

Jesus Brings Good Things to Life!

John 16:5–11 ⁵ but now I am going to him who sent me. None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ⁶ Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things. ⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

In Christ Jesus, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, dear fellow redeemed,

We’ve all seen them right...before and after pictures? Before and after weight loss; or before and after braces. When you’re “stuck” on the “before” side of things, life can be miserable. That’s how we find Jesus’ disciples – miserable. Our text is a “before” picture, one that shows men who are sad and scared. Why? Because Jesus is going away, not for day or two, but for good. They will not see him again, not on this side of heaven. What were they going to do? How were they going to survive? When they were out on the lake in the middle of a deadly storm, it was Jesus who stilled the storm and saved their lives. It was Jesus who fed them and 5000 others with a boy’s lunch. It was Jesus who healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and even raised the dead. Jesus provided safety and security that no one else could. They did not want to face life without him. In fact, they refused to even think or talk about it – as Jesus himself noted: **“None of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’ ‘Rather, you are filled with grief because I have said these things.’ ⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away.”** (John 16:5-7). Can you believe that – that Jesus was going away for the good of his disciples, for the good of his Church? Yes, my friend, you can believe it. You must believe it. Jesus would never lie to you. Everything he does, whether he’s coming or going, whether he’s giving or taking, is always for your good. It’s from this truth that we draw our theme today: Jesus Brings Good Things to Life! 1) In us; and 2) Through us.

As we’ve seen, the “before” snapshot of Jesus’ disciples, taken the night he was betrayed, was not a pretty picture. Things weren’t about to get any better for those men. By night’s end, every one of them deserted Jesus. The next day their Lord was crucified. Sunday night found them huddled together behind locked doors for fear of authorities.

Of course, the Savior’s resurrection changed their outlook, and yet they still struggled to see what it all meant for their lives. They slipped backwards into their old ways of thinking, convinced that Jesus’ had come to make their lives on earth a bit more heavenly. In fact, just before his ascension they asked him: **“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”** (Acts 1:6). In other words, Lord, now are you going to make Israel the powerhouse it once was? Now do we get to sing, “We are the champions!”?

Jesus had once told Peter: **“Get behind me, Satan! You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”** (Matthew 16:23). He could say the same thing here, not just to Peter and his cohorts, but to us – at least to me. How often during the past couple of months I have focused on merely human concerns. As I sat safer at home, I thought to myself how nice it would be to see Jesus face to face. If he were at my side, I wouldn’t worry about groceries or Clorox Wipes. Jesus could snap his fingers and supply all my needs. I wouldn’t worry about a plummeting 401K. Jesus at my side is better than social security. And should the virus strike me,

Jesus could cure me in a second with his healing touch. Of course, I prayed about all these things, knowing that although I cannot see him, Jesus is at my side. I prayed for me and my family and not just for us. I prayed for all of you. I've prayed for our world, that Jesus would put an end to this pandemic and spare people everywhere from disease and death. In other words, I've prayed for Jesus to bring good things to life, my life, your life, everybody's life.

And yet, even if I could say that I did not pray selfishly, I'd have to confess another sin: I prayed shortsightedly. As I look at my prayers in the light of what Jesus says to us today, I see petitions that are heavily focused on mere human concerns rather than on the concerns of our God. Do you ever do that – pray in a way that shows what you really want is heaven here on earth? If so, is that wrong? It is, when it exposes a heart filled with misguided loyalties. If my focus is a better life here on earth, I can easily devalue Jesus and everything he came to do for our world. A heart that is focused solely on a better here and now, will be miserable always and forever. There is no heaven on earth. And there is no heaven in eternity without Christ as our focal point.

We need Jesus so much. We need him to save us from ourselves, our foolish, selfish, shortsighted ways. We need him to save us from our sinful hearts that betray him so quickly and so easily. We need him to bring his good things to our lives, and that's exactly what he does. Rather than giving us what we want, rather than giving us the punishment we deserve, he works for us and in us everything we truly need!

Jesus told his first disciples: **“But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” (John 16:7).** Remember when and where Jesus spoke these words. It was Thursday night, most likely in the upper room where he was celebrating the Last Supper with his closest followers. When he says that he was going away for their good and ours, he meant that he was headed to the cross as our perfectly obedient Substitute. There he paid for the sin we were born with, sin that shows itself in our lives every day in so many ways – through selfish thoughts and actions, in misplaced priorities, in our failure to love self and others in ways that please and honor our God. Jesus was committed to facing God's wrath over sin in our place so that we won't have to. He left the upper room knowing that victory was in hand. He promised that he would rise from the dead and that his resurrection would be proof-positive that God has accepted his death as the atoning sacrifice our sin. Jesus saw beyond Easter to his Ascension. He would return to his Father, not as one abandoning his church, but as One who would take his place at his Father's right hand, the seat of great power from which he rules everything for the good of his church so that we might enter the heaven he has won for us. To this end, Jesus has promised and sent us help – the Holy Spirit who came in power on Pentecost and who will continue his work in the church until Jesus returns at the end of this age.

Do you see now why and how Jesus' departure is for our good? Unless he went the way of the cross, there would be no acceptable sacrifice for our sin. There would only be never-ending death and destruction for us all. Unless Jesus had died and risen as our Substitute, there would be no Savior from sin, no life-giving Gospel, no saving faith, no reason for God's Spirit to come to us. But because Jesus did go the way of the cross, we have all these things and more through the Spirit that Jesus has sent. He is our Advocate, the one who comes alongside of us, and in fact, dwells within us, working and preserving his precious gift of faith, faith that makes Jesus' holiness our own, even as it clings to his sacrifice as the absolute end of our sin-debt. This is the most important thing in all the world.

That's how God sees it. Your eternal well-being is God's greatest concern. He wants you with him forever! God's Spirit convinces you of God's great love for you in Christ. The Spirit uses God's love to reshape our minds and thoughts to be like his. We want what he wants. So yes, we pray for people's good health and long life. We pray for earthly blessings, but always with the desire that such blessings will have a positive impact on people's eternal wellbeing. This is the

Spirit teaching us to let go of mere human concerns and focus, instead, on the concerns of our God. This is the good that Jesus brings into our lives by his Holy Spirit.

You see this in his first followers. If Maundy Thursday is the “before” snapshot of those eleven disciples, Pentecost Sunday is the “after” picture. Look what has happened. Men who were sad and scared, men who had gone into hiding, now hit the streets of Jerusalem joyful and unafraid. They have a message to share. They know that what they have to say will not be popular, but people’s lives, their eternal lives depend on it. And so those men become what Jesus commissioned them to be – his **“...witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8).**

At the time Jesus spoke those words, the church numbered about 120 members. The world’s population at the time is estimated to have been 300,000,000 – roughly the present population of the United States. That must have seemed like an impossible task. Jesus has given us the same mission which seems just as impossible today. Our world is growing more and more ungodly. People don’t want to hear what we have to say. Many hate us for what we believe, and at times, they react violently to us Christians and our message. Like those first disciples, we may be tempted to crawl into a corner and wait for Jesus to come back for us.

But that’s not the mission. Remember the good things that Jesus has brought to your life. You were no more open and accepting of those things than is the unbelieving world around you. That didn’t stop Jesus or his Spirit. Nothing can stop him, not even the gates of hell. For Jesus promises: **“When [the Spirit] comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment...” (John 16:8).** Jesus is reminding us that we are simply messengers. He’s the One who will bring good things to life through us. We are his channels, nothing less and nothing more. It isn’t our job to convert anyone to Christianity. We speak. The Spirit does the heavy lifting. **“He will prove the world wrong...⁹ about sin, because people do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; ¹¹ and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.” (John 16:8-11).**

People take a test to see if they have COVID-19. The Spirit of God uses his Word in a similar way to show people they have the damning virus called sin. As we proclaim God’s will and Word, it is the Spirit who convinces people that failure to believe in Jesus is the worst sin of all. It is the Spirit who shows people that no matter how good they try to be, they cannot make themselves right with God. Righteousness comes from Jesus alone who left his Father’s side to make us right in God’s eyes, and then returned to the Father to prove and proclaim his mission accomplished. It is the Spirit, and he alone, who takes our testimony and uses it to convince people that sin is a dead end. Look at the father of lies, the prince of this world, Satan himself. He is already judged and condemned to an eternity of misery. Sin does not bring the pleasure or rewards that the devil promises. The Spirit’s purpose in all of this is a loving one. He calls the lost from sin to Christ. He shows them God’s love and forgiveness in Jesus and by the power of this gospel, he works life in them as he has in us.

God has greatly honored us by giving us such important work to do. God has greatly blessed us by giving us his Spirit who works in us both the desire and the ability to carry out our mission. If you ever doubt the impact we can have as individuals, I invite your attention to a now familiar map. Sometime last December one person contracted a virus that in six short months has spread throughout the world. We have something wonderful, a life-giving message, made contagious by Spirit’s power. It’s a message that begs to be spread far and wide until the saving name of Jesus is known and praised the world over. To this glorious end, come Holy Spirit! Renew our hearts and kindle in us the fire of your love. Amen.