

The Convicting Work of the Holy Spirit

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 16:1-11
Preached on: Sunday, May 24, 2015

I trust that you have prepared your hearts to be humbled before the word of God this morning. We are going to be examining Jesus' words in John 16, verses 1 through 11, and here we will learn about the convicting work of the Holy Spirit among other things. Let me read the text to you beginning in verse 1 of John 16. Jesus speaking says,

1 "These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. 2 They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. 3 These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. 4 But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at 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 But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. 8 And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer behold Me; 11 and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

This is a very precious and powerful passage of Scripture. This is part of Jesus' farewell address to his disciples on the eve of his betrayal and crucifixion. If you have been following our study, you will recall how Jesus has used the extended metaphor of a vine and the branches to go to great lengths to impress upon his disciples his increasing desire for intimate fellowship with them because we know that when a believer is united to him through faith, the life of Christ flows through us. He has also told them and us that when we are united to that vine, the Father prunes that vine so that we will be able to bear more fruit for his glory and for our eternal joy. But he has also warned them about the inevitable hostility that they are about to face when he departs because the world hates them.

So he promises to ask the Father to send the Helper, one who comes along someone in time of need as an advocate. The term paracletos in the original language is actually a legal term in ancient Greek. In chapter 14, verse 16, Jesus said, "I will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever." So no longer will God be with them corporeally or physically, he will now abide in them as verse 17 goes on to say. Jesus is basically saying, "The Holy Spirit is going to be My Advocate. He will plead my cause in

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the hearts of sinners and He will come alongside those that He gives new life to help them testify of Me in this hostile world." In chapter 15, verse 26, he says, "When the Helper comes," and then later in verse 27, "He will bear witness of Me and you will bear witness of Me." In other words, "He is the One who will testify to the world who I am and empower you to do the same, even in the face of inevitable persecution."

Now, this is at the heart of Jesus' words here in John 16. I wish to approach this section of Scripture by using 2 very simple categories that I hope will be helpful to you. Jesus is speaking to his disciples about 2 things. 1. The inevitable violence of the world that will be unleashed upon them. 2. The profound benefit of the Holy Spirit that will be given to them. Might I remind you that God ordained to allow the former by his grace that we might experience the latter. Satan's evil and man's sin never caught God offguard nor is God the direct cause of evil or sin. Habakkuk says of God, "Your eyes are too pure to approve evil and You cannot look on wickedness with favor." However, though God hates sin, he has ordained to allow it to exist in his created order as an integral part of his plan and his purpose to glorify himself. Because God is utterly holy, he is never the cause of sin but he does bring it about indirectly through the willing voluntary actions of moral creatures that act wickedly and as a result of their sin, he then dramatically displays his glory because all that God has ordained and all that he has ordained to allow is for his glory and we see his glory even in sin and evil that he has ordained to allow to enter his perfect universe. We see his glory manifested through his holiness, through his wrath, through his mercy and grace and love and power. And in John's Gospel, we see his glory manifested in these very ways, especially in the death and the resurrection and the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ and the person of the Holy Spirit, his ministry in the world and in our lives.

So first of all, let's look at what Jesus says regarding the inevitable violence of the world that will be unleashed upon them and by extension, to all of us. Verse 1 of chapter 16, "These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling." The term "stumbling" means in the original "to go astray or to be caught offguard," and in this context, "to be caught offguard and fall into sin." In fact, the Greek verb is related to a noun that is used in Greek to refer to the bait stick of an animal trap, one that can be sprung by an unsuspecting animal, causing it to suddenly be caught. Here the term "stumbling," is used figuratively to describe that very thing in the lives of the disciples. He's warning them that, "You are about to encounter persecution that can cause you to be caught offguard and cause you to fall into sin." Now, bear in mind that up until this time they have been shielded from persecution because of Jesus; Jesus has borne the brunt of it. Moreover, they have been anticipating the earthly kingdom. They have been fighting amongst themselves to determine which one is going to be greatest in the kingdom so the farthest thing from their mind is persecution. They are thinking just the opposite. They

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weren't expecting to be the targets of such violent hatred that would eventually cost them their life and were it not for the Helper that Jesus would send, they would have been rendered ineffective in their life and ministry because of their fear, because of their weakness, their lack of discernment.

So in his omniscience, Jesus knows that all of this is going to happen. He knows their weaknesses. In fact, in just a few minutes from when he said this, he said something else to them on their way to Gethsemane. Matthew records it in chapter 26, verse 31, "Then Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away because of Me this night, for it is written, "I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered."'" This is precisely what happened. We go on to read in verse 55 and, by the way, this is after Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. It's after Peter cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest. Jesus then confronts this massive group of armed soldiers and so forth that had come to arrest him and he says to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me. But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets."

Then Matthew says, "Then all the disciples left Him and fled." Like so many of us, it is easy to talk big when we have not been in a life and death situation. But unless there has been proper training, when you are confronted with a life or death situation, you will tend to do one of 2 things: either freeze or flee. Well, in this case, the disciples fled. Perhaps they froze for a bit but they fled and so Jesus is warning them ahead of time that, "When these times come, not if but when, I don't want you to stumble so severely that you are disheartened in your faith and utterly fail." So he says, "These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling." Stumbling altogether to the point of abandoning the faith. It's as if Jesus is saying, "Your greatest threat from the world is not going to be so much the danger of death but the danger of defection." So to be forewarned is to be forearmed.

Then Jesus gets more specific regarding the nature of their imminent persecution. Notice verse 2, "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God." Now, it should be no surprise that the most virulent persecution and hostility would come from their Jewish kinsmen, especially the religious leaders. You see, they were convinced that Jesus was not the promised Messiah. They were convinced that he was a fraud and they thought it was utter blasphemy for him to make claims to being the Son of God and the Father being his Father. Furthermore, they were jealous of his popularity. They were also embarrassed by his ability to make them out to be fools whenever they tried to humiliate him and they were enraged at the way he could expose their hypocrisy and the fact that he would call them to repentance was just astounding to them because, after all, they

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were the most godly, the most elite spiritually in the country. So they despised Christianity and they were determined to eradicate it.

Writing to the churches of Galatia, the Apostle Paul explained why he was once such a notorious persecutor of the church. In Galatians 1:13, we read, "For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it; and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions." Now, I might add that the same is true today in Israel, especially amongst the Ger Chassidim, these are the Orthodox Jews that wear the high circular fur hats. Perhaps you have seen them. I remember the last time I was in Israel, I was taken to a little church that had to meet in a secret place way out kind of in the mountains in a forest to avoid the Chassidim's hostility. They are not allowed to rent a place in town and if they know where they are meeting, they will come and disrupt the service. This pastor was a young man probably in his late 30s who had been one of them and God had gloriously saved and many of those people had come out of that as well.

I remember driving there. We could see them off in the distance and I felt like we were in some kind of a spy movie because we had to move about in a way to avoid detection. I remember hearing that man through the translators preach the Gospel and I had a chance to talk with him and I asked him about the persecution there amongst the Chassidim and he said, "Yes, it's severe." He gave an example that recently he was walking down the street and one of them came up and he had his little boy, the Orthodox Jew had his little son with him, and the man spit in the pastor's face and then he said to his son, "Today son, I'm going to teach you how to spit at a dog," and they continued to spit at him.

So this is the type of hostility that is there now. This is what it was like then. This is what Jesus is warning about. In fact, today the Orthodox Jews say that they hate the Christians more than they hate the Nazis. The reason for that, they say is, "The Nazis took our bodies but the Christians take our souls." Were it not for the protection of the laws in Israel today, they would eradicate the Christians and the Muslims and believe it would be a service to God. Knowing all of this, Jesus says, "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue."

Now, you must understand that being an outcast from the synagogue was something worse than death. This wasn't something as we might think in our culture, not getting to come to the services or not being able to attend the social functions. Being an outcast from the synagogue would mean that nobody would do business with you. No one would hire you. You would be shunned by all of your former friends and family members. You would be treated as a traitor, as an outcast in your culture and you would live in utter

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disgrace and you would live in constant danger for fear of injury or death. No wonder Jesus was called a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. No wonder the Apostle Paul received 39 lashes 5 times from the synagogue authorities. Do the math, 39×5 . No wonder in Acts 23, Luke tells of 40 Jews, you will recall, who formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath saying that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul.

So this is the kind of hostility that Jesus is warning them about and it's shocking to them. They were expecting the kingdom, now they are hearing hostility. So indeed, they will make you outcasts from the synagogue. Beloved, never underestimate Satan's rage against Christ and all who belong to him. Moreover, never underestimate his use of organized religion to do his bidding. Their disdain for the Gospel is eclipsed only by their utter contempt for the biblical Jesus. This is true today as it was then.

May I give you some history? During the 16th century, Protestant Reformation initiated by Martin Luther, by John Calvin, Eldred Zwingli and others, to mention a few, the reformers denounced the heresies of the Roman Catholic Church, especially the selling of indulgences and their damning Gospel of salvation by works. In fact, the 5 Solas of the Reformation that you see adorning this worship Center were developed in response to specific perversions of the truth that were taught by the Roman Catholic Church and they became the rallying cry of the Protestant reformers. As a result, according to Protestant historian, John Dowling, the Roman Catholic Church put to death more than 50 million heretics, people like us, between A.D. 606 which was the birth of the papacy and the mid-1800s. One such reformer who was martyred was the eminent scholar William Tyndale, known for his translation of the Bible into English and his opposition to the heresies of the Roman Catholic Church that were embraced by the king of England at that time. Tyndale was finally imprisoned and history tells us that he was imprisoned for a year and a half by virtue of the king's order. And it is said that his testimony for Christ was so powerful while he was in prison that through it his jail keeper, the keeper's daughter and others of his household were all converted to Christ.

John Fox, in his great work, "Fox's Book of Martyrs," tells us that Tyndale was finally brought forth to the place of his execution in A.D. 1536 in the town of Vilvoorde where he was tied to the stake, strangled by the hangman and afterward consumed with fire and it is said that he cried out with fervent zeal while lashed to the stake, "Lord, open the eyes of the King of England!" Now, you ask how can a man maintain such a loving and bold testimony in the face of such unspeakable hostility? Beloved, it is because the Spirit had come and dwelt within him. This is the work of the Spirit of God to testify through his saints. In fact, Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:19, "But when they deliver you up, do not

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become anxious about how or what you will speak, for it shall be given you in that hour what you are to speak."

You see, the Helper was with Tyndale as he has been with so many others. As Jesus promised in John 15, "When He comes, He will bear witness of Me and you will bear witness also." That's why at the end of verse 7 here in chapter 16, and end of verse 8, he says, "I will send Him to you." Think about that. "I'm going to send Him to you, not just into the world in some nebulous way but to you. He's going to abide in you." It's interesting, Martin Luther commented on this and he says, quote, "He uses the believing heart as his own chariot in which he rides into the world to convict it of sin and righteousness and judgment." And that's what Jesus says in verse 8, "I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."

And it's fair to also ask, "How can people, especially religious people, be so vehemently hostile to Christians with that kind of rage? How can they do that?" Well, Jesus answers it here in verse 3, "These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me." You see, the Jews proudly boasted of their knowledge of the Father but their boast was hollow. Like many today, they worship a God of their own making, one that they could manipulate and they called him Father. Had they known the true God, they would have easily recognized his beloved Son who is "the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature," as the writer of Hebrews tells us.

So Jesus warns the 11 of what they should expect so that they won't be caught offguard. Then in verse 4 he says, "But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you." In other words, prior to this time, Jesus had been their defender as I said earlier. He bore the brunt of all of the hatred. So it was not yet time for him to warn them about the dangers of persecution but now he is about to depart and the Spirit empowered growth of the early church is going to ignite a firestorm of persecution and revulsion against Christians.

It's amazing to look back historically and see what happened to those 11 disciples that Jesus addressed that night, men who bore witness of Christ. It's interesting. By the way, the term "bear witness" in the original language or it can be translated "testify," is from a Greek term, martyreo, we get our word "martyr" from that, the English word "martyr" from that. So to testify of Christ can lead to that, that's the idea. Those 11 men bore witness of Christ. They testified of him and they became martyrs. They were hated by the Jews and the Romans. According to one historian, quote, "Peter, Andrew and James, the son of Alphaeus, were all crucified. Bartholomew was whipped to death and then

