

John 14:15-14:31 **The Promise of the Spirit - New relationships**

I was talking to someone this week about prayer and in the course of the conversation we got around to the subject of praying for ourselves. The trouble was, this person had great difficulty with the thought of praying for themselves, because there were so many more worthy people in the world to pray for. The problem was they didn't think they deserved God to listen to them at all. It was OK for someone like me to pray to God, but not them. I quickly explained. I don't pray on the basis that I've done something to make God pleased with me. On the contrary, I pray despite my failings, because I know what Jesus has done for me. I pray because Jesus Christ has brought me into a new relationship with the Father.

When Jesus began to talk to his disciples about his going away, they began to worry. Over the years they'd been with Jesus, they'd become dependent on his presence to help them know what to do, and how to live. I guess they realised how much they still needed to learn. So the thought of Jesus leaving them was pretty disturbing. So Jesus set out to reassure them. John 14 begins with these words that we looked at a couple of weeks ago: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me," then he follows up with the promise that he's going to prepare a place for them in his Father's house. But having talked about that, he then goes on to deal with their concerns about the loss of his daily presence with them.

He says "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." Their hearts don't need to be troubled at the thought that Jesus is about to leave them, because His presence with them is to be replaced by something far greater. Back in v12 he said: "the one who

believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father." The coming of the Spirit will empower them in a way that Jesus' physical presence with them never could.

Notice the condition for this receiving of the Spirit. How worthy do you need to be, to receive God's Holy Spirit? What do you have to do? Do you have to pray for three hours every morning, before you get up? Do you need to study your Bible until you know it backwards? Do you need to be prayed over by someone like a Bishop? Do you need to lead a sinless life for the next week? Do you even have to be a good person? No, have a look at what he says: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever."

It's very easy to misunderstand this. The only if here, is "**If you love me.**" Not if you keep my commandments. That's a natural result of loving Jesus, not a prerequisite. No, it's "if you love me."

Picture a child with its parents. The parents don't wait to see if their child behaves well before they give him his dinner. They feed him because they love him. Their love is unconditional. And that love is returned by their child. It's interesting how the love of parents for a child comes about. It's one of the few loves where the object of the love has nothing to offer, apart from the love they give back. And there's no particular merit in a child loving its parents is there? It's just something that comes naturally.

Well, that's the picture that Jesus is using here. He says "If you love me, I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." The gift of the Holy Spirit is a gift of a generous and loving Father, given without

conditions, independent of merit.

But it isn't just a gift. In fact the Holy Spirit is the source of a whole new relationship with God. Look at what He says in v 18: "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you." Jesus' coming in the form of the Holy Spirit will change their relationship to God completely. They'll no longer be orphans, left to fend for themselves, because now they'll be children of God. But as He goes on it gets even better, even if it does seem more complicated. He says: "On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." Now if you've been reading John, you'll probably realise that he's said this sort of thing before about himself and God the Father, about how he is in the Father and the Father is in him. In fact back in verses 10&11 he's said just that. But here, he's extended the relationship to include us. And the reason that the relationships have changed is because the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in us.

In v23 he says: "Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

Can you see how there's this interweaving of relationships. Jesus is in the Father the Father is in Jesus, we are in Jesus, Jesus is in us. We love Jesus, so the Father loves us, and Jesus loves us. It's like one of those Celtic knot drawings, where everything is interwoven so that what you see is the whole, rather than the individual parts. And it's like that because with the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell within us, we're caught up in the mystery of the Godhead.

This is one of those things that no-one can ever really explain. How God can be Father, Son and Holy Spirit, 3 persons in one God. Yet that's the mystery into which we're

drawn as God's Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us. Notice, by the way, why it is that Jesus says he'll reveal himself to the disciples in this way, v21. It's because they love Him. There it is again! And the result of them loving Him, is that they listen to Him. They keep His word. There is a moral element to this, you see, but not as a prerequisite, rather as a result of the love we have for Jesus. A loving child does what their parents ask, not to ingratiate themselves with their parents but out of love for them; because they honour and respect them.

And as a result of the love we have for Jesus, the Father is able to come and dwell within us. On the other hand, those who don't love Jesus, won't keep his words, and the implication is that the Father won't come and dwell with them.

Well, what does it mean for us that the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us?

First of all the Spirit imparts power for God's service. Back in v12 he says "the one who believes in me will ... do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father." What were the works that Jesus did? Well, He healed people, He taught people, He proclaimed the gospel of God's Kingdom. So presumably, God's Spirit will empower us too, to do those things. More particularly, the Spirit will empower us for the work to which Jesus has called each one of us. For example, telling others about Jesus Christ. When we share the gospel with our friends it's the Holy Spirit who'll work in their hearts to convince them of the truth of what we're telling them.

That's what he says in v17: the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. In v26 he says: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." Later on, in ch16 he talks about how the Holy Spirit will

convince the world of sin and righteousness and judgement. Another thing that the Holy Spirit does is that he reminds us of what Jesus has taught us and so enables us to obey. The Holy Spirit speaks to us, when we need to know what to do and reminds us of God's words to us. Again, this is the result of that new relationship we just talked about. This is a whole new way of relating to God.

Do you remember how God spoke to people in the Old Testament? There was Abraham, sitting by his tent and up walked three men. He invites them in and they start giving him a message from God. It turns out that they're angels. Samuel is sleeping in the Temple and he's woken by what he thinks is Eli, calling his name. But it isn't it's God, speaking to him with a message for Eli and the people of Israel. Gideon's out threshing wheat in a winepress and up comes an angel to tell him that God wants him to go and rescue Israel. In the Old testament context, God has to use angels and intermediaries, prophets and priests to warn the people, to instruct them how to live. But all that has changed with the coming of the Holy Spirit. What do we read in that prophecy from Jeremiah 31? "The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ... this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more."

How is that prophecy fulfilled? By Jesus asking the Father to send the Holy Spirit to dwell in us, to remind us of what Jesus has taught, to bring God's words back to our minds. We no

longer need to wait for a priest to remind us of the law. We no longer have to wait for a prophet to come along and tell us what God wants us to know. God can speak to us directly through his Holy Spirit who dwells within us.

And finally, the coming of the Holy Spirit will bring us peace. Not the sort of peace that the world gives. Not a peace that's transitory or held in place by fear. In Jesus time the world was at peace. The so-called pax romana was widely praised, but it was a peace won and maintained at the point of a sword. In our own day, peace is maintained in a shaky sort of way, largely by the force of arms of the USA and/or NATO. But it isn't a very satisfactory peace is it? As the latest terrorist bombing will show, it's only a limited peace at best. And it certainly doesn't provide us with peace of mind.

One of the great desires of our day I think is for an inner peace. An inner tranquillity of spirit, not removed from the responsibilities and relationships of the world, but built up and experienced in the midst of it. That's the sort of peace that Jesus promises us here. It's a peace born out of a living personal relationship with Jesus himself, deepened through a growing surrender of our lives to the rule of his Holy Spirit, dwelling within.

And it's a peace based on our faith in Jesus promises. That's why Jesus points out to them, once again, in v29: "now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe." The faith we have in Jesus' promises, the peace we have because we believe those promises, is based on solid evidence. Evidence like this, where Jesus warns them beforehand what will happen, so that later they'll be convinced of who he is.

So how should this friend of mine who was so unsure of the

right to pray for themselves approach this issue of personal prayer? Well, they should be aware first of all, of how God sees them. That is He sees a disciple who loves Jesus. He sees one who has been adopted as one of His children. From that flows a whole host of natural consequences . If you're God's child, He wants you to speak to Him.

Look at my grandson Oscar who's just over 3 years old. I know his mum and dad couldn't wait for him to start talking to have a conversation with him, we all looked forward to that day. And it's like that with God. He wants you to talk to Him. What's more, he wants you to show your dependence on him. He delights in giving you all good things.

But it's more than that even. When God sees us, He sees someone in whom God's Spirit is dwelling. He sees someone who is truly made in the image of God, in a way that even Adam and Eve weren't. He sees his own being reflected in our Spirit.

And secondly they need to be aware that as a Christian, prayer is more than just sending a message up to heaven. Because God's Holy Spirit dwells within us, when we pray, God is present in our praying. For us, prayer is communicating within the mystery of the Godhead that we talked about earlier. Paul puts it like this: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." (Rom 8:26-27 NRSV)

We don't need to be afraid of asking unworthily, because the Spirit himself filters those prayers for us, according to the will of God.

So the Holy Spirit is given to all who love Jesus Christ, to empower us for his work, to teach us all things, and to give us a real and lasting peace in the knowledge that Jesus has overcome the world. How do you receive that gift of the Holy Spirit? By being one who loves Jesus Christ. How do you know if you're someone like that? By the way you desire to obey his commands. And that is the task for each one of us to go out and tell others about God and that by the power of the Holy Spirit they too will come to love Jesus for themselves and delight to do what He commands.

Lets pray now, that God's Holy Spirit would be present in each of our live, in a real way; that we all would recognise His presence and draw great comfort and peace from it as we enjoy being part of God's own family and bring others in too.
AMEN