

## Light, Love, Life ~ The Gospel of John

### Chapters 16-18

We pick up where we left off, in the midst of the Last Supper discourse. Jesus is continuing along the line of His faithful followers (then and now) being hated by the world. In their hatred some will completely disassociate from us; others will go further, inflicting physical violence...even death, some might even think they're doing so for God. There's probably no better example of this than a Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus. (You can read about him in the book of Acts. In fact, he ended up writing a good chunk of the New Testament. As much of a hero of the faith that Saul/Paul became after his conversion, you nevertheless get the sense that his earlier persecution of Christians haunted him until the day he died.)

Jesus wasn't telling them this to scare them, but rather to prepare them, "*I have told you this, so that when the time comes you will remember that I warned you.*" (16:4) When things get hard, when the pressure is on, if persecution breaks out, it's always tempting to shrink back. Actually, a fair amount of the New Testament is geared toward addressing this very thing.

We have to imagine at this point that the disciples were sad, confused, bewildered, and shell-shocked. Jesus could see it, "*...you are filled with grief*" (16:7) To comfort them Jesus points again to the coming Holy Spirit. Up to this point, Jesus' comments regarding the Holy Spirit had more to do with the role the Spirit will play in the life of the believer and the believing community. Now Jesus shifts to the role the Spirit will play in the wider world. The Spirit will convict the world of guilt (or expose the guilt of the world) in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. Let's break this down a little bit.

The language used here is rather legal. The word "paraclete" (Greek for Comforter/Counselor/Advocate/Helper) was used outside the New Testament in court settings for someone like an attorney who came alongside in legal proceedings. Connect that to the use of the words "convict" as well as the word "judgment", both of which also have legal connotations, and it appears like Jesus is turning the table a bit. Whereas the world might want to put followers of Jesus on trial (and will, in fact, put Jesus on trial shortly), in actuality, according to Jesus, it is the world that is on trial...and the Trinity is the Judge.

- Notice that "sin" in verses 8 and 9 is singular. The primary sin that the Spirit will bring conviction on is not believing in Jesus. This is the charge against the world, "*...they do not believe in Me*" (16:9)
- In Greek "righteousness" (dikaiosyne) can also be translated (perhaps is better translated) as "justice". Jesus was going to the Father based on His righteousness/justice. The resurrection and ascension were Christ's validation and vindication. Justice was, and will be, served.
- And the "*prince of this world now stands condemned*" (16:11). The Cross of Christ turns everything upside down. Though Christ will be condemned by a human court, it is

actually Satan (prince of this world) that will be condemned, along with all who stand with him...i.e. Those that don't believe in Jesus.

Jesus followed that up with quite the understatement, *"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear."* (16:12) What must have been going through the disciples' heads at this point? Again we see the role of the Holy Spirit...He will make all things clear in time. Notice the Trinitarian-ness of all this, the interweaving of the Father, Jesus, and the Spirit.

Jesus was doing everything He could to prepare the disciples for what was about to happen. But how do you get prepared for something you can't even imagine? Who would have ever thought that God would bring redemption and salvation through a Roman Cross, followed by Resurrection. The disciples had no frame of reference for this. Jesus described it much like one would describe something to a preschooler, *"In a little while you will see Me no more, and then after a little while you will see Me."* (16:16)

This only caused the disciples to murmur amongst themselves. So Jesus tried again, *"I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy."* (16:20), followed by an illustration of childbirth and yet another statement about being given whatever they ask in His name. OK, I've put this off as long as I can. This is now the fourth time Jesus has said something along these lines (see 14:13-14, 15:7, 15:16). What does Jesus mean by saying *"ask for whatever we want in His name"*? And will God actually give us whatever we ask for?

Let's start with what He was NOT saying. Asking/praying in Jesus' name does NOT mean simply adding, *"...in Jesus name, Amen."* at the end of our prayers. He was NOT giving us some special formula or incantation to use to guarantee results.

To pray in the name of Jesus means...

