

WHEN HEAVEN BREAKS IN

Why Jesus Said It Was Better That He Go Away

John 16:5-15

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INTRODUCTION

THE QUESTION WE ALL WOULD HAVE ASKED

John 16:5-15 (NLT)

I have had a lot of people ask about the book and what God has been teaching me lately. The easiest way I know to answer is simply to preach the message God has been burning in my heart.

Today I want to answer one question:

Why would Jesus ever say, "It is to your advantage that I go away"?

Think about that. Imagine you are one of the disciples. You have spent three years walking with Jesus. You watched Him calm storms with a word. You watched Him touch lepers and make them clean. You watched Him feed thousands with a little boy's lunch. You watched Him cast out demons. You watched Him raise the dead.

You listened to every sermon. You laughed together. You ate together. You traveled together. You saw the greatest Teacher who ever lived standing right in front of you.

Then Jesus looks at you and says, "It is actually better for you if I leave."

Really?

If we were honest, I think every one of us would have responded the same way: "No, Jesus. We would rather You stay."

Wouldn't you? If Jesus physically walked into this room right now, none of us would say, "Jesus, thank You for coming, but it would actually be better if You left."

No. We would want Him to stay. We would ask questions. We would worship. We would listen. We would never want Him to leave.

Yet Jesus - the One who is Truth - looks His disciples in the eyes and says something that completely changes the way we understand the Christian life:

"It is to your advantage. It is better. It is for your good that I go away."

Church, how could that possibly be true?

That is the question I want us to wrestle with this morning, because if we understand why Jesus made that statement, it will completely change the way we think about the Holy Spirit.

Born Too Late?

I think many Christians unknowingly live as though they missed the best part of the story. Sometimes we almost speak as if we were born too late.

"If only I could have walked with Jesus."

"If only I could have seen the miracles."

"If only I could have heard the Sermon on the Mount."

"If only I could have watched Him heal people."

Can I tell you something? Jesus does not seem to think that way.

He says, in effect, "You are not at a disadvantage because you cannot see Me physically. You are at an advantage because I am sending Someone."

Notice: He does not say, "I am sending something." He says, "I am sending Someone."

That changes everything.

MOVEMENT ONE

FROM BESIDE THEM TO WITHIN THEM

Jesus was not taking His presence away. He was making His presence available in a new way.

John 16:7; John 14:16-17

The disciples had Jesus beside them. Through the Spirit, believers would have God within them.

This is the first thing we have to understand. Jesus was not saying His presence was no longer necessary. He was saying His presence was about to become even more accessible.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus accepted the real limitations of a human body. If He was in Jerusalem, He was not in Galilee. If He was teaching on a hillside, He was not walking through Jericho. His physical presence was localized.

But after His death, resurrection, ascension, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, everything changed.

Now every believer, in every nation, in every generation, could experience the presence of God - not merely beside them, but within them.

The disciples had God with them. We have God within us.

That is not a downgrade. According to Jesus, it is an advantage.

A New Covenant Reality

Think about the story of Scripture. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came upon particular people for particular assignments. He came upon judges, kings, craftsmen, and prophets.

But the prophets looked ahead to a day when God would do something new. He would put His Spirit within His people. He would give them new hearts. His presence would no longer be reserved for a few people in a few moments.

Then Jesus tells His disciples, "He lives with you now, and later will be in you."

Church, Pentecost was not simply a dramatic meeting. It was the arrival of a New Covenant reality.

The Father promised redemption. The Son accomplished redemption. The Spirit applies redemption and brings the living presence of Christ into the life of every believer.

Jesus did not leave us alone. He made sure we would never be alone again.

So when Jesus says it is better that He go, He is not minimizing His own importance. He is explaining the next stage of God's redemptive plan.

Jesus beside them would become the Spirit within them.

MOVEMENT TWO

MEET THE HELPER

The Holy Spirit is a Person to know, not merely a power to use.

John 14:16; John 16:7-13

The Spirit is not an "it," a mood, or a religious experience. He is the divine Helper Jesus promised.

I think one of the greatest misunderstandings in the Church today is that we know about the Holy Spirit, but many of us do not truly know Him.

We reduce Him to a doctrine, an experience, a denomination, or a moment in a church service.

Some people only think about the Holy Spirit when they hear someone speaking in tongues. Others think about Him when the music becomes emotional. Some have been taught to chase manifestations. Others have been taught to avoid almost everything associated with Him.

But notice how Jesus introduces Him.

He does not say, "I am sending a force." He does not say, "I am sending an experience." He says, "I will send the Helper."

Parakletos: The One Called Alongside

The Greek word is Parakletos. It carries the idea of an advocate, counselor, comforter, and helper - someone called alongside another person.

Jesus is not replacing Himself with a program. He is promising another divine Person who will continue His ministry in the lives of His followers.

When Jesus says He will send "another Helper," He uses a word that carries the idea of another of the same kind. The Spirit is not inferior, less divine, or merely an influence. He is God.

That is why Scripture speaks of the Spirit teaching, speaking, leading, comforting, convicting, and being grieved.

You cannot grieve electricity. You cannot grieve an impersonal force. You grieve a person.

Paul writes, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." Why? Because He is not an "it." He is not a feeling. He is not a vibe. He is God.

The Holy Spirit is not an experience to chase. He is a Person to know.

I wonder how differently we would live if we woke up every morning aware that the Holy Spirit was not merely around us, but with us, living within us, and leading us through the day.

Learning to Recognize His Leading

Have you ever been driving somewhere and suddenly someone came to mind? You were not thinking about them. You had not spoken to them in months. But you could not get them off your mind.

So you sent a text: "I do not know why, but I felt like I should check on you."

Then they replied, "You have no idea. I was praying that someone would reach out."

Can I suggest something? Maybe that was not random. Maybe the Helper was inviting you into something He was already doing.

One of the greatest discoveries I have made in ministry is that the Holy Spirit is often speaking more than we are listening. The issue is not His unwillingness to lead. It is our unwillingness to slow down and obey.

The Whisper That Led Me

I was sitting on the couch in my home in Lorain, Ohio. It was quiet. I didn't have any worship music playing. It was just an ordinary moment of stillness.

And then I sensed Him.

The Holy Spirit spoke to me.

It wasn't audible, but it was unmistakable: He told me to move.

I didn't fully understand what that meant at the time, but it stirred something deep within me. It was the first time I had recognized His voice with that kind of clarity, and it marked the beginning of what would become a series of moments that slowly changed the direction of my life.

A few days later, as I mowed the lawn outside, the Spirit spoke to me again.

"How do you move that tree?" He asked.

I paused to think about it, then said, "It takes aggressive uprooting. You have to pop the roots out and shake the ground around it."

Then came the next question:

"What will it take for it to thrive once it's moved?"

I thought for another moment.

"A bigger hole," I responded. "Lots of sun. And water."

He whispered, "Remember that."

I didn't realize then that He was talking about me.

After that, time passed. One day, as I drove, I spotted an elderly pastor outside of a church. I was stopped at a traffic light and felt impressed to watch him.

He stood alone on the icy steps, spreading salt across the ground. He was preparing the way for people to enter. He moved slowly and faithfully, serving without spectacle.

And the Spirit spoke to me again:

"Who will this man pass this church to when I call him home?"

The question made me think. I knew the Lord was speaking about succession. Legacy. Stepping into something I hadn't built but would one day be called to steward.

Not long after, a man I didn't know spoke a prophetic word over my wife and me:

"There will be a people, a city, waiting for you. And when they see you, they will say, 'You are who we've been waiting for.'"

That word sealed something in me.

The whisper on the couch.

The lesson with the tree.

The moment on the icy steps.

The confirmation I didn't ask for.

I have discovered something over the years: the Holy Spirit often entrusts whispers to people who are willing to obey whispers.

He does not always shout. Sometimes He nudges. Sometimes a Scripture comes alive. Sometimes a burden rises in your heart. Sometimes He simply says:

"Call them."

"Pray."

"Wait."

"Do not say that."

"Encourage them."

"Apologize."

The Christian life becomes incredibly alive when you realize you are not navigating life alone. You are walking with the Helper.

MOVEMENT THREE

THE SPIRIT REVEALS JESUS

The Holy Spirit's great delight is to glorify Christ.

John 16:13-15

The clearest evidence of the Spirit's work is that Jesus becomes more beautiful, precious, and central.

Jesus tells us exactly what the Holy Spirit loves to do. We do not have to guess. Look again at verse 14: "He will glorify Me."

READ THE PHRASE AGAIN. PAUSE.

Do not rush past that. Jesus is describing the controlling purpose behind the Spirit's ministry.

Healing matters. Prophecy matters. Miracles matter. Conviction matters. But underneath every work of the Spirit is one great purpose: to glorify Jesus.

The Holy Spirit never competes with the Son. He does not say, "Look at Me." He keeps saying, "Look at Him."

If Jesus becomes greater in your life, the Holy Spirit is accomplishing exactly what He came to do.

The Spotlight

Think about a spotlight in a theater. The lights go down. The curtain opens. The spotlight comes on.

Have you ever heard someone leave the theater saying, "That spotlight was incredible"?

No. Nobody applauds the spotlight. The spotlight exists to illuminate the person standing at center stage.

The spotlight is not trying to become the attraction. Its purpose is to help you see the one you came to see.

