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THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JESUS STRENGTHENS HIS DISCIPLES
Golden Text—When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth. —John 16:13

Approach to the Lesson
Last words are always deeply cherished. Sometimes, indeed, we are inclined to give them an exaggerated significance, as if the proximity of death suddenly turned men into seers and prophets. And I shall not deny that in the case of some who have walked with God, and have learned wisdom in years of communion with Him, there can be something next to the oracular in their last words.

There can be no question, however about the vast importance of the words of our Lord given in these three chapters of John's Gospel, and uttered just before He went to the Cross. We must remember who He was that spoke them—the Son of God. Now every word of His is unspeakably precious, but the words uttered to His intimate friends on the eve of His passion have surely more than usual meaning for us. He knew He was going to die, and He knew the purpose of all that He was about to suffer. He knew the issue of it all—that He would not remain in the tomb, but rise again and ascend to the Father whence He had come. His faculties were not impaired, nor was He weakened by the ravages of disease. Every word, then, was weighed by divine wisdom and knowledge, and uttered with the throb of infinite love.

Notice the topics upon which He touches. He begins with His departure, which leads into a statement regarding His oneness with the Father (John 14:1-14). From this follow the new prayer privilege and the new communion open to the believer (14:12-24). The fifteenth chapter opens with the life of abiding and abounding (1-16) and then comes the warning that the world's hatred will be heaped upon His followers (15:18 to 16:4). Again He reverts to His departure and speaks of the "little while" of the separation which again brings up the matter of the new order of prayer (16:23-28). He ends with renewed assurance of His peace and victory in the midst of tribulation (16:33).

All this is punctuated with repeated promises of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter (14:16-18, 25, 26; 15: 26, 27; 16:7-15), to abide, to indwell, to teach, to guide, and to be "Christ's other self" to the believer.

Verse by Verse
John 16:1—"These things . . . that ye should not be offended." The statements about His coming death, the persecutions which awaited His followers, and the new resources that would be theirs, were all part of the divine precautions against the disciples' stumbling in face of the unexpected.

Verse 2—"They shall put you out of the synagogues . . . will think that he doeth God service." Excommunication and death would be two instruments used against them. Saul of Tarsus is an example of this verse (Acts 26:9-11; Gal. 1: 13,14).

Verse 3—" . . . because they have not known thy Father, nor me." Religion can be woefully ignorant. (See 1 Tim. 1: 13; Luke 23:34).

Verse 4—" . . . ye may remember that I told you of them. I was with you." Forewarned is forearmed. When the warning proved true, it would help the disciples to trust the promise of help. Such warnings were not necessary while Christ was with them in bodily presence.

Verse 5—" . . . none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?" Compare 13:36. Peter's

question did not go beyond death; but only as far as death as 13:37 shows. It was the question regarding the "beyond" that none of them asked.

Verse 6—" . . . sorrow hath filled your heart." Questioning seemed to have been crushed out by the weight of sorrow at the prospect of losing Him.

Verse 7—"It is expedient for you that I go away: . . . the Comforter . . . I will send him unto you." To the disciples the bodily presence of Jesus was the greatest of all blessings, but the Lord Himself regarded the coming of the Holy Spirit as supremely important for them. How highly then, should we regard His presence with us.

Verse 8—" . . . he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment." Here is a worldward ministry of the Spirit. The word here rendered "reprove" is difficult. It certainly means a forcible setting forth of a man's relation to sin, righteousness, and judgment in the light of Christ and His death, but it is no guarantee of conversion.

Verse 9—"Of sin, because they believe not on me." So long as men refuse to believe in Jesus, all sin stands against them. Unbelief is the sin of sins.

Verse 10—"Of righteousness, because go to my Father . . . God is not accepting any righteousness from our hands but offering us a righteousness to stand before Him in the person of His Son.

Verse 11—"Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged." So long as men can stand with the prince of this world, they share the judgment which has been passed on him by the Cross of Christ.

Verse 12—" . . . many things . . . but ye cannot bear them now." Divine wisdom never imposes instruction upon us beyond our ability to receive, but if we receive up to the limit of our ability, He will increase our ability and give more.

Verse 13—" . . . the Spirit of truth . . . will guide you into all truth . . . whatsoever he shall hear . . . things to come." The instruction was to be continued under the new (yet the same) Teacher. Like Christ, the Holy Spirit does not speak "independently," but as it is given Him. The New Testament, with its prophecies of "things to come," is the product of the Holy Spirit's teaching in fulfillment of this promise.

The Heart of the Lesson
In His farewell address to His disciples, our Lord painted no rosy picture of their future dealings with the world into which He was sending them. He made it quite clear that they were going out to face an inimical world. Its treatment of Him was a pre- sage of how it would treat His servants. The disciples must remember that they do not belong to this world. Although in it, and having a ministry to it, they have been chosen out of it and the world does not like those who stand a part from it. But whatever form the persecution might take, whether excommunication or death, they would have the comfort of knowing that it was "for my name's sake" so their suffering would be true fellowship with their Lord.

Over against this clear and faithful warning, our Lord assured His followers that they would not be alone as they went forth to witness to a hostile world. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, would be the partners of the Holy Spirit (15:26, 27). True, their sorrow at the prospect of "losing" their beloved Master as present was blinding them to the blessedness of the Holy Spirit's presence, but the Lord Himself regarded the change as highly profitable for them (16:7).

The Holy Spirit, said Jesus, would stand with the disciples in their witness to the world by pressing home a three-fold conviction—with respect to sin, righteousness, and judgment. So long as men continued in their unbelief, He would maintain the charge of sin against them (16:9). He would not allow them to rest in any

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righteousness of their own, since the only righteousness acceptable to God was even now before the face of God in Heaven (16:10). He would hold the world to judgment as identified with its prince, judged in the Cross of Christ (16:11). If these are the things of which the Holy Spirit reproveth the world, we are in line with the work of the Holy Spirit when we preach these truths, and we can be sure of His backing. In the meantime, the same Holy Spirit would have a ministry toward the disciples themselves. He would come as the Spirit of Truth to guide them into all truth—"as the truth is in Jesus," for His witness would be of the risen Saviour, according to the commission given Him (16:13, 14). All of which has three things to say to us:

1. As we witness in the Spirit, we are taught of the Spirit.
2. If the Son and the Spirit both wait to be given what they should say, how much more should we wait for our message!
3. The more we know of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the more we shall be captivated with Jesus.

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