

“He Will Give You Another Helper”

The Forty-Sixth in a Series of Sermons on the Gospel of John

Texts: John 14:15-31; Ezekiel 36:22-32

Every Jew confessed the famous words of the Shema—“*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*” Yet when Jesus began his messianic mission he identified himself as a divine figure (the Son of Man), and in John 8:58 declared himself to be one with YHWH—“*Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.*” Although the disciples believed that Jesus was Israel’s Messiah, they had a much harder time understanding how both Jesus and YHWH were the one true God. Jesus even uses the “I am” formula when celebrating the Passover with his disciples, when he tells them “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life.*” He even goes on to tell them, “*I am in the Father and the Father is in me.*” Now Jesus will speak of a third divine person, the Helper, who will come to the disciples after Jesus ascends into heaven and returns to the Father’s dwelling, where Jesus is preparing a place for them. It is this “Helper” (the Holy Spirit) who will remain with them after Jesus departs, and it is through his person and work that Jesus will be present with his disciples.

We are in the midst of a series on the Gospel of John, and we are considering the “Upper Room Discourse” in John 13-17, which was given by Jesus immediately before his betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. Last time we considered the first fourteen verses of John 14, while in this sermon we will consider the balance of the chapter (vv. 15-31), in which Jesus begins to reveal to his disciples the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity.

As the Passover celebration begins, Jesus washes his disciples’ feet, and make predictions about Judas (who will betray him) and Peter (who will deny him). Jesus also gives the disciples a new commandment that they love one another. As chapter 14 begins, it is clear that the disciples are troubled by these developments. For one thing, Jesus is obviously burdened by the weight of the ordeal ahead. He has told the disciples that he is about to depart from them, and undergo such great suffering that the disciples can hardly imagine it. To prepare them for their new ministry (founding the church) after his ascension into heaven, Jesus has much to teach the disciples during this their last evening together. But the disciples are having a hard time understanding the things which Jesus is telling them. Their own treasurer (Judas) will betray Jesus? Peter will deny him? Jesus implying that he was about to die, and yet he would see the disciples again? There is much for the disciples to take in, and they are having trouble doing so.

In the first part of chapter 14 (vv. 1-14), Jesus tells the disciples not to be troubled—they must believe in him—that is, trust that Jesus will see them through the ordeal ahead. The reason why they should not be troubled is that even though Jesus is going away, he will prepare a place for them where his Father dwells (in heaven). Jesus will ensure that there is room there for all who believe him—in his Father’s dwelling place are many rooms. When Thomas asks Jesus “*Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?*” Jesus answers him, declaring that “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.*” With unmistakable clarity, Jesus declares himself to be the only way to heaven—he is the true temple of God. At the moment of his death upon the cross, God will tear open the veil in the temple separating the holy place from the most holy place. Jesus is now the way to heaven, and who, through his death and resurrection, will remove the barrier between God and his people (human sin) symbolized by the temple veil which separated God from his people.

The talk of “seeing God” prompts Philip to ask Jesus the same question Moses asked YHWH in Exodus 33. *“Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”* Philip’s curiosity has gotten the better of him. God protected Moses from his glory by hiding Moses in the cleft of a rock, but Philip assumes that since the Father is in Jesus, and Jesus is in the Father, Jesus can show Philip what YHWH would not show Moses. Jesus’ answer reveals his divine identity, which has been veiled by human flesh. *“Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”*

Philip has lived with God incarnate for three years, yet he still wants more information than God has revealed to him through the messianic mission of Jesus—yet another indication of human ingratitude and sinful curiosity. Jesus goes on to say to Philip in verse 11, *“believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.”* Jesus states that he shares the divine nature with YHWH, and that Jesus has given Philip (and the others) ample reason to believe that Jesus is God in human flesh—the miraculous signs which Jesus has performed for one thing. Therefore, Philip has already seen God, because Jesus is God in human flesh.

