

JOHN — WEEK 22

RELEASING THE SPIRIT



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The cover image is *Ecce Homo (Behold the Man)* by Caravaggio

I am going away but that will release The Holy Spirit. You will be very sad for a time, but then overjoyed. You'll ask the Father in My name, rather than My praying for you, eliminating the middleman.

Everything the Father has is mine.

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John, Week 22 — Releasing The Spirit
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1 John 16:4b–11

“And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.

“But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going? But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

One of my favorite theological illustrations comes from a letter to Santa Claus, addressed thusly:

Santa Claus

The North Pole

Earth

The Solar System

The Milky Way Galaxy

The Universe

The Mind of God

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. — 1 Corinthians 13:12 (KJV)

This side of eternity, our understanding of God is going to be limited. The Bible gives us some important clues though. Genesis 1 says He created the world by speaking. John 1 says Jesus is the incarnate word of God and that the world was created through Him.

This part of John’s gospel fills in the Trinity, giving many details about the Spirit and His relationship to us. Jesus’s death, resurrection, and ascension are part of something God designed that releases the Spirit. Jesus returning to the Father changes other things in important ways—multiple ways.

And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. — 1 John 2:1b

For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; — Hebrews 9:24

These verses point to how the ascended Jesus is our advocate in the Heavenly realms.

Today’s passage teaches that His return to the Father releases the Holy Spirit to show up big time.

Chapter sixteen of John is a package. It teaches how everything will change as a result of the events to come.

The disciples will be different. Prayer will be different. The world will be different.

2 John 16:12–15 (ESV)

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

As much as Jesus has already said, He now announces that He’s pulling His punches—holding off on some of the toughest truths because the disciples *cannot bear them now*.

But the Holy Spirit will fill them in later. *He will guide you into all truth, ... and He will declare to you the things that are to come.*

And note how this ties together. Jesus had already told them that the Holy Spirit will fill it all in.

“But 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 things that I said to you.” — John 14:26

So, where do the epistles that we use to fill it all in come from?

The Holy Spirit. In other words, more scripture is coming.

And, just to close the loop, these very passages are part of the fulfilment of that.

John wrote this gospel many years later with the help of the Holy Spirit.

There’s another curious tidbit in this passage. The Holy Spirit *will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak.*

The Trinity is way beyond human comprehension, but this detail is simple. The Holy Spirit has no authority of His own. He also has no glory of His own. *He will glorify me, for He will take of what is mine and declare it to you.*

Okay, but what does “take” mean? Why say it that way?

The Greek words translated as “take” in verses 14 and 15 are both conjugations of lam-ban-o (λαμβάνω), which can be translated as gather, receive, or accept. In other words, He’s not grabbing, so much as acting as a middleman.

His job is just to pass along what has been assigned to Him.

This passage clearly sets out the Holy Spirit’s role as specifically subordinate. He is no less a part of the Trinity, which is all one God.

But the function of the Spirit is subordinate.

3 John 16:16–22

“A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.”

Then some of His disciples said among themselves, “What is this that He says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’?” They said therefore, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is saying.”

Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, “Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’? Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.”

Jesus is using a great psychological strategy here. He doesn’t describe the sequence of the coming events—crucifixion and resurrection—literally. Instead, He describes them in terms of how they will make the disciples feel. Jesus has already mentioned His death many times, so this is the same lesson, taught from another angle.

The childbirth analogy is intentionally extreme. There is great pain and even danger (especially back then) in childbirth. It cannot be halted; it must go forward. Thank God people don’t have the option to quit the whole thing right there.

But it eventually turns to great joy. So it will be with the disciples. *“Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.”*

The disciples are about to ride the greatest psychological roller-coaster ever. Childbirth is the best example in life that’s analogous,

So Jesus uses it.

Carol Burnett is quoted as saying, *“If you want to know what childbirth feels like, grab your lower lip and pull it over your head.”*

That’s comic, but it does portray the extreme nature of childbirth. In Jesus’s day, the only pain-killing drug available was wine. They didn’t even have the Lamaze magic pain-killing word “hout.”

That made childbirth back then a unique combination of terror, pain, and joy—the most extreme pain and the most extreme joy.

That’s a pretty good example of the emotional roller-coaster the disciples are about to ride.

4 John 16:23–28

“And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.”

This passage gives us two more details about the transformation that ascension brings. First, Jesus introduces the idea of praying to the Father in His name. Once Jesus is ascended and seated at the Father’s right hand, that’ll be the way to make petitions—directly to the Father in Jesus’s name.

This is a radical change in how to pray—praying to the Father while invoking the name of the Son. It’s a whole new system.

And notice the contrast with the old system. No altar. No sacrifices. Jesus’s name replaces all that because His death on the cross replaced all that.

Of course, that detail hasn’t been filled in yet for these guys. The substitutionary role of the cross is yet to be fully revealed. They won’t understand why asking in His name makes sense until later.

For now, they’re just memorizing the new system.

The other new detail is about what won’t happen. *In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you;*

Jesus praying for them won’t be how it works anymore. In other words, by praying in His name, we’ve connected directly with the Father. In a sense, they’ve “eliminated the middleman.”

And notice how this works—for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

The key word here is “because.” In other words, this is because of faith. Faith is why praying in Jesus’s name works.

We’re familiar with the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. This passage adds another “by faith” clause.

The direct connection to the Father is by faith too.

5 John 16:29–33

His disciples said to Him, “See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.”

Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

The disciples respond joyously that they get it—that Jesus is who He says He is. *By this we believe that You came forth from God.*

So Jesus immediately shoots down their happiness. That almost sounds mean-spirited.

But the last thing they need is to be giddy when the hammer drops. This is yet another allusion to how they’ll feel, but this time Jesus adds the crucial detail that they will be scattered.

That’s about feelings too. Scattering is a fear response.

Furthermore, it’s a cowardly fear response. The disciples should be aware of this. The basic concepts of warfare and other forms of violence are familiar to everyone in the first century because those kinds of events are anything but rare.

Running away can be the right thing to do in the presence of overwhelming force. Standing your ground may be useless, not to mention fatal.

So, their being scattered is either an indication of cowardice or overwhelming opposition.

Either way, it’s depressing.

This whole section of John is a portrait of pain and joy together. It’s a curious blend, but common in the economy of the kingdom of Heaven. It’s a hallmark of Christianity. We are promised both, over and over.

One takeaway is that joy is not the opposite of pain. It definitely isn’t all about the absence of pain.

So we end up with something that might be called “uncomfortable joy.” If what you seek is comfort, Christianity isn’t for you.

Christianity promises, even commands, suffering. It also warns of persecution.

But the joy is worth it. Being connected to God gives meaning to everything. It makes life more alive.

That’s the ultimate joy.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Should we celebrate the ascension?
2. Do we pay enough attention to the Holy Spirit?
3. Besides childbirth, give examples of anguish leading to extreme joy?
4. Are there exceptions to ending every prayer in Jesus's name?
5. Could you find joy in trials and persecution?

Items for prayer: