

The Gospel of John Session 9

John 16:4b—18:32

I. John 16:4b-11

1. Jesus makes it clear to the disciples that his going away is not a cause of sadness but, ironically, a cause of joy. The reason why it is a cause of joy is that Jesus is going to the Father (16:5) and this will make it possible for the Spirit to come. It is not that the Spirit simply follows the coming of the Son but that the Son's coming makes the Spirit's coming possible.
2. This is Jesus' fourth statement about the Spirit (16:7). Note the connection between the Son's departure and the Spirit's coming: "for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you" (16:7). Jesus has spoken about his relationship to the Spirit before. In 15:26 the Son sends the Spirit from the Father. In 14:25 the Spirit is sent by the Father in the Son's name. In 16:7 the Son sends the Spirit. We must think of the ministry of the Son and the ministry of the Spirit as organically related.
3. The language of 16:8 presupposes a trial in which "the world" is proved guilty (even as it thinks of having proven Jesus guilty). The Spirit will witness against "the world" and in doing so will confirm the faith of the disciples. The world will be proven wrong (guilty) on three counts: sin, righteousness and judgment.
4. The essence of sin is the rejection of the divine Word (16:9) as untrue. Sin is a fundamental resistance to God and the Truth he reveals. The Spirit will show that the world is in rebellion against God and that its rebellion is based upon falsehood. The world will also be proven wrong about righteousness. For the world, Jesus' crucifixion shows that he has been rejected by God as unrighteous. But the Spirit will bear witness that Jesus has gone to the Father (16:10) and so is the Righteous One. The witness of the Spirit will counter the assumptions of the world. The Spirit will also prove the world to be wrong about judgment. Jesus' death on the cross will seem to be a defeat in the eyes of his adversaries (over which they will rejoice). But the Spirit will bear witness that it is the "ruler of this world" which has been condemned (16:11). Jesus' death will be shown to have broken the devil's power (note 12:31).

II. John 16:12-15

1. This is the fifth promise about the Spirit. Jesus has "many things" to tell the disciples but they are not ready to receive these things now. What will be communicated later by the Spirit must be communicated by the Spirit because it will not simply be a matter of applying human intelligence.
2. Now the Spirit is designated as the "Spirit of truth" (16:13) because he will guide the disciples in "all the truth". The Spirit will lead the disciples into the Truth which has been revealed in Jesus. Through the Spirit, the meaning of what Jesus has revealed will be imparted to the disciples and will saturate their hearts and minds. This Truth cannot be appropriated in a merely mechanical way.
3. The Spirit will "glorify" the Son (16:14). The Spirit will disclose the identity of the Son and his relationship to the Father. The Son is glorified in being shown to share equally in the glory of the Father.
4. The relationship between the Father and the Son is such that they share completely in one another. The Father gives all that he has to the Son and the Son pours himself completely out for the Father. Through the Spirit, this communion is revealed to us and we are allowed to share in it. The one mission of God is carried through both the Son and the Spirit. The truth about the Son can only be received through the Spirit.

III. John 16:16-24

1. In 16:16 Jesus states a paradoxical truth: In a “little while” the disciples will not be able to see him but also in a “little while” they will be able to see him. Jesus is speaking of his death and resurrection. The disciples must think about their experience of what is about to occur in the light of this promise.
2. The disciples appear to be thoroughly confused (16:17-18). Jesus briefly describes what they will experience: “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” (16:20). To illustrate this point, Jesus used the example of a woman in childbirth (16:21). When “her hour has come,” a woman in childbirth is in great pain but after the birth of her child the joy of giving new life helps her to see that the pain was worth it. (Note that in Romans 8:22 Paul uses childbirth as a metaphor for the new creation.) Likewise, the disciples will experience great sorrow at Jesus’ death, but this sorrow will give way to joy when the “birth” comes about (Jesus’ resurrection). Note the emphasis in 16:22. Jesus’ resurrection will be such that their sorrow will be replaced by joy “and no one will take your joy from you”. This enduring joy is grounded in the resurrection.
3. During the time of the resurrection, the disciples will not question Jesus about anything (16:23) as they have just questioned repeatedly. The reason for this has been indicated in 16:13. The time of the resurrection will be a time of communion between Jesus and his disciples, a communion made possible by the Spirit. This communion will be manifested in the way in which they pray (16:23-24). They will pray in communion with Jesus and will, thus, pray in accordance with God’s will. By praying in communion with Jesus, what they ask for will be given. It is important to see here that prayer is not simply a matter of asking God for things but a matter of drawing nearer to God and becoming more and more open to him. This openness to God results in a joy that is “full” (16:24).

IV. John 16:25-33

1. While Jesus has spoken to the disciples in “figures of speech,” the time is coming when he will speak to them “plainly about the Father” (16:25). The difference between now and this future time is the coming of the Spirit (16:13). While they can not understand this now, the disciples will have a new relationship to Jesus, one of intimate communion. This communion will be based on love. Note that in 16:27 love and faith are essentially the same thing. The love of the disciples for Jesus is expressed in their faith that he is from the Father. Having loved the Son, they have also loved the Father. In the Son, they receive the love of the Father (16:27). Once again, Jesus’ departure from the world is not to be seen as a bad thing, as Jesus somehow abandoning the disciples (16:28).
2. In 16:29—30 it becomes clear that the disciples misunderstand Jesus. At this point, true understanding is impossible for Jesus has not yet been glorified and the Spirit has not yet come. Their faith is still incomplete and must be so at this point. In fact, at the approach of “this hour” they will be scattered and will leave Jesus alone (16:32).
3. In light of all this, Jesus offers consolation. While the disciples will leave him alone, Jesus is actually never alone because he and the Father are always together. The success of Jesus’ mission is not dependent upon the unwavering faith of the disciples. The peace which the disciples are to have is not the product of their own intelligence or steadfastness and it is certainly not the product of never experiencing difficulty. Jesus makes it clear that the peace they are to have come from him and his relationship to the Father. Note the contrast: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. The “hour” which approaches is the victory of Jesus, not the victory of the disciples.

V. John 17:1-8

1. 17:1-26 is an extended prayer offered by Jesus on behalf of the disciples (and the Church which is to follow). For this reason, it is sometimes called the High Priestly Prayer. It is analogous to the prayer the high priest would have offered on behalf of Israel and the Day of Atonement. This prayer emphasizes the intimacy of the Father and the Son.
2. Jesus' "hour" has now come, and it is to be an hour in which God is glorified (17:1). While Jesus' death may appear to be an hour of shame, defeat and rejection it will in fact be the hour in which the Father will glorify the Son (by raising him from the dead) and in which the Son will glorify the Father (by revealing his love). The Cross involves the Father surrendering his Son and the Son surrendering himself.
3. The Son have been given authority over everyone (17:2) and now asks that the Father give eternal life to all who belong to the Son. As crucified, risen and ascended, the Son become the source of eternal life (Life). Eternal life is knowing the Son for in knowing the Son one comes to a knowledge of the Father or, better, one enters into communion with the Father. Note that the Son is not receiving a glory which he has not yet possessed. His glorification by the Father reveals something about him that has always been true. In the Presence of the Father, the Son will possess the glory (the divine radiance) which he had "before the world existed" (17:5).
4. Jesus has fulfilled his mission of revealing the Name of the Father (17:6). Note the reciprocity of Father and Son: Those who have come to Jesus belong to the Father who has given them to the Son. The Son has imparted the Father's words to them (17:8) and they have come to know the truth about God. This truth can be simply stated but it has many implications. The truth about God is that he has sent the Son into the world to redeem the world.

VI. John 17:9-19

1. Jesus prays for the disciples as they are about to be sent out into the world. Jesus emphasizes the communion between the Father, the Son and the disciples. The Father has given the disciples to the Son, but this action is qualified by the fact that all that the Son possesses belongs to the Father and all the Father possesses belongs to the Son (17:10). The Son is glorified in the disciples. Note one of the consequences of this communion: the Father is glorified in the Son, the Father glorifies the Son and the Son is glorified in the disciples.
2. The Son is going to the Father, but the disciples will remain in the world and so Jesus prays for their protection and for their unity (17:11). The unity of the disciples will be a sign of their communion with the Father and the Son.
3. The communion of Father, Son and disciples results in the joy of the Son being fulfilled in the disciples (17:13). It should be noted that this is not simply a human joy, but the joy of the Son given to the disciples. This joy is supernatural in nature. Because the disciples have received Jesus' word, they are not the possession of the world but, rather, have been set apart from it just as the Son has himself been set apart from the world (17:14).
4. Jesus prays for protection for the disciples, particularly for protection from the evil one (17:15). He does not, however, pray that they will be removed from the world because they are being sent into world (17:18) because this is where their mission unfolds. The disciples can only carry out their mission in communion with God and this means that while they will be in the world, they will not be of it.
5. 17:17-19 is of great significance. Jesus asks the Father to "consecrate" the disciples. The Greek verb he uses here is the same one as is used in the Septuagint version of Exodus 29:1, where "consecrate" refers to the ordination of the sons of Aaron to the priesthood. Jesus has already spoken of himself as being consecrated and sent into the world (10:36). The disciples are to be "ordained in the Truth" which is

Jesus himself. However, before the disciples can begin their mission, Jesus must “consecrate” himself as the Sacrifice which seals the New Covenant. Jesus’ sacrifice is the source of the consecration and mission that the disciples will receive.

VII. John 17:20-26

1. Participation in the communion of God’s Triune life is now extended to future disciples. 17:20 highlights the fruit of the apostolic ministry—there will, despite the opposition of the world, be future generations of disciples. Jesus prays that these disciples will be unified because of their common sharing in the communion of the life of God. Just as the Father and the Son are “in” one another, future disciples will be “in” the life of God (17:21). The participation of human beings in the divine communion is salvation.
2. The unity of the disciples should be a witness to their being sent from the Son (17:21) and the glory that the Father has given to the Son, the Son will give to the disciples (17:22-23). The community of disciples has a destination—they will see the Son’s glory, a glory given by the Father to the Son “before the foundation of the world” (17:24).
3. Jesus’ final prayer for the disciples is that the love with which the Father has loved him will be in them as well. Father, Son, Spirit and Church will form a communion of love and this love will constitute the very essence of the Church and will be the source of her witness.

VIII. John 18:1-14

1. The scene now shifts from the place where Jesus and the disciples kept the Passover to a garden “across the Kidron Valley” (18:1). This garden was most likely located on the Mount of Olives and is known as the Garden of Gethsemane.
2. When we last saw Judas, he gone out into the “night” (13:30) or the darkness of sin. Now he reappears with soldiers and some officers sent from the chief priests to arrest Jesus (18:3). It is significant that this arresting force consists of both Gentiles (Roman soldiers) and Jews (officers from the chief priests). This group represents the whole of sinful humankind.
3. Jesus has already said that the “ruler of the world” is his chief opponent (12:31) so we may take Judas and this band of soldiers and officers as representing him. Appropriately, they act at night.
4. John’s account emphasizes that Jesus is in full control of all that happens (18:4). Note that when Jesus identifies himself in 18:5 (“I am he”) the arresting party behaves as if it has experienced a theophany—it falls to the ground (18:6). Jesus identifies himself in this way a second time and then acts with authority. He allows himself to be arrested and commands that the disciples be let go (18:8).
5. Peter decides that Jesus need to be “protected” and so responds in the way that the chief priests has anticipated. They expected armed resistance and so sent an armed force to arrest Jesus. Peter’s attack on the servant of the high priest on reveals his lack of understanding. Attempts to “protect” Jesus reveal a merely human understanding of his mission. Jesus’ response to Peter in 18:11 makes this clear. The language of drinking the “cup” is an Old Testament way of fulfilling God’s will (note Psalm 16:5). Jesus has come to “this hour” by his own choice and out of love for the Father.
6. In 18:12-14 the dual composition of the arresting party is mentioned again. There are both soldiers and “officers of the Jews” (18:12). Jesus is arrested because he allows himself to be arrested. He is taken first to Annas (a former high priest and a person of influence) and then to Caiaphas. 18:14 refers back to 11:50 and Caiaphas’ (unconsciously) prophetic remark.

IX. John 18:15-27

1. John has arranged his narrative so that Jesus' appearance before Annas is placed between two scenes in which Peter denies Jesus. Both Peter and Jesus are on trial, but Peter's frailty is fully exposed.
2. Does "another disciple" in 18:15 refer to the beloved disciple (13:23)? If so, this disciple may have had aristocratic priestly connections. Because he was known to Annas, he is allowed to gain access to the courtyard of Annas' house. He is able to get Peter admitted (18:16). The "servant girl" watching the door questions Peter: "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you" (18:17). Peter's response is emphatic: "I am not". As he stands among Jesus' enemies, he denies any contact with Jesus.
3. In 18:19-24 Jesus appears before Annas. When questioned, Jesus replies that he has spoken openly and has taught in the synagogues and the temple. Jesus does not have a "secret doctrine" that has been taught to a few (18:20). Jesus tells Annas that he can easily ask anyone who has heard his teaching the questions he is asking. Note that by only mentioning Annas and not reporting his actual words, John allows the spotlight to remain on Jesus. This scene underlines the fact that the outcome of this "trial" has been predetermined.
4. Having listened in on the questioning of Jesus, we return to the questioning of Peter. He has already been questioned by the servant girl (18:17) and now those standing around the fire question him: "You also are not one of his disciples, are you?" (18:25). Is Peter a disciple of Jesus? He is questioned a third time by the relative of the man whose ear he had cut off in the Garden of Gethsemane (someone who could have factual knowledge of his association with Jesus). Note that his question is more specific: "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" (18:26). Peter has now denied being a disciple three times (note 13:36-38).

X. John 18:28-32 (Trial, Scene 1)

1. This is the first scene in Jesus' trial before Pilate. As John's narrative makes clear, it is not really Jesus who is on trial but Pilate and "the Jews" (18:31). Note that John tells us nothing about Jesus' appearance before Ciaphas, only that "they" ("the Jews") bring him from Ciaphas' house to the praetorium (Pilate's residence in Jerusalem).
2. While "the Jews" are happy to hand Jesus over to Pilate for execution, they refuse to enter the praetorium since doing so would render them unclean (since it is the house of a Gentile). They do not want to be "defiled" (18:28) by being in the house of a Gentile but they have no reservations about sending Jesus to his death.
3. Pilate comes out of the praetorium to speak to them. Following procedure, Pilate asks them about the accusations made against Jesus. Significantly, they offer no specific accusations: "If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him to you" (18:30). Pilate can not conduct a trial with no accusations being made, so he tells "the Jews" to take Jesus and judge him "by your own law" (18:31). At this point, Pilate sees only an intra-Jewish dispute in which he has no interest.
4. "The Jews" now suggest that the crime involved is a capital crime and that administering such a punishment is beyond their authority. In 18:32 John makes it clear that Jesus' death on the cross has already been hinted at (note 12:32). Once again, John makes it clear that Jesus is not a victim.