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crucified. James, the son of Zebedee was beheaded as was Paul. Thomas was stabbed with spears. Mark was dragged to death through the streets of Alexandria. James, the half-brother of Jesus, was stoned by order of the Sanhedrin. Philip was also stoned to death. Others including Matthew, Simon the Zealot, Thaddeus, Timothy and Stephen were also killed for their unwavering commitment to the Lord." Frankly, I fear if the Lord tarries, that will probably be my fate and probably the fate of some of you. We don't know what kind of persecution is mounting against us but we do know this: the world hates us because they hate Christ and we see this hostility growing in our culture and were it not for the laws of this land which are gradually being eroded, the persecution would be fierce. This is why Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12, "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

So Jesus knows the full fury of the world's hatred is about to be unleashed upon them but he also knows that the disciples are fixated upon what's going to happen to them. They are not giving any thought about what's going to happen to Jesus so he says in verse 5, "But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?'" In other words, "I'm about to leave this wicked world and return to the glory of My heavenly home. I'm going to once again enjoy the intimate fellowship with the Father. But you are so self absorbed, none of you even ask Me, 'Where are you going?'" You will recall that he had chided them earlier in chapter 14, verse 28. He said, "If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father." So here, once again, he is reproofing them at some level for their selfishness. They are paralyzed with concern over their impending loss, over the potential for persecution, despite all of the promises that Jesus has given them with respect to the Helper that he is going to send.

Verse 6, "But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart." Now, earlier there were some questions given to Jesus concerning his departure. Peter asked in chapter 13, "Lord, where are you going?" And similarly in chapter 14, verse 5, Thomas asks, "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How do we know the way?" Well, you must understand these questions were based only on a crudely literal interpretation of Jesus' statement concerning his departure, as if he were moving from Nashville to, I don't know, Evansville or are you going to San Diego? They just didn't get it. Moreover, I might add, that their questions were motivated by a concern for themselves, not really for where Jesus was going. Let me give you an example, my little 4-year-old grandson will ask me routinely, "Pawpaw, where are you going?" Now, I assure you that his concern is not about my ultimate destination and how that might impact my life in some positive way. That's not what's going through his mind. Rather, what his concern is about my departure is how it might cause him to forfeit some pleasure and/or leave him in some peril. He's thinking about himself. This is what really fueled the disciples' questions so Jesus is basically telling them that they need to look beyond the temporal, look into the

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eternal, focus upon what's really happening here including where he's going and the implications of all of that. It's as if Jesus is saying, "Men, wake up! Understand that in My death I am going to conquer sin and Satan and death and through all of this I will bring in the promised kingdom. So stop being so despondent and self-absorbed. The cross must precede the crown." And all this should bring joyful anticipation, not sorrow.

Well, so much for the inevitable violence of the world that will be unleashed upon them. Let's look secondly at what Jesus said concerning the profound benefit of the Holy Spirit who will be given to them. Notice verse 7, "But 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." In other words, "Men, your sorrow is without warrant. Look at the profound benefit of My departure. Your loss is really going to be the source of such great gain. Have I not told you before that I am going away to prepare a place for you and I'm going to come again to you and take you unto Myself? Have I not told you that you're going to be supernaturally enabled to do even greater works? That I am going to impart to you even greater knowledge? That I will never leave you? I'm not going to leave you alone and I'm going to send a Helper who will abide in you. But guys, unless I go, He cannot come. I must first finish the work for which I was sent. Only then will the Holy Spirit be able to testify to the world concerning My finished work of redemption and My ascension back into glory."

Now, mind you, the disciples didn't understand all this. By the way, we wouldn't have understood it either. The reason why? Not only because they were self-absorbed, they were thinking about the kingdom but because the Spirit hadn't come yet who would guide them into all truth. Aren't you glad we have the Spirit? That's why people without the Spirit of God read the Scriptures and they think, "This is nuts." We have to be sympathetic to that but, do you know what? They got it later when the Spirit came. Let me give you an example. Remember Peter's words in his great sermon given at Pentecost, recorded in Acts 2? There he spoke of the sacrificial death of Christ. There he spoke of his resurrection and his Ascension and he declared, verse 33, "Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear." Isn't it great? So by the power of the Holy Spirit, they were able to finally understand the advantage of Jesus' departure. But prior to this, they had grown so fond of his presence. Can you imagine what it would have been like to have spent time with the Son of God? My mind just cannot compute that. Plus they were so excited about reigning with him in the kingdom, it's almost impossible for them to see the expedience of him leaving.

So Jesus goes on to explain to them in verse 8, "And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." Now, once again, Jesus uses

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The Convicting Work of the Holy Spirit

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 16:1-11

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this legal language to explain the role of the Advocate. Bear in mind, he has spoken of the Holy Spirit who will be a witness to the world concerning his person and work. He will also be, shall we say, the prosecuting attorney who will bring conviction to the world concerning their sin, their need for righteousness and certain judgment. Now, mind you, the Spirit is not coming to convince the Judge, the Judge is already fully aware of their guilt but rather he comes to convict the sinful world. He comes to bring before sinners the conclusive evidence of their guilt. Think about it: who among us seeks a cure for a disease that we do not have? Why do that until we find out we have the disease and then suddenly, after that diagnosis, we are motivated to seek a cure. Beloved, the same thing is true spiritually. Until by the power of the Spirit, a man is broken over his sin, he will never see the need for the Savior. He will just have no desire for that. This is why people don't come running to Christ in repentant faith. This is a work of the Spirit.

I want you to notice Jesus says the Spirit is going to convict the world concerning 3 things, 3 things necessary for a man to come to saving faith in Christ and I might add, that this is an easy outline that you can all use when the Spirit gives you opportunity to share the Gospel, for example, with your children. First of all, he's going to convict them concerning sin. Man must understand that God is holy and man is not and there is a big problem there. Now, the implication here is that man has no real awareness of his sin. It's just not a big deal to him. And when you start talking about it, he is going to bristle because he doesn't want to hear that stuff. Maybe I have told you before, I have been asked a few times, I haven't been asked in a while, to speak at a seeker sensitive kind of church and I remember one specifically that said, "Now, we've got some ground rules." I remember some of the ground rules were that I'm not allowed to use or talk about sin or repentance or hell and so forth and the reason was because, "We're trying to reach the unchurched." I remember saying, "Reach them with what because you've just eviscerated the Gospel?" You see, that type of thinking is focused on getting people to come to church, not to come to Christ. There is a huge difference. That kind of idiocy betrays not only a stunning ignorance of the Gospel but even more fundamentally, it betrays a low view of the holiness of God and a high view of the righteousness of man. So the Spirit must come and do something because man just doesn't get it. God is not very big to him but "Oh my, we're pretty good. We kind of all deserve heaven. After all, I'm a lot better than this guy." That's how people think. Oh, what a marvel it is to behold the Spirit of God do his work of conviction in a rebellious heart.

Again, after the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost, Peter was empowered to preach Christ and him crucified and resurrected and he exhorted his kinsman to, "Repent and be saved from this perverse generation." And I find it interesting, I have preached Christ for many, many years and many times, people who have heard the Gospel from my mouth and from the mouths of many other preachers, have not been moved. How many of you have heard the

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The Convicting Work of the Holy Spirit

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Gospel over and over and over again? You could preach it yourself and yet you have never collapsed under the weight of your sin. Why not? Because, dear friends, it has nothing to do with the preacher or the words, it has everything to do with the convicting work of the Spirit of God and in some mysterious way, he works in tandem with a person's will to cause that person to believe and repent.

Well, this is what happened when Peter preached. The people who heard his message didn't come away unmoved as many of you do when you leave here. Instead, the Spirit of God did something. Luke tells us, "Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart." This is what you look for in your children. This is what you look for in any person that claims they have been saved. Have they been pierced to their heart over their sin and their need for a Savior? Don't give a person something to eat when they are not hungry. "They were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" The text goes on to say, "And there were added that day about 3,000 souls." Oh, how I pray that the Spirit of God would do such a work of conviction in this church, in this community, in this state, in this country.

Historically, this kind of mass conviction comes in seasons of revival. Now, it's important for me to make a distinction: I'm not referring to the type of revivals that we're used to seeing especially here in Tennessee. Not the man made revivals that crop up every year that are, frankly, rooted in the errors of Pelagianism that basically believes that man's only problem is his will, not his nature. Therefore conversions are really the result of a sinner's decision, not the regenerating work of the Spirit. And given that kind of theology, that errant theology, you're basically allowed to use any kind of manipulative technique to get people kind of worked up. Preachers start talking LIKE THIS and they come down and they talk like this and they get them all worked up with stories. And before you know it, everybody is in this frenzy and then you start getting people to walk aisles and repeat prayers and all of this kind of stuff. Folks, all of that is not only bad theology, it's inconsistent with what has happened historically in the church. You see, true revival comes down from God. It is never raised up by man. It is the work of the Spirit, not the work of a pastor. It is not something that you schedule between August 5th and the 9th. Historically, true revivals have broken out unexpectedly. They have never been scheduled.

Stories abound regarding the Spirit's unexpected outpouring of conviction. Let me give you a few. In 1859, the Spirit brought his reviving work to northern Ireland and Scotland and Wales and that spread into various parts of Europe and some of them call it "The Second Evangelical Awakening" in that area. It began with a young fisherman in a small

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The Convicting Work of the Holy Spirit

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Bible Text: John 16:1-11
Preached on: Sunday, May 24, 2015

village of Cellardyke and this fisherman was hostile to the things of God. He scoffed at the Gospel but one day when he went out to sea, the Spirit of God moved upon him and he was so overcome by a conviction of his sin and his need for a Savior that he had to return to shore despite the ridicule of his friends. It's interesting how the Spirit of God used that spark to ignite a firestorm of revival in that region of the world. Witnesses stated that they had never seen a man so troubled over his sin. One minister of Cellardyke who had preached the Gospel for many years wrote this, quote, "Those of us who were at ease in Zion have no conception of what it means for a soul to be gripped by the reality of sin and the holiness of God." Folks, this is the work of the Spirit.

Similar stories abound in the history of the Great Awakening in America in the early 18th and late 19th centuries. It began up in the Northeast. It began to dwindle there and then it moved to the South. It's interesting that among the Presbyterians, we see that they were unanimously, or almost unanimously, opposed to the revivalistic practices of that day such as, "Mechanical methods of stirring up emotions, exhorting people in the aisle to go forward and be saved, anxious benches," and on and on and on it goes. Instead, what you see historically then and throughout other great times of revival is that the ministers and their congregations spent many nights in fervent prayer, pleading with the Spirit to do the work that only he can do. Charles Spurgeon said it well, "If you want to get up a revival as the term is, you can do it just as you can grow tasteless strawberries in winter by artificial heat. There are ways and means of doing that kind of thing but the genuine work of God needs no such planning and scheming."

Let me give you an example here in the South and I take this from Ian Murray's great work "Revival and Revivalism." I would heartily recommend it to all of you. It's one of, shall we say, the top 10 books that have had the greatest impact on my life. In 1858, Zion Church, the largest church in Charleston, South Carolina, constituted of about 1500 to 2000 black people. The pastor was John L. Gerardo. In 1858, special prayer meetings were instituted, quote, "that constantly increased until the house was filled," the pastor tells us. At that point, the church officers began to counsel Pastor Gerardo to start special preaching services but according to one historian, quote, "The pastor steadily refused, waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit." And the historian goes on to give this man's theology, "The pastor's view was that the Father had given to Jesus as the King and head of the church, the gift of the Holy Spirit and that Jesus in his sovereign administration of the affairs of His church bestowed Him upon whomsoever He pleased and in whatever measure He pleased. Day after day, therefore, he kept his prayer addressed directly to the mediatorial throne for the Holy Spirit in mighty reviving power." That's good theology.

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The Convicting Work of the Holy Spirit

By David Harrell

Bible Text: John 16:1-11
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Then, at one of those evening prayer meetings, the preacher received the most distinctive conviction that he had had ever that the prayers were heard and answered and he said this, "The Holy Spirit has come. We will begin preaching tomorrow evening." But it's interesting, when the congregation was dismissed, they would not depart nor did they until Gerardo had proclaimed Christ to them until midnight. Then we are told that for 8 weeks, night after night, he preached, he says, "to dense and deeply moved congregations." Folks, this is what the Spirit can do. Even when the revival itself was over, the pastor wrote, quote, "The work grew steadily until it was arrested by the war," referring to the Civil War. As with so many others, he always "believed that this great ingathering was the merciful work of God prior to the conflict which was so soon to sweep so many of them into eternity."

