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“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

JOHN 16

5“But now I am going away to him who sent me, and not one of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ 6Yet because I have told you these things, sorrow has filled your heart. 7Nevertheless, I am telling you the truth: It is good for you that I go away. For if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. 8When he comes, he will convict the world about sin, about righteousness, and about judgment: 9about sin, because they do not believe in me; 10about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will no longer see me; 11about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.”



After Christianity was legalized in the 300s, Julian the Apostate was emperor of the entire Roman world. Julian wanted to scrub the Roman empire of Christianity. He undertook a series of reforms, reinstating paganism and even attempting to rebuild the Jewish temple. But at the end of his life, Julian’s army lost a decisive battle and was mortally wounded. Seeing that none of his reforms against Christianity would last, his last words were telling. He flung his own blood to the sky and said, “So then, O Galilean, thou hast at last won the victory.” Julian’s life ended in anger against the God he didn’t believe.

Often what may sound like denying God is, in fact, acknowledging God. The many atheists of our day often seem to have two main tenets: “There is no God, and I hate Him.” In a constant obsession with disproving the existence of God, it would seem they protest too much. Hidden in the rage against God is a quiet acknowledgement that God exists. In this way the Holy Spirit works on the hearts of the unbelieving world.

That is because the testimony about God is not just paper and ink. The witness of the Bible, your witness of Jesus, is living and active. Inside of that witness is the inseparable Holy Spirit. He came on Jesus at His baptism and sent on the Day of Pentecost, just as Jesus promised in His “olivet discourse” in John 14-16.

Often it would seem the whole world is against God. But that is often because the unbelieving world knows it is fighting a losing battle. Jesus sent His Holy Spirit to convict the world. If the unbelieving world wants to draw battle lines, there will be no match for ...

THE HOLY SPIRIT VERSUS THE WHOLE WORLD

To the Twelve apostles, everything looked wrong on paper. John 16 took place on the night Jesus was betrayed, Maundy Thursday. Though Jesus had told them 20 minutes beforehand, in John 14, not to let their hearts be troubled, they were filled with sorrow. Jesus was explaining His departure. To them, Jesus' departure to the Father, involving crucifixion and death, was a great calamity. Their messianic hopes were dashed. It just didn't add up.

Jesus explained not only that it would add up on paper, but that it wouldn't add up without His going to the Father. If He were to leave, it would actually be a good thing. If He went to the Father who sent Him, then He would be able to send the Holy Spirit and help them to believe all the things that added up together. They could believe Jesus' bodily sufferings, Jesus' bodily death, Jesus' resurrection of the body, and Jesus' rule at the Father's right hand for their good.

The Holy Spirit's proper work is to comfort, but He also has a strange work; that strange work is the Law. He comes to glorify Jesus, to illuminate the soul, to guide sinners to the truth and make them rivers of flowing water. But the Holy Spirit is not absent when the Law is preached. He brings home the truth to the world. A good example is in Acts 2:36, "*This Jesus, whom YOU CRUCIFIED.*"

Jesus says that the Holy Spirit would be sent to "convince" or "convict." There has been a great deal of ink spilled about which word is better: "convince" or "convict." I like the word "reprove." The point is that since the Spirit came, the world never has any excuse to deny the Gospel.

The Holy Spirit brings confrontation. He does this effectively. Because of the Holy Spirit, God's Word does not only look good on paper, it works on the person. Maybe you remember our presenter, Chris Driesbach, from last month. He said that pastors seem to have this trick where they don't argue the truth. Pastors simply use the words of the Bible, unleashing the Holy Spirit.

Soon enough, the challenger is up against (not the pastor, but) the Holy Spirit. This was very encouraging for a pastor to be reminded of that, by a former atheist-turned-Christian. It is a good reminder how to witness.

So when it comes to the truth, we do not tone down the truth, but speak it with the motive of love. Even if that truth happens to be God's convicting Law, we do not tone it down, but speak it with the motive of love. If the Law is remembering the Sabbath and hearing the Word, not despising it, the battle is the Spirit's. If the Law says to honor your father and mother, the battle is the Spirit's. If the Law tells you to be content and not covet, the battle is the Spirit's. Romans 3:20 tells us through the law we become conscious of sin. Once we are conscious of sin, then we can begin to the search for some kind of savior from sin. As a Christian, even a pastor, we do not need to go into defense mode – or argue, or attack – we simply witness to the truth of God's Word.

We learn three ways the Spirit convicts the world: sin, righteousness, and judgment.

The point of convicting the world of "*sin, because they do not believe in*" Jesus, is not for us to think that unbelief is the biggest sin, although it is a grave one. The point is that because people do not believe in Jesus Christ, their sin remains on them and condemns them. Without Jesus Christ, there is no remission of sins. The passage here literally states that sin remains their sin because of unbelief in Jesus Christ.

The Spirit convicts the world about "*righteousness,*" because Jesus was "*going to the Father and*" they would "*no longer see*" Jesus. This is the only use of the word "righteousness" in the book of John. The unbelieving world insists that man be the judge of what God considers righteousness. Works are proclaimed from the hilltops as if they were righteous before God, from the street corners, media, movies, governments, and liberal churches, as if personal works are the way to God. That makes sense because works are the natural religion of man.

Instead Jesus says that His going to the Father is righteousness. The very idea that God must accept what man offers in the way of righteousness is wrong. The Spirit convicts us of His way, THE Way, the death and resurrection of our Savior Jesus, who is now ascended and seated at the right hand of God. This is righteousness.

From there He will come to ... do what? To judge. Do you believe in the judgment? We would need the conviction of the Spirit to know and believe in the judgment. The Spirit convicts the world about *judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.*" The world is judged. Wherever Jesus Christ is preached, the world is told of sin. The world learns from the true Christian message how great sin is, and that attempting self-righteousness or works-righteousness is futile. The world may put on a fearless face of bravery, but it is just outward bravado. In their minds the unbelieving world knows:

- Their own righteousness won't stand before God.
- There must be a day of reckoning.
- Even that they stand on the side of the devil.

The world is enthralled by the devil, although they wouldn't admit it. They resent any suggestion of it. But it is what the Holy Spirit wants the unbeliever to know. The Spirit wants the world to know it, because the devil stands judged already. This world's prince is judged, the deed is done.

If the world is no match for the Holy Spirit ... how about your heart? If you think about Jesus at all like the Twelve in this sermon text, then you don't want Him to be out of sight. You are filled with sorrow. If your heart is filled with sorrow, there is no room for spiritual feelings. Why? Where did your sorrow come from?

This was a heavy newsweek, and it's not as though the return of Jesus Christ was the main headline. Far from it. Someone died by police brutality. Others overreacted and burned their city. Both were awful incidents. Both set our hearts churning. We would love to have justice, or at least the greatest legal counsel imaginable. We want to be set things right. But that is why the Holy Spirit is in this world – to convict the world. On the basis of the evidence of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit has long since won His case. Does the world care? Do people know? Won't they believe? Or will they fling their blood to the heavens and groan in revenge?

Don't be filled with sorrow. Be filled with the Holy Spirit. He meets you in Word and sacrament. Be filled with Him and sing songs, hymns, and spiritual songs. For if He can take on the whole world, what match for Him is your heart? Amen.

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.