

# The Promise of God

---

Richard Dawson

Sunday 10 July

Luke 24<sup>44-49</sup>

2Cor 1<sup>19-22</sup>

Last time I spoke about the three statements made in our *40 Days With Jesus* Study number 6... The Holy Spirit is the **Great Promise** of the Father, the **great Power** of the Trinity and the great **Partner in Mission**. Today I want to reflect on the first of these three.

## **The Holy Spirit is the Great Promise of the Father.**

In Luke 24<sup>49</sup> we read these words:

**<sup>49</sup>And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.**

It's instructive to read just exactly what the Father had promised at this point. We find it perhaps most clearly in John 14:

### **The Promise of the Holy Spirit**

<sup>15</sup>"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup>And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. <sup>17</sup>This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you...

<sup>25</sup>“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. <sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

God’s promise essentially is to replace Jesus with something better; something more accessible, something more agile and something more universal. BUT you say, how can this be? Surely Jesus was everything He could be. Surely nothing could surpass His obedience and His service? Yes, quite right. Nothing could or can replace what Jesus has won for us on the Cross but beyond this in His earthly form Jesus could essentially only teach a limited number of people; he could only be present to a limited number of people; He could only give to a limited number of people whereas the Spirit – the Spirit can be everywhere; with everyone; teaching about anything they need! As far as the mission of God is concerned the Spirit is essential and Jesus expresses this necessity when He says in John 16:

**<sup>7</sup>Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.**

The Spirit is the promise of God **to give us something suited to the great Mission of God.** As Jesus says, it is to our **advantage** that Jesus goes for when that happens God will send the Spirit, the Advocate, the one who is with us **always.**

I'd have to say to you this morning that in a small way and yet in a very real way the same is true of Fran and I. We cannot be serving here much in the next two years but when we go, God's Spirit will remain and will become even more active amongst you for that is how the Spirit works – **our extremity (our need) is always God's opportunity.** So our going will create a gap but it will be a gap which becomes God's opportunity for you all to grow and to know the Spirit of God working amongst you.

But how does the Spirit work? What does the Spirit do? I think we have a good clue in that verse from John 14 we read this morning:

**<sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. (John 14)**

Jesus sums up the work of the Spirit here. The Spirit is firstly an Advocate, then a teacher, then a reminder and finally a peace giver. Let me work through those.

The Spirit is an Advocate. The Greek here is παράκλητος or paraclete which is a technical legal term usually referring to a legal assistant or advocate who is counsel for the defense. The sense of the word is that of someone who is called alongside us. So the Spirit as Advocate is the one who is called to our side to act in our defense – to defend us. In the NT the word is actually applied to Jesus twice but the four other times it is used it is applied to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the One who **is on our side**; who sees things from our point of view, who understands our predicament and who defends us.

So often, I suspect, the Church has offered a picture of God as being One who sits in judgement over us and who metes out punishment to those who do wrong. Here what Jesus is promising is a God who sits with us in any trial and who defends us against all-comers. God is our defence lawyer, our Advocate.

Is this how you see God? As One who is on your side and who takes your view seriously?

The Spirit is our teacher. I think we can relate to this a little easier but let's not take this for granted. My belief is that this may be translated thus... **'shall teach you all things that you need to know over and above what I have said'** – so that what is being referred to here is the ongoing nature of God's revelation. God continues to reveal things to us as we can understand them so there will be new things to learn and new things to encounter. This is why it is so important to come to the Bible both humbly

and with an open mind. God is still teaching us and still opening our mind up to new things.

You say to me, 'But Richard, isn't everything we need to know in the Bible? Well yes and no. Certainly everything we need to know for salvation is in the Bible but even Jesus made it clear that there was much that He didn't teach the disciples **because He couldn't; – they weren't ready!** John 16<sup>12</sup> reads:

**<sup>12</sup>"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. (John 16)**

Jesus has not been able to teach the disciples everything because they are not ready. Who then will teach us these things? Who will lead us further into the kingdom of God? In the very next verse Jesus say this:

**<sup>13</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. <sup>14</sup>He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16)**

The Spirit teaches us new things in God – things we need to know; things we can bear; things that will enable us to be the Church in Truth.

The Spirit also reminds us of what Jesus has said and helps us to understand it. The disciples clearly showed an incapacity to learn. They didn't really get Jesus until after all the things He taught

them about Himself had come to pass. They needed to be reminded again and again of what he had said. You and I need the same thing. We need to be reminded that Jesus died for us **because God loves us so deeply that He wants a relationship with each and every one of us.** We need to be reminded that despite our weaknesses and mistakes God's love for us does not wane or grow dim. We need to be reminded that God promises us help and heaven's hand if only we will reach out for them and we need to be reminded that though evil seems to prosper its days are growing short and it will not win out in the end. Finally, we need to be reminded that this world, this Creation, this life is not without purpose; That God has a purpose for every one of us and we only need to keep learning to find it!

The Spirit takes what is Jesus' and brings it to us at just the right time not before, not after – at the right time. And this is the nature of the Promise of God. It will come at the right time. A story to illustrate...

In his book *Against the Flow* Oxford professor John Lennox notes that when God calls us to do something difficult he gives us the strength when we need it, not before we need it. Lennox illustrates this biblical principle with a story about an encounter with a Russian follower of Jesus who spent years in a Siberian labour camp for the crime of teaching his children about the Bible. Lennox writes:

This man described to me that he had seen things that no man should ever have to see. I listened, thinking how little I really knew about life, and wondering how I would have fared under his circumstances. As if he had read my thoughts, he suddenly said: "You couldn't cope with that, could you?" Embarrassed, I stumbled out something like: "No, I am sure you are right." He then grinned and said: "Nor could I! I was a man who fainted at the sight of his own blood, let alone that of others. But what I discovered in the camp was this: God does not help us to face theoretical situations but real ones. Like you I couldn't imagine how one could cope in the Gulag. But once there I found that God met me, exactly as Jesus had promised his disciples when he was preparing them for victimization and persecution."

Lennox adds, "We can be confident, then, that the Lord will give us a sufficient amount of grace to handle whatever comes our way, whenever it comes our way—and not necessarily a moment before!"

Finally, I think we may also add that the Spirit is a Spirit of peace. Though Jesus says to His disciples that it is His peace He leaves with them it is, of course, one of the things the Spirit will remind them of. And it is instructive to ponder why of all the things Jesus could've left with them, He leaves peace. What is it about peace that is so important? And it is important.

Among other things peace is a fruit of the work of the Spirit within us listed in Galatians. Peace is also the bond by which the Church

is held together (Eph 3). Furthermore, it is the signal characteristic of the Gospel at work so that the gospel is called the Gospel **of peace**. Eph 6. It is also a key characteristic of the Kingdom of God... <sup>17</sup>**For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.**

There is much to be said about peace but one thing is clear the Spirit works to bring us to peace and peace to us. A lack of peace speaks to the spiritual poverty both of the world and of individuals and blessed are they who both understand this and do something about it. Quite simply there is no civilization without peace. Peace is the context for a civil society but more so, it is the predominant characteristic of the Church – or should be. But let me leave you with this. Jesus came to bring us peace but to do that He had to leave the comfort of God's Eternal Presence and come into a dark and diseased neighbourhood. He had to leave peace in order to give it.

He calls us to do the same. The world's idea of peace is a wallet full of money and a tropical paradise or something like that. But that will never give us true peace. Rather, our peace comes as we give ourselves to the One who is the source of all true peace. The Spirit is the Promise of God – the promise of God to bring peace to all Creation.

Won't you join me in doing that today – in giving your life to the One who can give you peace.