapter:

- John 16:25 — "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father."

Figurative language is language that's not plain or obvious; it's language where the full meaning doesn't lie transparently on the surface but is veiled and hidden. Figurative language may

perfectly reveal at the same time that it hides. So why does Jesus speak of the Father in veiled language? Why doesn't He speak transparently and plainly *now*? The answer is because He *Himself* is still veiled and hidden, as it were, by His fleshly weakness. During the days of His flesh, Jesus was a full and perfect revelation of the Father (Jn. 1:14; 14:9), and yet at the same time that He was revealing fully and perfectly, His revelation of the Father was veiled because He Himself was not yet glorified (cf. Jn. 7:39; 12:16; 17:5; 1 Tim. 3:16). How can Jesus speak to His disciples directly and plainly of the Father when He Himself (who is the eternal Word of the Father; Jn. 1:1, 14) remains veiled? This was not so much a "choice" that Jesus made as it was a consequence of the way things still were. To think that He could have spoken plainly *then* would be to forget that the point is not just propositions and head-knowledge, but believing and understanding.

Until the veil of Jesus' own fleshly weakness has been lifted and He has been exalted and glorified at the right hand of the Father, the disciples cannot possibly believe or understand. Until the veil of Jesus' own fleshly weakness has been lifted, all direct and plain speech about the Father—all direct and plain speech about the fullness of salvation still to be revealed *in Jesus*—must be impossible for the disciples to bear, and even, redemptive-historically, wholly out of place. So Jesus speaks to the disciples, *now*, with figurative language – language that's revealing perfectly even as it hides; language that's calling the disciples to believe and to understand even while that believing and understanding remains, in the fullest sense, impossible.

Jesus says that He *still* has many more things to *say* to His disciples, but that they cannot bear them *now*. Jesus says that He speaks to His disciples, *now*, in figurative language, but *an hour is coming* when He will *tell* them plainly **of the Father**. This is what explains how Jesus can say to His disciples in chapter fifteen: "All things that I have heard **from My Father** I have [already] *made known* to you" (15:15). What are the "many more things" that Jesus still has to say to His disciples? They're ultimately all the *same* things that He's said already — only now fully unveiled and clearly and even comprehensively "explained" because He Himself will no longer be veiled in fleshly weakness but exalted and glorified at the right hand of the Father.

Only when the great redemptive realities that are the substance of our faith have been fully accomplished can the disciples truly believe and understand. Jesus said to His disciples on the night before His crucifixion: "I still have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now." And then Jesus says:

**II. John 16:13a** — "But when He [the Advocate], the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into *all the truth*;"

If the Spirit advocates for us in relation to the world by convicting, as in a court of law, the world that hates and persecutes us, now we see how that same Spirit advocates for us directly by guiding us into all the truth.

The point here is not new truth or new revelation because that would require us to go beyond the ultimate, climactic revelation of the truth that's already been given to us in Jesus. The point is our full entrance into and belief in and understanding of that revelation that's already been given once for all, and that has now been clearly, even comprehensively, explained to us by the Spirit.

The work of the Spirit of truth is not to give new truth, but rather to guide *into* the truth that has all already been given. We remember Jesus' words in chapter fourteen:

- John 14:6 — “*I am* the way, and *the truth*, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me.”

The author of Hebrews writes:

- Hebrews 1:1–3 — God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, **in these last days has spoken to us in His Son**, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...

And now we have fully believed and fully understood this final word—this completed, finished revelation—because the Advocate has come and because He now guides us into all the truth. Jesus continues now:

**III. John 16:13b** — “...for He will not speak **from Himself**, but whatever He **hears**, He will speak;”

Does that sound familiar? How many times have we heard Jesus say the same things of Himself (3:31-32; 8:38, 40, 42; 14:10, 24)?

- John 5:30 — “I can do nothing **from Myself**. As I **hear**, I judge...”
- John 8:26, 28 — “...the things which I **heard** from Him, these I am saying to the world... I do nothing **from Myself**, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me.”
- John 12:49 — “I did not speak **from Myself**, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment—what to say and what to speak.”
- John 15:15 — “**All things** that I have **heard** from My Father I have **made known** to you.”

So now when Jesus says of the Advocate, the Spirit of truth, “He will not speak **from Himself**, but whatever He **hears**, He will speak,” we understand immediately that the work of the Spirit must be bound up in every way with the fullness of revelation that has already come in Jesus.

