In John 16 we find ourselves listening in on Jesus’ Farewell Discourse the night before He is to be crucified. Really it is more of an intimate chat with His disciples. One of His greatest concerns is to convey the fact that while He is going to leave them, He is not going to leave them alone. He will send them the Holy Spirit. Every branch of the Christian Church has historically been united in its allegiance to the Apostles’ Creed, including the phrase, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” But to many it amounts to little more than words. People speak today of the Holy Spirit in the same way they talk of the “Spirit of Christmas” or the “Spirit of Brotherhood,” a synonym for “a noble influence.”

When Paul asked the Ephesian disciples in Acts 19, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” they responded, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.” That’s sad, but at least they had an excuse—they were new Christians and the New Testament hadn’t been written yet. Unfortunately in countless churches today professing Christians seem to know little more about the Holy Spirit than did these Ephesians, despite the fact that we have the extensive teaching of the NT to dispel our ignorance. Our Scripture text today introduces us to several major ministries of the Holy Spirit, but it does more than that—it explains the relationship between the departure of Jesus and the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

So let’s open our Bibles and read from John 16, beginning in the middle of verse 4 through verse 15. If you are able, I invite you to stand for the reading of God’s Word.

**John 16:4b-15 (ESV)**

4 I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. 5 But now I am going 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 Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. 8 And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; 10 concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; 11 concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

12 I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. 13 When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The words, “It is to your advantage that I go away,” are not easy words for Jesus’ disciples to receive. In fact, this is just about the worst news they have ever heard. Put yourselves in their shoes. For 3½ years you have staked everything on Jesus. You have left your career and your
family, and have endured danger and rejection to follow Him. He has been the source of all your teaching, your encouragement, your strength. And now He tells you He’s leaving and you will see Him no longer. The disciples are devastated! But there is a silver lining in Jesus’ words.

**THE DEPARTURE OF JESUS ALLOWS FOR THE ARRIVAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

(5-15) “For if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” And the Holy Spirit will more than make up for His absence. Here’s why: while Jesus was ministering in His human body He could not be everywhere. He was limited by space and time because of His human nature. It was always a case of greetings and farewells. But there are no such limitations with the Holy Spirit. Everywhere the disciples go, the Spirit will go with them.

The Holy Spirit will have unique ministries—to believers, to the world, to the Apostles, and to Jesus Himself. Let’s examine each of these ministries briefly.

*The Holy Spirit as helper: His ministry to believers (5-7)*

Jesus again refers to the Holy Spirit as “the helper,” as He did back in chapter 14. Last week Josh spoke of Him as a “good traveling companion” on the rough road of persecution. The basic idea of the word in Greek is counselor or advocate. But for me the best translation may be “one who enables us to cope.” From time to time I hear people say that they simply can’t cope with the circumstances of their lives. Well, this is precisely the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer: to take away our inadequacies and help us to cope.

But the Holy Spirit has a very different sort of ministry to unbelievers. For them He is a prosecutor, one who seeks to bring about conviction—not before God’s throne but conviction of their hearts so they don’t have to face His judgment.

*The Holy Spirit as prosecutor: His relationship to the world (8-11)*

Verse 8 spells out three specific areas of conviction: “when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.”

1. **He convicts the world of the sin of unbelief.** Verse 9 elaborates, “concerning sin, because they do not believe in me.” There are several important points here. First, the sin in the unbeliever’s life that concerns the Holy Spirit above all other sins is not gambling, or adultery, or drunkenness, or stealing—it is the sin of unbelief. This is not because these other things are not sinful and do not call for repentance. Instead it is because all of these other sins are really only symptoms of the root sin—the sin of unbelief. Until that sin is resolved the unbeliever generally lacks either the motivation or the power to make significant lifestyle changes. All of us have known people who through self-help have conquered degrading, sinful habits. The change has

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1. But don't forget that when the Lord says in John 14:16 that He is sending a helper to us, He calls Him *another* advocate. That is because Jesus Himself is the first Advocate and the Holy Spirit is the second. So we have two advocates, two attorneys: both are on Retainer for us, both are praying for us, both are available to encourage us, both are anxious to help us become all that God wants us to be.
probably helped them smell better or made them easier to live with, but it didn't necessarily bring them closer to God.

Second, conviction of the sin of unbelief is not something we can accomplish. God may use our witnessing, our preaching, or even our lifestyles to bring conviction of sin, but we must never rely on our cleverness or reasoning ability or emotional appeals—the Holy Spirit must convict. The reason conviction must be a supernatural work is that the unbeliever doesn't even view his unbelief as sin. If anything, he regards it as a mark of intellectual sophistication.

A young single man in our church in St. Louis came to faith in Christ after growing up in a skeptical home. The only reason he came to church at all was his interest in a certain young woman, but after sitting under the preaching of the Gospel for some months the Holy Spirit convicted him of his sin of unbelief. He shared the fact that he had become a Bible-believing Christian with his father, a highly educated skeptic, who then wrote him a letter. Here are a few paragraphs:

“I'm glad you're reading the Bible, but documents 1900 years old need to be read critically and in context. Nothing survives of the originals, and Biblical scholars agree that additions have been added since they were written. Approach the Bible intelligently and constantly question what you read. We are created in God's image and that means that everyone, baptized or not, can earn salvation through faith and good works. The idea that only through faith is one saved is wanting because it implies that we are so flawed that we are depraved. We were not created by a flawed and depraved God. In the end, God creates people who can achieve salvation in a variety of ways, even though they have not heard of Jesus of Nazareth. Salvation is earned everyday of one's life. It does not arrive in a single instant.”

This letter demonstrates how unbelievers often consider their skepticism on matters of faith as a sign of intellectual superiority. If conviction is to come to such people, it can happen only by the work of the Holy Spirit.

There is an amazing example of this convicting work in Acts 2. When the Jews crucified Jesus they did not believe they were sinning. In fact, I'm convinced that most of them believed they were actually doing God a favor. But then the Apostle Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, got up and preached a brief but bold sermon to these same people, closing with these words (Acts 2:36), “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

The only thing that had changed in the 50 days since these same people demanded Jesus’ death is that the Holy Spirit had been sent to take Jesus' place, to empower His disciples, and to convict the world of the sin of unbelief. But look at the result (verse 37): “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’ ... Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.”
Peter didn’t even give an invitation at the end of his sermon. Instead, the crowd begged him, “What shall we do to get right with God?” Don't ever underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit to convict the world of the sin of unbelief!

2. **He convicts of the need for righteousness.** Verse 10: “concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer.” It’s easy to see why conviction of sin is important. But why does the world need to be convicted concerning righteousness? I think the answer is found in divine mathematics. Addition is as important as subtraction. We need to get rid of our guilt, but we also need to receive the righteousness of Christ.

While Jesus walked on this earth, there was no question about what constituted true righteousness, because He lived it perfectly for all to see. He not only committed no sin; he also omitted no righteous deed. But Jesus was leaving. Without Him present, how is the world to know what true righteousness looks like? That is another ministry of the Holy Spirit—to create in the sinner an awareness of his need to live as Jesus lived, and to have the righteousness of Jesus Christ added to his account.

3. **He convicts of the certainty of coming judgment.** Verse 11: “concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.” No one enjoys the thought of eternal judgment. In fact, liberal theologians have long tried to eliminate the concept from Christianity. Since God is a God of love, and judgment is contrary to love (which it really is not), we must jettison the idea of hell. Even some evangelicals have tried to get in on this game, substituting annihilation for hell, suggesting that the wicked will simply go out of existence.

But this is very dangerous, unbiblical thinking, for Jesus spoke more of hell than He did of heaven. Here He appeals to the fact that Satan, whom He calls “the ruler of this world,” is judged (present tense). I think He is referring to the fact that within 24 hours Satan’s power will be broken at the Cross, and his sentence will be handed down—eternity in the Lake of Fire. If the leader of the opposition is judged, so will be his followers. They can count on it.

Friends, if you are wrestling with unbelief, I plead with you not to turn a deaf ear to the convicting work of God’s Spirit. If you can feel Him tugging at your heart, don't resist Him! Don't believe Satan’s deceitful appeals for you to maintain your intellectual skepticism. Don't let him convince you that you have plenty of time to get right with God.

A third ministry of the Holy Spirit which Jesus addresses is to the Apostles.

*The Holy Spirit as revealer: His ministry to the Apostles (12-13)*

Look again at verses 12-13: “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.”
Please note that the immediate audience to whom Jesus is speaking is the Apostles, and while His teaching here does have some application to us (which we will note in a few moments), I believe the primary application is to the Apostles themselves. The things which the Holy Spirit reveals to them will come in three primary forms—history, doctrine, and prophecy—and will result in the writing of the New Testament.

1. **He will remind the Apostles of historical facts.** Earlier in this discourse Jesus said in John 14:26, “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.” Why was it necessary for the Holy Spirit to remind them of everything Jesus spoke? Because the time gap between the events of Jesus’ life and the writing of the New Testament was significant. Jesus was crucified in April of A.D. 33, according to the best chronological studies. The first New Testament book (the Gospel of Mark) was not written before A.D. 45. That’s a minimum of 12 years after the events which Mark was reporting. John, on the other hand, didn’t write the book we are studying until at least A.D. 65, and perhaps as late as A.D. 95. This means as many as 60 years passed between the death of Jesus, when John was a very young man, and the writing of this Gospel when he was perhaps in his 80’s.

How many of you here could write in detail a conversation you had twelve years ago? How about twelve hours ago? Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit would supernaturally recall to the minds of the apostles the events and conversations which they would record for the Church. And I believe this is the only possible explanation for the amazing historical consistency and accuracy of the Bible. Nowhere in the history of literature could you find four independent accounts written from 12-60 years after the fact which agree anywhere near the extent to which the four Gospels agree? The few differences there are can generally be easily explained by the varying perspectives people inevitably bring to any situation.

2. **He will explain to them doctrinal truth.** In verse 12 of John 16 Jesus indicates there are many deep theological issues He would like to explain to His disciples before His death and departure, but their capacity to understand is too limited. However, “when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.” Were these Apostles the kind of men who needed special insight? I think so. After all, few of them were scholars, but rather just ordinary laborers; few of them had formal theological training before meeting Jesus; and frankly, they were often rather dull of understanding.

If we ask, “Did the Holy Spirit accomplish the job of teaching them the great doctrinal truths?” the answer is a resounding “yes.” How could someone like the Apostle John, a fisherman by trade, write a book like this one without the help of a divine teacher? And when one examines the intricate and complex doctrines of election in Ephesians 1 or divine sovereignty in Romans 8 or human suffering in 1 Peter or the Second Coming in 1 & 2 Thessalonians, it seems obvious to me that the Holy Spirit was active in explaining doctrinal truth to the Apostles.

3. **He will reveal prophetic truth.** Verse 13: “When the Spirit of truth comes,... he will declare to you the things that are to come.” Have you ever wondered where the Apostle John got the information he recorded in the Book of Revelation? I know there have been those who thought he might have had a bad nightmare. But seriously, the source of the rich prophetic truths
of the Bible is the Holy Spirit. This same Apostle John specifically claims that in the first chapter of the Revelation: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, ‘Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches.’” (Rev. 1:10-11). And once again, the proof is in the pudding. While not all prophecies have been fulfilled yet, the number that have is astounding and attests to the supernatural origin of prophetic truth.

Now I personally do not believe the Holy Spirit is giving revelation today in the form of historical reminders, doctrinal truth, or prophetic truth, as He did for the Apostles. Yet at the same time I believe the Spirit does have a teaching ministry for believers today, which brings us to the question:

4. **In what sense does the Holy Spirit guide believers today into all truth?** Well, since He is the divine author of Scripture, He is our guide and teacher whenever we study the Bible. He may not be teaching us directly, as He did the Apostles and prophets, but He teaches us indirectly through them. But He also teaches us through the ministry of illumination, by which I mean that He convicts us of our indifference to the Word, motivates us to study it, enables us to appreciate its significance, and helps us apply it to our lives.

My greatest problem has never been deciding what the Bible means. I already understand a lot more than I obey. If that is going to change, it will only change as I submit to the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Now in verse 14 we read of a fourth ministry of the Holy Spirit, this one to Jesus.

*The Holy Spirit as glorifier: His ministry to Jesus (14-15)*

In verse 14 Jesus says of the Holy Spirit the “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” While many in the church today are ignorant of the Holy Spirit, some, believe it or not, focus too much on the Holy Spirit. They speak constantly of their baptism by the Spirit and of their gifts from the Spirit and what the Spirit is doing in their lives. They sing songs about the Spirit and even sponsor conferences about Him. But Jesus says the Spirit doesn’t exalt Himself—His goal is to glorify Jesus. So when a person is truly filled and controlled by the Spirit, I would assume the greatest evidence of that will be a Christ-exalting life.

**THE DEPARTURE OF JESUS OPENS UP NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR HIS DISCIPLES.** (16-33) Now I want to briefly survey what Jesus conveys to His disciples in the last half of this chapter, for this, too, is part of the silver lining.

*A new permanent joy in place of their temporary grief. (16-22)*

**John 16:16-22 (ESV)**

16 “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.”
17 So some of his disciples said to one another, “What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going
to the Father’? 18 So they were saying, ‘What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.’ 19 Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, ‘Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me’? 20 Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.

21 When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”

The disciples are confused, to say the least, and they engage in quite a discussion with one another concerning what Jesus means when speaking of His departure. In essence they seem to be saying, “If Jesus wishes to establish His Kingdom, why go away? If He doesn’t, why return?” He perceives their confusion and uses the occasion to offer them some encouraging instruction.

1. The instruction (20). Jesus uses three verbs in verse 20 to describe His disciples’ reaction to His imminent departure: weep, lament, and be sorrowful. All of these terms were commonly used for mourning the dead, and this points to the fact that the way He will be leaving them is through death. Their grief, however, will be temporary, for He says, “your sorrow will turn into joy.” It is particularly interesting that Jesus does not say that their grief will be replaced by joy. Rather it shall become joy. That is, the very thing that plunges them into grief, namely His crucifixion on the Cross within 24 hours, shall turn into a cause for joy. That is why we call Good Friday Good Friday and not Evil Friday.

To help the disciples understand this concept Jesus chooses an illustration that from everyday life.

2. The illustration (21). He speaks of childbirth and how a woman forgets the grief of childbirth when she experiences the joy of holding her child. Someone has said that if that didn’t happen, no woman would have more than one child. This is true in other areas as well. No one would endure a second root canal or run a second marathon. God has made us to be able to forget pain when we see the value it produces. “So also you,” Jesus says. The precise fulfillment is found in John 20:19,20, when on the day of resurrection when Jesus “showed them his hands and side, and the disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.” We have seen the instruction, the illustration, but what is the application?

3. The application (22). What is the value of this promise of “a new permanent joy in place of grief” for us here this morning? We will never experience exactly what the disciples experienced in fearing they had lost their Lord, only to receive Him back three days later, but what can we learn from this?

I would suggest that every sorrow and every grief we face has the potential of being turned to joy, by God's grace. God never minimizes our pain or our grief; and we get nowhere by denying it or pretending it isn't there. But by the same token we get nowhere by wallowing in it or allowing it to consume us. I can’t help but think of John Walsh whose son Adam was kidnaped, sexually
abused, and murdered almost 31 years ago. The kind of grief such a dastardly deed produces can probably be understood only by one who has experienced it, but Walsh decided not to waste his sorrows. As the star of America’s Most Wanted, he has succeeded in tracking down hundreds of dangerous criminals by telling the stories of their heinous crimes and asking ordinary citizens to get involved. Walsh has been a man on a mission, and his grief turns to joy every time another criminal is taken off the streets.

I don't know what your grief is today. It may be an unhappy marriage, it may be singleness, it may be childlessness, it may be a miscarriage, it may be an incorrigible child, it may be abandonment by a family member, it may be joblessness. Every single one of the griefs I have mentioned is represented here in this room this morning; and there are others I know nothing about. But I do know that it is possible by God's grace to see that grief turned to joy. That may happen as you accept circumstances you can't change and focus your attention on things you can change. It can be facilitated by the healing of relationships which is a long and difficult process, or through pouring your life into others who are facing what you have suffered. Whatever you do, don't waste your sorrows. Believe Jesus when He promises a new permanent joy in place of grief.

A new access to the Father through prayer. (23-24)

John 16:23-28 (ESV)

23 In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

25 I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. 26 In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; 27 for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. 28 I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.

In verse 23 the word “me” is in the emphatic position in the Greek text. Jesus is saying in effect that after His resurrection and ascension the disciples would no longer ask Him for their needs to be met. Up to this time they had treated Jesus as their personal priest. If they needed to know anything, they asked Him. If they needed to receive anything, they asked Him. But with His departure they could cut the red tape, cut out the middle man (if I can say that reverently), and go directly to the Father. But in the process they still need to recognize and acknowledge that this new access to the Father is available only because of His work on the cross. That seems to be the point of the phrase twice repeated, “ask in my name.” Don't go to God in your own name, He says, don’t go in the saints’ names, don’t go in the name of My mother, go in Mine.

Dr. Reuben Torrey used the illustration of a person who goes to a bank to withdraw money from his checking account. He is asking in his own name, and if he has an account sufficiently large to cover the check, it will be cashed. But, he says,
"When I go to the bank of heaven, when I go to God in prayer, I have nothing deposited there. I have absolutely no credit there, and if I go in my own name God is under no obligation to honor my request. But Jesus Christ has unlimited credit in heaven, and He has granted me the privilege of going to the bank with His name on my checks."

I love Jesus’ words, though confusing perhaps when first read, in verses 26-27: “I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you.” Jesus does not have to plead with the Father to care for us. As Calvin wrote, “we have the heart of God as soon as we place before Him the name of His Son.”

A new peace in time of trouble. (29-33)

John 16:29-33 (ESV)
29His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! 30Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” 31Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? 32Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. 33I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Jesus is pleased with their affirmation of personal faith in Him, but He knows they are weak. In fact, He warns that they will abandon Him, and sure enough, later that very night as He is arrested and tried, they will all flee in fear and dismay. Their leader Simon Peter will deny with an oath that he even knows who Jesus is. But Jesus does not speak in anger. Instead He encourages them that despite the fact that “in the world” they will have tribulation, yet “in Him” they can enjoy peace.

I think it is instructive that while Jesus promises trouble in the world, He only offers peace. It isn’t automatic, you see; we must appropriate it, and sadly many Christian fail to do so. Perhaps that is why Jesus concludes His Upper Room Discourse by urging us to take some action. In verse 33 He says, “But take heart!” That’s really quite a different message from the ones we give and receive when people are hurting. Some say, “Hang in there.” Well, that’s nice, but when you hear that, you sometimes begin to look around for the rope. Others say, “Good luck!”, and while they mean well, there’s little comfort in putting one’s future in the hands of blind fate.

Jesus’ words, “Take heart!” might not be much better had He not added the reason His followers can take heart: “I have overcome the world.” That’s good news indeed. This statement, spoken in the shadow of the Cross, is audacious. The Cross would seem to the outsider to be Christ’s total defeat. But He sees it as His complete victory over all that the world can do to Him. He goes to the Cross, not in fear but as a conqueror.2

Friends, we have been given good reason today to focus on the silver lining. In spite of the trials and troubles of life, we have been given the Holy Spirit to help us cope, and we have the promise of Christ for a new permanent joy, a new access to the Father through prayer, and a new peace in time of trouble.

The spiritual triumph Jesus accomplished over Satan and His forces at the Cross will someday be completed when He returns to this earth and receives the family of believers to Himself to rule and reign with Him for all eternity. When that glorious event takes place, all the trials and troubles and pain and sorrow will immediately turn into triumph for believers. As the hymn says,

It will be worth it all when we see Jesus.
Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ.
One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase,
So bravely run the race 'til we see Christ.”