

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN - PART XVII

DISCOURSE ON THE DEPARTURE OF JESUS AND THE INDWELLING OF THE TRINITY

I. The main part of the Last Supper Discourse begins with Jesus giving His disciples assurance that He will depart, but will bring them with Him later. He guides the disciples who are still struggling with understanding.

A. Jesus begins by telling them not to be troubled, for He has been warning them that He would depart and even told Peter (and, according to the other Gospels the other disciples) that they would abandon Him. See also Matt. 28:31-35; Mark 14:27-31; Luke 22:31-34.

- At one level, He is assuring them that He will come back to them and they will dwell with Him and the Father forever.
- He is also implicitly already giving them assurance that their weakness will be forgiven. Cf. Luke 22:31-32.
- Moses used very similar words when commissioning Joshua to lead the people. See Duet. 31:8. However, in that case, Moses was leaving permanently, whereas Jesus repeatedly assures His disciples that He will return to them.

B. Jesus promises that He will go and prepare the "dwelling places" in His Father's house for His disciples.

- There is the image of a great palace with many houses within it. The Book of Revelation will pick up on this theme of heaven as an incomprehensibly vast new Jerusalem (the place of God's dwelling) with the faithful dwelling in it. See Rev. 21:9-22:5. See also 1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 5:1.
- In addition, the imagery of one going to prepare a place and then returning reminds one of the ancient Jewish custom of a husband leaving the bride with her family while he prepares the home for her. The New Jerusalem is presented in the Book of Revelation as the bride who will come to Jesus at the end of all things. See Rev. 19:6-9, 21:2, 9-10.

C. When Jesus tells them they know the way to His Father's house, Thomas (ever the practical one willing to point out difficulties) is puzzled, for he does not understand how to get to this place.

1. Jesus means that He Himself is the way and they, to some degree at least, know Him.

2. Because Thomas comes to Jesus with an honest question, Jesus gives a direct answer, and more, by saying He is the way, the truth and the life.

- He is the way, for one can only proceed along the paths where Jesus the Good Shepherd leads. See John 10:1-11; Ps. 23:1 ff.; Ez. 34:11-31. In addition, only by following the way of Christ through Calvary can one arrive at everlasting life. See, e.g., Matt. 10:38-39; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 14:27. Jesus gives us the light by which to travel. See, e.g., 8:12.

- Jesus also, not only teaches the truth, but is the truth, about God (for he shows forth God's nature to us) and about humanity (for He is restored humanity) and the summation of all of creation. See, e.g., John 1:14, 18; Eph. 1:9-10.

- He also, not only gives life, but also is the life. Therefore, one who receives Him (e.g., in the Eucharist and in faith) receives everlasting life. See John 1:4-5; 5:28-29; 6:57-58, 68.

3. Fulfilling the last promise of the prologue, Jesus tells them that in Him they know and have seen the Father. In Jewish theology, no one can see the glory of God, but now He is revealed in Christ. See, e.g., Ex. 33:20.

D. Philip then asks Him to show them the Father. Confident in Jesus' promise, He appears to be asking for a glorious appearance of God, as the likes of Moses, Isaiah and Daniel received. See Ex. 24:9-18; Is. 6:1-13; Dan. Dan. 7:9-28.

1. There is an irony about this request, for when Moses and Isaiah received visions of God and the heavenly court, they were unable to keep the people from lapsing into idolatry, while Daniel's vision was kept secret. But Phillip seems to realize that this manifestation of God will be different, for of old they saw God in some sort of image of glory, not in Himself. See Ex. 33:20.

2. Jesus' first response is that He Himself shows forth the Father, for the Father dwells in Him and He in the Father. There is an image of God dwelling in the Temple, but that Temple was only an image of the heavenly temple in which God truly dwells. See Heb. 3:4-6, 9:25.

3. Jesus then says that they should believe in Him because of Who He is, but in any case should be convinced by His works, as He has said before. See John 5:36; 10:38. They especially, having been close to Him should draw, and will draw, the rightful lessons from His signs and from His life and death.

4. He then extends the promise even to the point of saying that His disciples will do greater works that He does in His human nature because He is going to the Father. Part of the idea is that His works have been basically limited to calling forth a small band among the Chosen People. They will bring His salvation to all of the world in the power of the Holy Spirit.

5. He even says that whatever they ask in His name will be given, that the father may show forth more glory. However, this promise is connected to the next statement, that one who really loves Him will keep His commands. See also Matt. 7:7-11; Mark 11:24-25. The connection to the Father through the Gospel of Christ and the way of Christ both makes one's prayers powerful and assures that they are consistent with the Father's will.

II. Then, as if to describe how the disciples will know the Father through Him and will perform these great works, Jesus promises the sending of the Spirit

A. Jesus first describes the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of truth whom the Father sends to those who love Jesus and, therefore, abide by His commandments. Jesus, therefore, promises the Spirit neither to legalists who value His commands but not for love of Christ, nor the lax who believe they love Christ, but do not keep His commands. True fidelity and love are connected. See James 2:14-26.

- The Qumran scrolls also describe a Spirit of truth, that is contrasted with the spirit of perversity, but it is more of a force sent by God. Jesus here begins to make it clear the Spirit is more personal.

B. Also contrasting with the true faithful is the world, who only believes what it sees and knows, in a worldly sense.

- The faithful know the Spirit, not because of sight alone, but rather because of the indwelling of the Spirit. There is a sense of the Spirit that Christ is with one. See, e.g., Heb. 12:18-24.

- The faithful will even, in a sense, see Jesus because of the life He gives them. The imperfect sight leads one forward even now, and will if followed give way to the perfect sight of God and thus transformation into God's image. See 1 Cor. 13:12; 1 John 3:1-2.

C. The Father sends the Spirit in the name of Jesus.

- There has been a long-standing dispute about how to phrase the sending of the Spirit, whether to say that the Spirit proceeds simply from the Father (as the eastern version of the Nicene Creed says) or from the Father and the Son (as the Western version of the Nicene Creed says.) Jesus is not directly dealing with this issue, for He is more describing how God sends the power of the Spirit upon the disciples of Christ.

D. There is a paradox in verses 21 and again in verses 23 and 24, for they seem to imply that God loves us after we have decided to keep His words, whereas John makes it clear elsewhere that the love of God comes first. 1 John 3:10, 18; see also Romans 3-7.

- However, these verses do not say that God does not love one first, but rather indicate that one becomes more of the person God loves by keeping the words and commandments of Jesus. See also Proverb. 8:17

- As Jesus has indicated elsewhere, one who does not keep the words of God and the commandments of Christ will not understand Him, and therefore, will cease to be His people.

III. Jesus then promises again the Holy Spirit, this time as the Paraclete and the one who will bring understanding.

A. A Paraclete was an advocate for one, especially in a court of law. Here, however, the Paraclete is more in the role of teaching and reminding them of what Jesus has said.

- At one level, Jesus is promising the Paraclete, here expressly named the Holy Spirit, to guide the Apostles, and therefore, the Church, along the paths of truth. He is the Advocate of truth. See, e.g., Matt. 16:17-19; 1 Tim. 4:15

- At another level, Jesus is promising them an Advocate so that their own sins do not blind them to the truth or make them despair at their sins. For Jesus has just said that only those who follow His commandments will understand the truth. The other two times the Gospel uses the title "Holy Spirit," it refers to different ways of forgiveness, through baptism and through the apostolic authority. See John 1:33, 20:22.

B. Jesus then promises them peace, but not as the world gives it. He does not assure them that there will be no troubles, see John 16:33, but rather the secure knowledge that He is with them. There is also an implication of the unity and peace of the Church as against the divisions of the world. See Eph. 2:14-22.

- This promise contrasts with the demand of the people of old to have a king "like other nations," hoping that such a ruler would bring them peace and prosperity. See 1 Sam. 8:5, 20. Jesus is promising that the peace of the messianic era will begin, but not in the way imagined. See, e.g., Is. 8:23-9:6, 12:1-17, 66:18-21; Jer. 31:31-40, 32:36-41; Ez. 36; Joel 4:17-20; Amos 9:9-15; Zech. 12:10-14.

C. Jesus then presents His return to the Father as glorious because the Father is greater than the human nature of Jesus. Jesus will be bringing the first part of humanity back to the Father, in preparation for all of humanity, as He promised near the beginning of the discourse. And so He says again that they should not be troubled.

D. Jesus then indicates that He is bringing the discourse to an end, for the great events are to take place. Emphasizing His control over the events, He represents the apparent triumph of the powers of darkness as in fact the way God shows the love of the Son for the Father. See, e.g., Phil 2:5-11. Likewise, the sufferings of the disciples will be a proof of their glory and faithfulness, and will in fact increase the grace of God in them. See, e.g., 2 Cor. 4:17-18; James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 1:6-9.