When telling Philip that he is one with the Father, in John 14:12-14, Jesus now reveals a significant way in which things will be different for them after Jesus’ departure from them. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”* As we will see in the balance of the Upper Room Discourse, the greater works the disciples will do are tied to the gift of the Holy Spirit. This side of Pentecost, the disciples cannot know what will happen once the Holy Spirit is poured out upon them—God will use them to turn the world upside down. On Pentecost, Peter will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach a sermon in which 3,000 place their faith in Jesus, are baptized, and then receive the Holy Spirit. These are the greater works of which Jesus is speaking.

Jesus also promises to answer the disciples’ prayers in a way unlike anything the disciples had known previously. This will come about because Jesus is going away (ascending into heaven), and preparing a place for them in the Father’s dwelling, preparations which include the gift of the Holy Spirit which Jesus is about to explain to them. Jesus is informing them that a new age in redemptive history is about to dawn, and even though Jesus will not be present with them physically, in this new age God’s power and presence are manifest in greater ways than they could imagine. But the blessings of this coming age require Jesus to depart to the Father’s dwelling so as to prepare a place for them.

In verse 15, Jesus reiterates a point he made earlier—only with a condition. *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”* No doubt, one of the greater “works” the disciples will do is demonstrate obedience to God’s commandments (the moral law) in a way not possible before the coming of the Holy Spirit. The difference is that in the new covenant era Jesus will enable his people to obey his commands. He will do so by fulfilling the law for them and in their place (through his own perfect obedience), and then in dying for all of their failures to obey his commands so that the law no longer condemns them. By doing this for us, Jesus sets us free from sin to obey his commandments. When justified by faith (Jesus’ repeated command to “believe in me”), and once indwelt by the Holy Spirit, his disciples will find themselves desiring to obey those things which Jesus will command them. The condition is as follows: **if** the disciples love Jesus, **then** they will obey his commands. This is the kind of biblical assertion underlying the structure of the Heidelberg Catechism’s take on the Christian life: guilt, grace, and gratitude.

Jesus does not give them a recipe or a formula of things they can do to perform these greater works or so that they might have a victorious prayer life. Rather, in verse 16 he tells them of a person—the blessed

Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity, who to this point is a mystery to them. To empower the disciples to do these greater works, and to pray according to the will of God so that their prayers are answered as Jesus has promised, Jesus reveals to them the one through whom all of these things will come to pass. “*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.*”

Those who believe in Jesus will keep his commands because Jesus will ask the Father (on their behalf) to give them a “helper” who will be with them “forever.” This helper is the “Paraclete”—one who comes along side and gives aid. In secular Greek, the term *paraklatos* referred to an advocate (or a defense attorney) in a court. John will emphasize this legal function of the Paraclete in John 16:7-11, but here John emphasizes that it is the coming of “another” Helper who will remain with the disciples to comfort them after Jesus departs from them to return to the Father. The Paraclete will advance the work Jesus has been doing, because he is the Spirit of God.¹

This “Helper” Jesus says is “*the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.*” As the Spirit of truth, the Paraclete will be the one through whom God will reveal the meaning (“the truths”) of those events which are about to unfold in redemptive history, and who will illumine the minds of believers to understand the nature of God’s saving work. It is the Paraclete who will, as Jesus says later in John 16, convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. This is why the world (the unbelieving who love darkness rather than light) cannot receive him. The Spirit of God brings truth in the midst of error just as a floodlight brings light into darkness. As John has told us, the world loves darkness rather than light because people’s deeds are evil. The world does not want God’s truth. The world rejects God’s truth, preferring to live in error about the truths which Jesus is revealing.

But it is not as though the Spirit is impotent in the face of unbelief—on the contrary, only the Holy Spirit can illumine the truth of God’s word to unbelievers and create faith in their hearts. But the Holy Spirit will do this only for those chosen by the Father, and then given by the Father to Jesus, who will in turn redeem them, and give them the gift of the Holy Spirit. This theme (particular redemption in which God saves his elect, whom he knows by name) reappears in Jesus’ high priestly prayer of John 17.

Jesus tells the disciples that, “*you know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.*” As those whom Jesus has called to faith and given new life (regeneration), they already have been made alive by the Holy Spirit. Even though they already know him, they will come to know more about him. They will experience his work in their lives in a much greater way as Jesus’ redemptive work continues to unfold—his death, resurrection, ascension, and then gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Yet, even though the work of the Paraclete is already a reality for the disciples, the Spirit’s work remains mysterious to them, and will remain so, until Jesus reveals to them more about the work of the Spirit, and as the disciples receive and experience additional blessings of the Spirit working in their lives—especially after Pentecost when the Spirit is poured out upon all flesh.

In verse 18 Jesus continues to comfort the disciples in light of the news that he was departing. “*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*” Yes, Jesus is leaving them. He is going to prepare a place for them in heaven, but he will not leave them on their own. Again, we see the theological dilemma which results from Jesus’ departure (his ascension). He is leaving them to prepare a place for them, but he will not leave them as orphans—on their own without access to their heavenly Father. But the question remains—how do Jesus’ people relate to him once he has ascended and now physically absent from us?

¹ Ridderbos, The Gospel of John, 499-500.

Jesus gives the answer, in part, when he says he will come to the disciples. Jesus did indeed appear to them after the resurrection (yet before his ascension). He will give them the Holy Spirit and indwell them (The Holy Spirit unites all believers to Jesus). And Jesus will come again at the end of the age. Jesus is not going to leave them alone, without his help, or apart from his presence. But the disciples do need to brace themselves for the reality that Jesus' departure is imminent—they are in their final hours together. As Jesus tells them in verse 19, *“yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.”*

The meaning of these words would become clear on Easter Sunday, but during the Passover celebration in the upper room, Jesus' words must have sounded rather cryptic. Jesus is telling them that his departure is soon, and the world (that is, the unbelievers who will put him to death, which includes Israel) will see Jesus no more. As far as the world is concerned, Jesus will be crucified and buried, and gone forever. But Jesus will rise again from the dead three days later, and appear to the disciples in a glorified body several times, before ascending into heaven not to appear again until his second advent.

Jesus gives them a wonderful promise, which can only make sense in hindsight after the resurrection. *Because I live, you also will live.* These words made little sense on this night, but when Jesus dies upon the cross and then appears to them alive on the third day, these words would be a wonderful comfort. Jesus lives, and because he does, his disciples will as well. This is what, in part, Jesus means when he says he is going away to prepare a place for them so that they will be with him in his Father's dwelling. Jesus' death secures the forgiveness of sin for those for whom he is dying because he bears in his own body the wrath of God toward those of us whom he intends to save. When Jesus rises again from the dead he secures eternal life for all those whom he will raise unto life at the end of the age. Because Jesus will conquer death and the grave, so will those all who trust in him.

Jesus goes on to tell them in verse 20, *“in that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”* Jesus has spoken of his relationship to the Father as one in which he (the Father) uniquely is in the Son, and likewise the Son is in the Father. But after Jesus departs and the Paraclete comes, Jesus will now indwell them through the Holy Spirit. This will be possible once Jesus dies on the cross and overturns the curse, and then is raised from the dead. Not only will the disciples live (after death), but they will know an intimacy with Jesus they could not know until the Father sends them the Helper after Jesus ascends into heaven. This is the answer, then, to Jesus' promise that God will hear the disciples' prayers and answer them—the Father will send the Holy Spirit to us, and because he will indwell believers, he will help us to pray, as Paul tells us in Romans 8.

For yet a third time Jesus reiterates that the characteristic of “that day” (this new age in redemptive history characterized by the gift of the Holy Spirit) is obedience to his commandments. In verse 21, we read, *“whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.”* Those indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who are made alive, and who have faith in Jesus (those who love him), will demonstrate this love by striving to keep God's commands. Although there are a number of prophetic references in the Old Testament to the fact that the messianic age would be characterized by the person and work of the Holy Spirit, such as the Holy Spirit being poured out upon all flesh, and dead bones coming back to life, Ezekiel also foretells of the connection between the presence of the Holy Spirit and new obedience to the commandments of God. As we read in our Old Testament lesson (vv. 26-27 of Ezekiel 36), *“and I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.”*

The power and desire to live in obedience is the effect which results from the cause (Jesus calling his people through the gospel, granting them the new birth, and faith). The initiative in our salvation always lies with Jesus. But his saving work in us produces a love for our Savior and the desire to demonstrate that love through obedience to his commands. In fact, Jesus goes on to say, “*and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.*”

And once again, Jesus’ statement leads to a question from one of the disciples, in this case Judas (no, not that Judas, but the son of James, also named Judas) is curious about why Jesus’ followers will see him, but the world will not. According to verse 22, “*Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, ‘Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?’*” The disciples are still thinking of these events in terms of Jesus’ messianic kingdom culminating with Jesus claiming David’s royal throne and then defeating the Romans, with all the ceremonial pomp and circumstance that goes with it (just as they had seen on Palm Sunday—only much greater).²

Jesus’ answer (in verse 23) is certainly different from what the disciples were expecting. “*Jesus answered him, ‘If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.’*” Jesus’ kingdom has come, but is a spiritual kingdom which does not manifest itself in geopolitical ways (at least until the end of the age). His kingdom is primarily manifest in the relationship between the individual believer and the Triune God. Those who love Jesus (and who believe and trust in him) will keep (obey) the things Jesus is revealing to them. The Father will also love those who love Jesus, and Jesus will make his dwelling place with them. The Greek word *monē* translated “dwelling place” in verse 2, is also used here. Jesus will leave to prepare a dwelling for them, but once he does, Jesus (through the Spirit) will come and indwell all believers. This is what Jesus meant by not leaving the disciples alone, even though he was departing from them physically—“*we will come to him and make our home with him.*” Jesus will be present with us through a new and better way—the indwelling Spirit of God who abides with us forever.

In verse 24, Jesus also speaks about those who reject him. “*Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.*” Those who are indifferent to God’s word demonstrate that the Father’s judgment remains upon them. Those who do not love Jesus have no interest in keeping his commands. This does not refer to the struggle with sin—all believers struggle with their sins, and often worry because we have not kept God’s commandments. Rather, John is referring to indifference towards the things of God typical of unbelievers. Those who claim to love God, will demonstrate this love by striving to love and obey Jesus. Those who believe in Jesus (and therefore love him) will manifest their faith in him through their obedience to God’s commands.

Jesus continues to press home his point that his time with the disciples is over. “*These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you.*” Soon, he will not be with them. But the disciples are not to despair, because, as Jesus promises, “*the Helper, 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 have said to you.*” The Holy Spirit will do for the disciples what Jesus did, only in a new and profound way. The Father will send the Spirit in Jesus’ name to teach the disciples those things they will need to know to preach the gospel to the ends of the earth, as well as bring to remembrance all those things which Jesus has taught them during their time together. This not only refers to apostolic preaching—Spirit empowered preaching about Jesus’ person and work in fulfilling Old Testament prophecies—but also to the inspiration of Holy Scripture

² Carson, The Gospel According to John, 504.

(specifically those gospels and epistles we now know as the New Testament).

Their evening together, apparently, is coming to an end. Jesus extends to the disciples his “shalom” or word of peace. *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”* Through the indwelling Holy Spirit, Jesus will give his disciples a peace (the sense that the sinner is reconciled to the Father) which those apart from Christ (the world) can never know. Although many difficult things will come their way in the hours and days ahead, the disciples should not be troubled or afraid. No doubt, Jesus’ words have an ominous tone to them. Why would the disciples need the kind of peace Jesus is describing? Why should they be afraid? These words will make much more sense and truly will give them comfort in the days ahead.

But there is little time for the disciples to reflect upon the meaning of these words. In verse 28, Jesus reminds them, *“you heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.”* The disciples are truly struggling, and as Jesus reminds them if they loved him to the degree to which they should, they should rejoice at the fact that Jesus is about to return to his Father in heaven. Since his Father is greater, the disciples should not be afraid, but rather thankful for the fact that Jesus is about to return to the eternal glory he possessed with the Father before he came to earth, when he clothed his divine glory with human flesh to suffer and die for us. Jesus reminds them why he is giving this discourse and why they must listen to him despite the difficult nature of his words, *“and now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe.”*

Jesus presses this point again in verses 30-31. *“I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.”* Once Jesus is arrested, he will not be able to speak with them face to face, as he now does. Since Jesus’ hour has come, it is time for the Passover celebration to end. Jesus will soon take them to that place where he is to confront Satan’s minions led by Judas. Even though Satan (whom Jesus identifies as “ruler” of this age) has no claim upon Jesus, Jesus will obey his Father’s will and allow himself to be arrested, tried, and crucified, although he is completely innocent and has done nothing wrong. This will demonstrate that Jesus is indeed obedient to the Father even unto death. Jesus will do this for us, to save us from our sins.

Jesus announces that the time has come to leave. *“Rise, let us go from here.”* But the discourse continues on in chapters 15-17 as though the conversation kept going for some time after Jesus’ directed them to rise and leave—which is why a number of commentators believe that the discussion was so intense that even though Jesus was ready to leave, everyone lingered in the rented upper room until the discourse was completed (the end of chapter 17). In fact, it is not until John 18:1-2, that we read that Jesus crosses the Kidron Valley to the olive garden of Gethsemane for his fateful encounter with Judas and the members of the Sanhedrin, who are doing the work and will of Satan. So, that portion of the discourse from chapters 15-17 is often called “part two” of the “Farewell Discourse.” It is very likely that these chapters are a continuation of the Upper Room Discourse. Next time, Lord willing, we will take up Jesus’ discourse on the vine and branches.

What, then, do we take with us from these remarkable verses? The most important thing is Jesus’ revelation of the Helper, the Holy Spirit, who will dwell within God’s people, once Jesus has ascended into heaven. The gift of the Holy Spirit is, therefore, the answer to the dilemma posed by Jesus’ physical absence from his disciples after his ascension into heaven. After Pentecost, Jesus now dwells within us (and therefore is present with us) through the work of the Holy Spirit. It is because of his gift of the

Spirit that our hearts are not to be troubled, nor are we to be afraid. It is the Holy Spirit who speaks to us through the word of God, and it is the Holy Spirit who ensures that the signs and seals of the promises of God (the sacraments) are effectual as reminders to us of God's grace and mercy toward us as we struggle with our sin, and with obeying God's commandments.

It is the indwelling Holy Spirit who enables us to love God by keeping the sign of God's love for us (the cross of Christ) before our eyes, and who then creates within us the desire and the power to obey God's commandments as the fruit of regeneration and faith. It is the Holy Spirit who helps us to pray, and ensures that our prayers are answered. This is what Jesus means when he promises the disciples, the Father "*will give you another Helper, to be with you forever.*" Jesus has prepared a place for us in God's dwelling, but until that day we see him face to face, he now dwells within us through the blessed Holy Spirit. This is how we relate to Jesus in the new covenant era—through the person and work of the Holy Spirit, who helps us pray, who enables us to love our Savior and to keep his commandments. It is the blessed Holy Spirit who comes to us every Lord's day, confirming the promises of the gospel through his word and through his sacraments.