**IV. John 16:13c** — “But when He [the Advocate], the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak from Himself, but whatever He hears, He will speak; **and He will disclose [*anangelo*] to you what is to come.**”

When Jesus says that the Spirit will guide us into all the truth, He has in mind the truth that has already been given. “He will guide you into the already finished, already completed revelation that I have brought to you from the Father.” So what does Jesus mean when He says that the Spirit will disclose to the disciples what is to come?

This isn't about the "end times" or "future events" as these things are popularly thought of. What was still to come on that night as Jesus talked with His disciples is no longer still to come. It has come already. What was still to come was the salvation that was already present in Jesus, fully unveiled. What was still to come was the figurative language giving way to the plain. What was still to come was the suffering and dying one veiled in fleshly weakness giving way to the exalted and triumphant one revealed in all His saving glory. These were the things that Jesus still needed to say to His disciples on that night of His betrayal, but that they could not yet bear. These were the things that the Spirit would disclose to the disciples, and that the Spirit discloses to us. So Jesus says in verses 14-15:

**V. John 16:14-15** — "He will glorify Me, for He will take of *Mine* and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you."

Which is really just to say: He will take of *Me*—for *I am* the revelation of the Father—and He will disclose *Me* (plainly and comprehensively and savingly) to you. This is the work of the Spirit. And what an awesome and wonderful work it is! The **Spirit** glorifies **Jesus** by disclosing to us the unsearchable riches of His person as the only Savior, now seated in glory at the **Father's** right hand.

### **Conclusion**

How does the Spirit do this?

The first thing we need to know—and that we rejoice to know—is that there's a primary application of these words to those first eleven disciples of Jesus – the ones that He also named as apostles (Lk. 6:13). Jesus said in chapter fourteen:

- John 14:25-26 — "These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Advocate, **the Holy Spirit**, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your *remembrance* all that I said *to you*."

The Spirit would teach the disciples all things as He brought to their remembrance all that Jesus had said to them and as He explained and "unpacked" those things for them now in the full light of Jesus exaltation. The Spirit cannot bring back to our remembrance the things that Jesus said to us because we were not "with Jesus from the beginning" (15:27) and He never did say anything to us. And if Jesus Himself has not spoken directly to us, neither has any of us received direct redemptive revelation from the Holy Spirit. Which one of us can say with the Apostle Paul (who came last of all the apostles, as one "untimely born"; 1 Cor. 15:8):

- Ephesians 3:3-5 — ...by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery **of Christ**, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets **in the Spirit**.

None of us could say these things! And yet we rejoice exceedingly to know that the Holy Spirit did guide those original apostles and prophets into *all* the truth, and that He did disclose to them *all* the unsearchable riches of our salvation by speaking plainly to them of *all* that He heard — of *all* that belongs to Jesus now exalted at the Father’s right hand. Why do we rejoice in this? The Apostle Peter writes:

- 1 Peter 1:12 — It was revealed to [the Old Testament prophets] that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been disclosed [*anangelo*] **to you through** those who preached *the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit* sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.

If the Spirit convicts *the world*, as in a court of law, *by the preaching of the Gospel*, the Spirit also guides *us* into all the truth and discloses to *us* the saving glory of Christ *in and through the preaching of the apostolic Gospel* which is preserved for us, pure and inviolate, in the Scriptures. It’s because of this that Paul can include the Corinthians—and us—along with himself and the rest of the Apostles when he says:

- 1 Corinthians 2:9–10 — “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all *that* God has prepared for those who love Him.” For *to us* God revealed them **through the Spirit**; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

The revelation of God’s salvation in Jesus Christ is nothing less than the revelation of the unsearchable depths of God Himself. To know the Gospel is to “know” that which “surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:19). Maybe now we can better understand what Jesus meant when He said, “I still have *many more things* to say to you...”

The Spirit’s work in guiding us into all the truth and disclosing to us the saving glory of Jesus isn’t just a matter of communicating information, but of communicating truth to our hearts and minds – truth for us to believe and to understand and to live (cf. Col. 1:9-12). So Paul writes in Ephesians:

- Ephesians 1:15–23 — For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you **the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the full knowledge of Him**, so that you—the eyes of your heart having been enlightened—will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe according to the working of the might of His strength, which He worked in Christ, by raising Him from the dead and seating Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And HE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.