

Prepared to Witness

John 15:26-16:4 (ESV)

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray:

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The apostles sit before their Lord, preparing in their work to be fishers of men. They sit listening to this last address before he is taken to the cross. The Lord has desired this work of them ever since he called them three years ago. They have experienced a lot. They have heard their master teach with authority and have beheld his amazing miracles. What did they learn from their master's signs and sermons? What did Jesus teach them? The apostles learned who their God was. They learned that the Father had sent his Son into the world to save the world. They had learned that the Son through his works was revealing who the Father is. What the apostles were going to learn at last was the role and purpose of the Holy Spirit. It is beneficial for us to meditate on this work of the Holy Spirit as we await the celebration of Pentecost. We sit on this Sunday between the day of Jesus' ascension and the fulfillment of his promise from the Father, the coming of the Spirit on the apostles. As we look forward to that day when the promised Spirit showed his power through the apostles, we meditate on the words of Jesus' promise. We meditate on this:

**OUR LORD PREPARES HIS APOSTLES FOR WITNESS EVEN AGAINST
OPPOSITION.**

The Lord Jesus shows how the Holy Spirit will help them to be fishers of men. The Holy Spirit will do this through his own witness. The Holy Spirit will witness to who Jesus is. And this witness will be *the* witness the apostles give, as they make fellow believers in Christ. Jesus lays all this out with these words, **“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning”**. What the disciples witnessed in Jesus’ ministry is what they will enact in their own work after Jesus’ ascension. They saw the Son of God show the power of the kingdom of God through the Spirit’s own power and work. The Spirit of God rested on Jesus at his Baptism; and through this Spirit the Son taught and worked miracles. This work brought the listeners and the growing number of Jesus’ followers into the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the Father. Now, Jesus will send this very Spirit to preach and proclaim through the apostles. The Holy Spirit, sent by the Son, the Spirit who is from the Father, will bear witness; but, this happens through the apostles who bear witness. So here Jesus is promising and encouraging his chosen apostles for the work that is ahead. They will not be left alone; they will have a Helper who will preach for them. And the apostles can be certain that their message is of the true God. They will not be bearing witness to their own truth. No, this Spirit of truth is the very one who comes from the Father and is sent by the Son. He is not their spirit; he is not a spirit of the age. This is the Spirit of God.

These words of Jesus are a testimony to you and all who hear the apostles preach. These men are not speaking on their own authority. They do not speak their own words. I am not receiving the thoughts and opinions of Peter; or of John; or of Thomas. I am not listening to someone who is trying to manipulate me for his own gain. No, this is God the Holy Spirit speaking. The witness the apostles gave in their preaching and the witness they gave in the written Scriptures are the witness of the Holy Spirit. These words of Jesus confirm it: the Spirit whom I send will witness to me and you dear apostles will witness to me.

Why must Jesus instill such confidence into his disciples? Why does he go through such precise and intense detail on their task ahead? The Lord must do this because the apostles face a hard task. Our Lord Jesus warned of a great assault against his apostles. He says, **“I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you. I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you.”**

The difficulty the apostles will face is death. They will have to die because they bear witness to Jesus. The apostles face opposition from the evil one who cannot bear to hear the truth of the Holy Spirit proclaimed. Who will do these terrible things to the apostles, of which Jesus foretells? (This is really the hardest part) The ones who will do this are the apostle's fellow churchmen. The ones who will do this are the synagogue leaders, the scribes, the Pharisees. The apostles will be rejected by their own brothers and family members.

Jesus warns the apostles that the ones who will kill them think they are offering up service to God. They think they are worshiping God, the true God, by silencing these "blasphemers." They think they are giving glory to God when in reality, they reject the very God who sent these apostles. How do we know the apostles are faithful to the truth, compared to those who persecute them? This is the difference which Jesus shows: the apostles know the Father and the Son because they have the Holy Spirit; the opposition don't know the Father nor the Son. The apostles love the Son, keep his word, and seek to guard his commandments. The opposition reject the Son, think he is of the devil, and will not keep his word.

With these words, Jesus is warning his disciples and preparing them for the days ahead, the days after he goes to the Father and sends his Holy Spirit. And these days came. Read the book of Acts in the holy scriptures, and you will see the fulfillment of Jesus' promise. First, the Holy Spirit was sent to the apostles (come back for Pentecost next Sunday to hear those details). Second, the apostles bore their testimonies as eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection. They spoke of the man who rose from the dead and who will come back to judge the living and the dead. They spoke these things in homes, in synagogues, in the temple, in the courtroom, even in prisons. No place, no situation, no person could stop them. They remained true witnesses and spoke boldly. Lastly, they faced harm to themselves, some even dying for telling the truth of Jesus. Were they ashamed of this? Did they back down? Did they allow themselves to be silenced? No, because they had the power and witness of the Holy Spirit. Not only were they not ashamed but they gloried in the chance to suffer for Jesus' sake.

Dear Christian, let this be your confidence and certainty. The conviction of the apostles is yours. The boldness of the apostles is yours. Their power of the Holy Spirit is yours. You too may proclaim the name of Jesus. You too may glory in the possible suffering and (as God wills it) even death for sharing the love of Christ. At the very least, take confidence that the words you regularly read from the apostles are true. They are backed up by the words and promises of Jesus who foretold their witnessing power and the pains they would suffer for showing this power.

When you gather again next Sunday and come to celebrate the day of Pentecost, keep in mind these promises you heard today from Jesus. The apostles were not surprised (completely) when the Holy Spirit rushed upon them that Sunday morning. They were expecting it since Jesus had said, "And I will send the Helper." They knew they were to be witnesses; not only for that day, but for every day until Jesus returns because of their witness in the Scriptures. That boldness which you will hear of next week continued all the apostles' life because they knew of the truth. And this very truth is yours, forever more. Amen.

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus.