

“Another Advocate”

Introduction: Have you ever noticed how impossible it seems to be to live like Jesus lived, and to do what Jesus said we are to do? I mean, things like living a life of sacrificial love, or loving our enemies, or bearing witness, sound good on the surface, but have you ever tried to put them into practice?! It’s kind of like watching Mookie Betts play baseball. You can see him crush another home run over the Green Monster, steal another base, and make another diving catch out in right field, but even if you could fit into his fancy red shoes, it would be impossible for you to actually do what Mookie does.

One of the truths of the Christian life that we declare on the day of Pentecost, is that living the Christian life, living as a follower of Jesus, is impossible . . . on our own strength. A writer named Charles Stanley has put it this way: “The promise of [the Spirit] was Jesus’ way of tipping us off to one of the most profound truths concerning the Christian life—it’s impossible . . . apart from outside intervention.” We need, in other words, to wait on, and rest in, the person and presence of the Holy Spirit. In fact, as we observe the disciples wandering around aimlessly and even going back to their old jobs as fishermen after the resurrection of Jesus, we might say that the resurrection wasn’t enough. It wasn’t enough to launch them into the ministry of bearing witness to the reconciling love of God, in word and in deed, that Jesus had called them to. That would take the arrival, and the empowering presence, of the Spirit.

Such witness bearing is the same ministry to which Jesus calls us. How is the Spirit involved? How are we to wait on him? In what is known as his “farewell discourse,” the rather long talk Jesus shares with his disciples just before his arrest, trial, and crucifixion, the promise and ministry of the Spirit was one of Jesus’ primary talking points. While we certainly can’t cover the Spirit’s entire ministry this morning, what I’d like to point us to is that the Spirit works in us and through us as we are prayerfully obedient. Jesus’ summary statement of this comes right up front: “If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth” (14:15-17a).

I. The Spirit Who is Personal

A. The first observation we want to make is that the Spirit is personal. Sometimes we think of the Spirit as a kind of power or force, and hence we refer to the Spirit as “it.” But Jesus never refers to the Spirit in such an impersonal way. “Another advocate” is how he begins. “Advocate” means one who comes alongside in some way. It’s a very rich word which is why some translations use the word Helper or Comforter. In any event, an advocate or helper or comforter does not refer to a force, but to a person. Further, consider the word “another.” Know that there are two Greek words that our English word translates as “another.” One means another that is totally different, and the other means another just like the first one. It is the second meaning that Jesus uses here. In some way, the Spirit is another, just like Jesus, which is why Jesus can go on to say, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” Between these statements, notice how Jesus uses the personal pronoun “him” to describe the Spirit (14: 17), and that the Spirit is revealed as one we can know who teaches, testifies, and convicts (14:26; 15:26; 16:8-10).

B. The distinction between simply a power, and a person, is significant. A power is something we try to use to our advantage, like buying more memory for our computer, or a bigger motor for our boat. But a person is someone we seek to be in relationship with,

someone we speak to, listen to, wait on, love, and obey. If we think of the Spirit as a power, our thought will be, “How can I get more of this power?” But if we think of the Spirit as a person, our question will be, “How can the Spirit get more of me?” The first thought expresses a desire to use the Spirit; it will lead to pride and self-glorification. The second expresses a willingness to be used by the Spirit, in humble service, for the glory of God.

Acts 8 talks about a man named Simon the Sorcerer who, upon observing the powerful, Spirit-filled ministry of the apostles of Jesus, offered them money, thinking that somehow the Spirit was a power he could purchase. Peter, quite definitively, told him this was not the case!

II. The Spirit Who Testifies and Convicts

A. We’ll return to Peter in a moment. First, let’s hone in a bit on the testifying and convicting role of the Spirit. To what does the Spirit testify? “He will testify about me,” says Jesus. It is the Spirit’s role to actually work behind the scenes, not promoting himself, but promoting Jesus. He sees his job as glorifying not himself, but glorifying Jesus, shining the spotlight on Jesus, helping others to know and understand Jesus more clearly (16:14-15). To this, Jesus adds an instruction for his followers: “And you also must testify.” This refers first of all to the Twelve, but the writers of the NT (which include some of the 12) are clear that it doesn’t stop with them. Evidently, according to Jesus, our testimony is an important part of the process.

Illustration: In this vein, we might picture a courtroom scene. The case under discussion is the response of men and women to the person and ministry of Jesus. God the Father is behind the bench as judge. The Spirit is the prosecuting attorney. We are the witnesses, which means that we are to simply bear witness to what we have seen and heard. That is very important, as well as very freeing. On the one hand, if we don’t testify, the Spirit can’t prosecute; he has no case. On the other hand, we are not the prosecutor or the judge. That, thankfully, are the roles of the Spirit and the Father.

B. What does the Spirit prosecute? Jesus points to three things. He is to prove the world to be in the wrong about sin, righteousness, and judgment (16:8). The word “because” further defines it for us. “About sin, *because* people do not believe in me.” The Spirit is the one who will lead people to see their need for Jesus. “About righteousness, *because* I am going to the Father.” The Spirit is the one who will reveal to people what a righteous life looks like, after Jesus has returned to the Father. “About judgment, *because* the prince of this world now stands condemned.” The Spirit is the one who will convict people that if they continue to follow the evil one, who was judged on the cross, they too will come under judgment.

What I love about all of this is that the Spirit clearly gets to do all the hard work! I simply need to share how Jesus has impacted my life. Let’s put some arms and legs on this prayerful obedience and the accompanying work of the Spirit in the experience of Cornelius and Peter, found in Acts 10.

III. Cornelius and Peter (Ac 10)

A. The action begins with an officer in the Roman army, Cornelius, on his knees praying. In fact, Luke tells us that as a Gentile who worshipped the God of Israel, a “God-fearer,” Cornelius “prayed to God regularly” (10:2). As he prayed, God told Cornelius to send for a man named Peter, who was at that time 32 miles away in a town called Joppa, and bring him to Caesarea, where Cornelius was living. Cornelius obeyed and instructed two of his servants to go and do just that. The next day, as these servants were on their way, we read

that Peter was on his roof praying. As he did so, God gave him a vision of a picnic blanket filled with food that a devout Jew would not touch. Such food restrictions, along with special days like the Sabbath, and rites like circumcision, were to keep the Jews distinct from the culture around them, reminding them of the holiness of God and the holiness to which God had called them to. This was to enable them to stand apart from the rest of humanity so that through them, the light of God might shine to the Gentiles around them. But during his prayer, God told Peter that all foods had been made clean and that he should go ahead and eat what was laid out on that blanket.

B. While Peter was puzzling about what that meant, the two servants sent by Cornelius arrived and told him why Peter was to come back with them. Remarkably, Peter extended hospitality to these Gentiles and invited them into his home to spend the night in preparation for the next day's journey. Even more remarkable, when they arrived at the home of Cornelius the next day, and he invited Peter into his house, and in Peter went! Gentiles and Jews just didn't share hospitality in this way, but Peter seemed to have a sense that God was up to something, that the dividing walls between Jew and Gentile were somehow coming down, that the distinctions based on food, and observance of days, and rites like circumcision were no longer necessary now that Jesus had arrived on the scene.

C. So, no matter how strange it felt (and it must have felt "wicked strange" for in entering Cornelius' house, Peter was breaking every law in the Jewish book, and going against everything he had ever known), he was going to take a step across that threshold and obey what God was calling him to do. When Cornelius explained what had happened in his own prayer time, the steps he had taken, and that he was now ready to listen to what God had commanded Peter to share, Peter began to bear witness to all that he had experienced Jesus doing through his life, death, and resurrection. In the midst of this testimony, the Holy Spirit came upon these Gentiles who had been listening in a way that convinced the Jews present that God was at work in them, too. Immediately, Peter baptized them into the faith and family of Jesus. The door of salvation had swung open wide to the Gentiles.

D. The door swung open as these two men were prayerfully obedient, stopping to wait and listen to what God might want to say to them, and then taking the first steps of putting into practice what they heard. As they did so, they experienced the Spirit at work, bringing about the remarkable new thing that God had set in motion in and through Jesus, breaking down the barrier that had existed between Jew and Gentile. Both would be able to experience new life through faith in this Jesus, new life that included a shared life together.

We cannot convict the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment. Thank God that we cannot! That is a job only God, through his Spirit, takes on. But note that the Spirit can't, or at least won't, do his convicting work without our testimony. Yet this third person of the trinity promises to draw near to us as we pray, and to come alongside us to be our helper, comforter, and advocate, as we seek to obediently participate in the mission of God. Are we willing to stop and to prayerfully listen? To whom might God be calling us to offer hospitality? Will we take a step of obedience in order to see what might happen?