- To pray by the authority of Jesus
  - Because of Jesus we have access to the Father. As the writer of Hebrews states, *"Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence."* (Hebrews 4:16) We do not have to go through a bunch of intermediaries. Jesus had the authority to grant that kind of access. He opened up the way and invites us to approach with boldness.
- To pray in line with the character of Jesus
  - Someone's name carried two connotations—whatever authority they held, as mentioned above—and it also implied their character. So to ask something in Jesus' name means to ask something Jesus Himself would ask. For example, praying to win the lottery is not something I would imagine Jesus doing. But praying, *"give us today our daily bread"*, since that's how He taught us to pray, would be in line.
- To pray in accordance with the will of Jesus

- What does Jesus want? That's what we are to ask for. To follow Jesus means to align our will to His. So what He wants is what we want...nothing more, nothing less.
- To pray in seeking the glory of God
  - We see an example of this in 12:28. We'll see another example of this in chapter 17. And even the prayer Jesus taught us to pray opens with, "*Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*" (Matthew 6:9-10)

Now, even if what we ask for fits all of that, does that mean we'll get what we want? Hmm, well, let me remind us all that the point of prayer is NOT to get God to do (or give) whatever it is we think God ought to do (or give), but rather to be properly formed. Additionally, Jewish rabbis, of which Jesus followed the pattern of in many ways, often taught using hyperbole. (For example, if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out; or if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off...see Matthew 5:29-30). For further consideration, I would also offer up Jesus' own prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, "*Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.*" (Luke 22:42)

To paraphrase the disciples, "*Oh, we get it now.*" (16:29-30) To paraphrase Jesus, "*Really? Do you?*" (16:31) Then Jesus foretells that they are all going to scatter and abandon Him. While He's foretelling, He also offered up this little nugget that all followers of Jesus ought to take to heart, "*In this world you WILL HAVE trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*" (16:33, emphasis added)

As writer Flannery O'Connor stated, "*You shall know the truth, and the truth will make you odd.*" The world can be very unkind to odd folks. And those who accept the Gospel call to follow Jesus are nonconforming to the ways of the world, instead trusting the way of the Kingdom. As we do so, trouble is bound to come. As our friend Shane Claiborne would say, we are holy troublemakers, because our confidence is in the One who overcame the world. So let's not let the world press us into its mold, but let us press on in the way of the Lamb of God.

We're all familiar with the Lord's Prayer, but we may be less familiar with the Prayer of the Lord, or the High Priestly Prayer, that makes up the entirety of chapter 17. If we want to know the heart of Jesus, we need only look at this prayer. Let's look at some of the highlights of this prayer.

We see again the theme of Glory ("doxazo" in Greek, from which we get the word doxology) in the first five verses. In the book of Isaiah we hear God speaking through the prophet Isaiah, "*I am the Lord, that is My name! I will not give My glory to another or My praise to idols.*" (Isaiah 42:8) and "*For My own sake, for My own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield My glory to another.*" (Isaiah 48:11) Yet here we see Jesus saying, "*Glorify Me*". This is entirely appropriate because He is not "another" but rather God Himself. God's glory in human form...which really is the vocation of humanity from the beginning. But

humanity as a whole failed to live up to that vocation, so God became human to fulfill that vocation Himself.

Notice how Jesus defined eternal life, “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*” (17:3) The word “know” here denotes a deep and personal knowledge/understanding that comes from experience...it’s not knowledge in the sense of facts and information. This is also the word used euphemistically to speak of sexual intimacy. Remember the purpose of John’s writing is to help readers “believe” in Jesus, and by doing so to have life. This statement by Jesus, then, gives us a better understanding of what belief has in mind...not agreement to doctrinal statements but personal, relational knowledge of God and Jesus.

People are able to know God/Jesus because, as Jesus says, “*I have revealed You...*” (17:6) or I have made you known, I have made you visible, understandable. We could say this is a summary statement of Jesus’ whole mission: to make God known. This also signals how much God wants us to know Him. We could summarize the first part of this prayer this way, “*Father, I’ve completed the task You’ve given Me; now return Me to My former glory.*” This circles back to chapter 1, “*We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth...No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made Him known.*” (1:14, 18)

Jesus prayed specifically for His disciples, that the Father would protect them (17:11, 15), and that “*...they may be one as We are one.*” (17:11) He goes on, “*...they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.*” (17:14). Hmm, not of this world. Yet how much time and effort do we put in trying to fit in the world? It is imperative that we understand that as disciples of Jesus we are stepping out of sync with the world. When people see Christians/the Church they should see an odd, peculiar people. We need to expect it, be OK with it, even embrace it. Now, the goal isn’t to be odd/peculiar, rather the goal is to be faithful to Jesus, which naturally makes us odd/peculiar.

This is reinforced by Jesus praying, “*Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.*” (17:17) To sanctify means to make holy, to separate or set apart. Again, followers of Jesus are meant to be a distinct, set apart people. What makes us so? Truth...and Jesus is Truth. We adopt and embrace His narrative (His explanation) of, well, everything: Reality; God; the world and why it exists, and why it is the way it is; humanity—our purpose, calling, and belovedness; good and evil; what a good life is; and where all of history is headed...again, everything.

Not only are we different, but we’re also “sent” (17:18) into the world to infect it with our differentness...the Love and Truth of Jesus. Jesus assumes His disciples will be successful because He also prays for those who will believe through them and the message they’re spreading (17:20). The fact that we’re discussing it two thousand years later indicates that they were reasonably successful.

One way we could look at this is Jesus prayed for you and me on the night He was betrayed. He envisioned us...those who would come to believe down the line. And His prayer for us is the

same as the original disciples, “*May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You sent Me.*” (17:21) Our mission/purpose/calling is the same as the original disciples. And our unity is meant to help the world believe. Hmm, uh oh. I’m not sure if people look around at Christians/the Church that unity will be what they see.

Someone who understood the importance of all this was the apostle Paul. He wrote to the Ephesians, “*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*” (Ephesians 4:1-6, emphasis added)

How must Christ feel to see His Church divided up as we are. I remember when this passage (John 17) really hit home for me. I was in college, studying for ministry. As much as I was learning about theology, Scripture, and church ministry, there was not much practical teaching on fostering unity. Sure, it was discussed conceptually, sentimentally, and in platitudes, but for Jesus to pray for it as He did, when He did, it seemed to me that putting forth more effort to cultivate unity amongst Christians and congregations would be in order. That’s when I made a commitment to adopt an ecumenical posture toward my fellow believers. While we may have our differences of opinions on matters, even important matters, those don’t eclipse the importance of unity. Jesus Himself understood that unity was critical for the accomplishment of the mission. So, practically speaking, we should never let “brand loyalty” to our tribe, tradition, or denomination take precedence over a Kingdom first attitude.

John 17 is a good passage of Scripture for us to marinate in and take to heart, allowing it to form us and inform us. Please spend some time meditating on it this Lenten season.

Moving on from the Last Supper, Jesus and the gang head to “*...an olive grove*” (18:1). From the other gospel writers we know that this was the Garden of Gethsemane. To get a good handle on how things went down this grim night it is good to piece the Synoptics and John together, as each of them include certain details and exclude others, so reading them in harmony is helpful.

We see another of the “I Am...” allusions when Jesus asked those who came to arrest Him, “*Who is it you want?*” (18:4) John is the only writer to note the detail that upon Jesus answering them, “*I am He*” (18:5) that “*they drew back and fell to the ground.*” (18:6) Interesting that they came to arrest Him with a detachment of soldiers and weapons, yet with just His voice and admission of who He was, they hit the ground. This demonstrates, yet again, that Jesus was fully in control of this whole situation. To say it another way, they were able to arrest Him because Jesus allowed them to arrest them, as it was an integral part to the whole plan. It is a strange paradox in that as much as Jesus was a victim of injustice and violence, as events proceeded, yet at the same time, it seems everyone else were almost like puppets on a string. (Please note my careful use of the words “seems” and “almost”...I don’t want to take anything away from the agency and responsibility of those involved. I’m simply trying to make the point that even with

all our agency and responsibility, God will get done what He wants done, with or without our help.)

A close reading of chapter 18 may have us wondering who the high priest was, since it refers to both Annas and Caiaphas as the high priest. Technically, Caiaphas was the high priest. Formerly, Annas had been the high priest and evidently still played quite an influential role seeing that it was to Annas that they first took Jesus.

Now imagine what it must have been like to be Peter on this dreadful night. Jesus had already predicted that Peter would deny/disown Him three times (13:38). What was he thinking and feeling as he observed the proceedings from a distance? Unlike the Synoptics, John doesn't comment on Peter's reaction to the rooster crowing after his third denial. Apparently John wanted to leave it to the reader's imagination (hence my questions above).

We see a brief interrogation before Annas. John notes a stop at Caiaphas' but offers no details of what happened there. (Again, see the other Gospel writers for details.) John seems more intent on sharing what happened before Pilate. Pilate, I suspect, was none-too-happy to have to be dealing with this. It was around the Passover so the Romans were always on high alert when the Jews were gathered together for their festivals. The Romans liked peace and order, and festivals were ripe with potential for things to get out of hand. To top it off, Pilate had to accommodate their religious sensibilities by going out to them instead of having them in his palace. Plus, it was early in the morning. What is unclear from all the Gospel writers is whether or not Pilate had heard any rumblings about this itinerant rabbi from Nazareth prior to this.

Unlike the Synoptic writers, John uses kingdom language sparingly. But before Pilate, when Pilate asked if Jesus was the king of the Jews, Jesus answered, "*My kingdom is not of this world...*" (18:36), and admitted to being a king (18:37). Then Jesus pulls a subtle, ninja-like, turn of the tables on Pilate when He said, "*Everyone on the side of truth listens to Me.*" (18:37) A court and a trial are all about (or supposed to be all about) truth and justice. Jesus was essentially asking Pilate if he was really after the truth...as the Truth was staring him in the face. Pilate's response of, "*What is truth?*" demonstrates that he didn't like being questioned as well as having other motives at play other than seeking truth. (All signs point to Pilate being motivated by fear, which we'll see more clearly in chapter 19.)

Now comes an iconic twist. Here the Jewish religious leaders were trying to convince Pilate that Jesus was a troublemaker deserving of death. In keeping with a custom of releasing a prisoner at Passover (a very strange custom if you ask me) they asked that Barabbas be released. Why was Barabbas in prison? Because he was a known troublemaker, having taken part in a rebellion/insurrection. Pilate knew Barabas was a threat and had committed crimes deserving death. It was complete pretension on the part of the Jews that they were somehow helping Pilate/Rome by handing over Jesus...and Pilate was fully aware of it. (And people wonder why I have issues with politics and politicians.)

The conclusion of this story (or is it a new beginning?) comes next week...

Possible Discussion Questions

- In what ways have you been misunderstood, mistreated, looked down upon, dismissed, rejected, etc. because of your faith in Jesus?
- If we've faced no negative consequences due to our faith in Christ, might that be reason to consider how faithfully we're following/obeying Jesus? (Or should we just consider ourselves "blessed"?)
- Share about a time when you were confused, disoriented, didn't know or understand what was going on around you...a time when things just didn't make sense.
- What does it mean to pray/ask in the name of Jesus? How would you explain that to someone?
- Throughout the Last Supper discourse Jesus had mentioned the role of the Holy Spirit quite a bit. What has been your experience with the Holy Spirit?
- The disciples often struggled to understand Jesus. What are you presently struggling to understand about Jesus, or what Jesus taught, or about following His way?
- If you're willing to share, what's been something you prayed very fervently about that was not answered as you hoped? How did you process that? When you hear/read something like, "*Ask whatever you want in My name and it will be given to you..*" what do you think/feel, and do with that?  
(\* \*\*Table Group Leaders, please be careful with this one if you choose to use it. This could be very triggering. We have plenty of people who have prayed for sick loved ones who have nevertheless passed, or similar situations. Just be sensitive...and make sure others in your group are sensitive too.)
- Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble." (16:33) Do you function/live with the expectation that trouble will come your way? What trouble (hardship, suffering) have you experienced? Has the trouble you've experienced been a result of following Jesus, or more chance misfortune that comes from living in this world?
- What from the High Priestly Prayer (chapter 17) stands out to you, perhaps speaks to you?
- How would you describe the difference between knowing about God versus knowing God? What has been your experience of this?
- In what ways are Christians/the Church odd, peculiar, distinct within the world?
- How would you describe the connection, the interplay between our sanctified-ness and our sent-ness?

- What does your commitment to unity amongst believers/the Church look like?
- How do you feel about the current state of the Church from a unity perspective? (Does it grieve your heart? Or Is division just how things are...not much we can do about it? What level of priority should it take in our day to day activities? Etc.)
- What thoughts and feelings do you experience as you read about Jesus' arrest and trial?
- Try to put yourself in the position of one of Jesus' disciples on the night He was arrested and put on trial. How do you think you'd feel? How would you want to respond?
- Try to put yourself in the position of Pilate. What would you think/feel about being put in this situation? What questions would you ask?

### Soul Training Exercise

Read:                      John chapters 19-21

Memorize:                John 20:21