Beloved, this is how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of individuals and sometimes in congregations. He convicts them concerning sin. Jesus says in verse 9, "because they do not believe in Me." You see, if they believed in Jesus, they would see the gravity of their sin and their desperate need for a righteousness that was not their own. And I must add, if the great need of the world is to see their sin and the Savior and if the only way to create within a sinner an awareness of this guilt before a holy God is for the Spirit to do his work, then what is the great need of the church? The great need of the church is to come together in prayer and plead for the Spirit to do the work that only he can do. This is the clear logic of what Jesus is saying.

This is why it is so important for each of us to be committed to prayer. Frankly, I grieve at how few of you attend our prayer meetings. Some of you will never miss a potluck dinner but you have no time to go before the throne of grace and plead for the souls of your family and friends. I pray that this happens in the privacy of your worship and I'm sure it does and even in your small groups, but I certainly don't see that kind of passion for it in our prayer meetings. The great Scottish minister and Bible expositor, Eric Alexander, who served the church of Scotland for over 50 years understood this. Here's what he said, "If you do not speak as much about man to God as you do about God to man, you're wasting your time."

Well, we must move quickly. The Spirit also convicts concerning righteousness. He says, "because I go to the Father," and you see, the fact that he went to the Father proved that he was perfectly righteous. You see, again, man is hopelessly biased in his own favor. He lacks righteousness altogether but he cannot see it. God says that our righteousnesses are like filthy rags to him. So it is the great ministry of the Spirit of God to cause a sinner to see his unrighteousness and beg for a righteousness that he does not have that he can only attain from Christ and that is at the heart of the great doctrine of justification that we are declared righteous. We are now hidden in Christ and so the work of the Spirit is to cause

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sinner to see that they are not properly dressed to enter into the presence of the holy King. They must be adorned with the righteousness of Christ but only the Spirit can do this.

Finally, Jesus says he convicts the world concerning judgment in verse 11. Now, we all know that the world scoffs at judgment. After all, God is love, right? He wouldn't send anybody to hell. But what they fail to understand is that the all encompassing attribute that God uses of himself the most is that he is a holy God. Remember in Isaiah 6, Isaiah stood before the throne of God and the Seraphim cried out, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." Friends, a holy God cannot leave sin unpunished. The world today laughs, for example, at the worldwide flood that God used to judge the world many years ago. They laugh at the plagues that God sent upon Egypt. They laugh at the incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah because of their perverted sexual lifestyles. They think that it is utter folly that God would pour out his judgment, pour out his wrath, upon his beloved Son in order to pay the just penalty of all who believe in him. So why would they be concerned with what the writer of Hebrews says that it is appointed unto man to die once and then the judgment? You see, in our culture, everybody gets a free pass, right? Everybody goes to heaven. You go to any funeral and I will guarantee you, it doesn't matter how wicked that person was, "Oh, he's in heaven today looking down. Isn't that wonderful?" You see, the Spirit of God must do his great work of conviction and that's why Jesus says, "because the ruler of this world has been judged." In other words, Satan and his demons were judged at the cross and God is going to judge all rebels in the same way.

Now, with this understanding of Jesus' words, may I conclude by giving you 2 profound implications that must arrest your attention as you examine these things with your heart. 1. We are to be his witnesses. Ask yourself, "Does my life give testimony to the glory and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I a Spirit empowered believer whose life can bring conviction?" Secondly, the secret to an effective witness is prayer. It's prayer, dear friends. Parents, are you fervently praying for your children? Husbands, wives, are you fervently praying for your spouse who does not know Christ? Praying that the Spirit would bring his work of conviction to that heart? Are we all praying for those in our family? Our friends? People that we don't even know? For the Spirit to do his work? Folks, may I challenge you to get serious about your prayer life, especially as it relates to evangelism and pray that the Holy Spirit will use you as his chariot to ride into the world to convict it of sin and righteousness and judgment. Then finally, will you pray that the Spirit of God will ignite a fire of revival here at Calvary Bible Church. I have been praying for that for years and I will continue to pray that. Maybe he will. Certainly we see him work in the hearts of individuals but oh, I want so much more, don't you? So join me in prayer for that great work.

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Father, thank you for these truths. Thank you for the hope that we have in Christ, the power that we have in the Spirit of God. And Spirit, I pray that you will indeed do your mighty work of conviction, that sinners might be saved and that Christ might be glorified. For it is in his name that I pray. Amen.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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