Church, that is what the Holy Spirit does. He shines His light on Jesus. He reveals Jesus. He reminds us of Jesus. He forms us into the likeness of Jesus. Then He empowers us to represent Jesus.

Everything points back to Christ.

Over the last year, I have spent a great deal of time studying, praying, and writing about the Holy Spirit. That journey eventually became a book called When Heaven Breaks In.

But something surprised me while I was writing it. I began with a desire to understand the work of the Holy Spirit more clearly. By the end, I found myself loving Jesus more deeply.

And I realized that is exactly what the Holy Spirit loves to do. He does not draw us into fascination with Himself while leaving Jesus at the edge. He makes Christ beautiful. He makes Christ precious. He makes Christ central.

That is the heartbeat behind the book, and more importantly, it is the heartbeat of this message: the Spirit-filled life is a Jesus-centered life.

That is why I become concerned whenever people grow fascinated with experiences but lose their affection for Jesus.

The Holy Spirit does not create people who are merely impressed by manifestations. He creates people who fall more deeply in love with Christ.

You can tell when the Holy Spirit has been at work, because people do not merely walk away talking about what happened. They walk away saying, "What a wonderful Savior."

A Daily Prayer

When was the last time you intentionally acknowledged the Holy Spirit - not because you were in church, but because you genuinely wanted His leadership that day?

What if tomorrow morning, before checking your phone, before turning on the news, and before looking at your calendar, you simply prayed:

"Holy Spirit, lead me today. Open my eyes. Interrupt my schedule if You want. Give me courage to obey You. Help me love like Jesus."

Do you think God would answer a prayer like that? Absolutely. That is exactly why Jesus sent the Helper.

And here is what happens when someone consistently walks with the Holy Spirit: something begins to change, not only around them, but within them.

The Spirit does not simply guide our decisions. He transforms our desires. He does not merely adjust our behavior. He changes our hearts.

MOVEMENT FOUR

THE SPIRIT FORMS JESUS IN US

The fruit of the Spirit is the character of Christ being formed in ordinary people.

Galatians 5:22-25; John 15:4-5

The Spirit does not merely make us more useful. He makes us more like Jesus.

Turn with me to Galatians 5. Paul gives us one of the most familiar descriptions of the Spirit's work: "The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives."

Notice who produces it: the Holy Spirit. Not self-effort. Not personality. Not raw willpower. The Spirit.

There have been seasons in my life when I tried to become more patient. I tried harder. I made promises. I told myself, "This week is going to be different."

Then somebody cut me off in traffic. Or criticized me. Or changed a plan I had already settled in my mind.

Suddenly, I discovered I was not nearly as patient as I thought.

Why? Because behavior modification is not the same thing as spiritual transformation.

The Holy Spirit is not interested in helping you become a slightly nicer version of yourself. He is forming the life of Christ within you.

That is a miracle.

Fruit Is Grown, Not Manufactured

Have you ever seen somebody standing in an orchard yelling at an apple tree?

"Come on! Try harder! Grow apples!"

No. Healthy trees do not strain to produce fruit. They produce fruit because they are alive and connected to a source of life.

Jesus said, "Abide in Me." Remain. Stay connected.

The Christian life is not about trying harder. It is about abiding deeper.

Fruit is singular. Paul does not describe nine unrelated spiritual achievements. He describes one fruit with many expressions: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The Spirit is not creating a collection of impressive traits. He is forming the integrated character of Jesus within us.

When the Spirit Confronted My Impatience

There was a season in ministry when I became deeply frustrated with the people I was leading.

I could see where I believed we needed to go. I could see what needed to change. I could see the potential in people, but I couldn't understand why they weren't moving as quickly as I thought they should.

I prayed about it, but looking back, some of my prayers were probably complaints dressed in spiritual language.

"Lord, why don't they see it?"

"Why aren't they growing?"

"Why does it feel like I'm carrying this alone?"

I thought my frustration was evidence of how much I cared. Some of it was. But the Holy Spirit began to expose something deeper in my heart.

My impatience wasn't only about their growth.

It was also about my need to feel effective.

Without realizing it, I had started treating people's progress as proof that I was doing a good job. If they changed, I felt successful. If they struggled, stalled, or resisted, I took it personally.

I wanted God to change them because I didn't like how their lack of progress made me feel about myself.

Then, in one of those quiet moments with the Lord, I sensed the Holy Spirit say:

"I'm not trying to change them right now. I'm trying to change you."

That stopped me.

Because I had entered prayer asking God to deal with everyone else, and the Holy Spirit lovingly turned the light toward my own heart.

He exposed my impatience.

He exposed my desire to control the outcome.

He exposed the part of me that needed visible progress to feel secure in my calling.

It wasn't that the things I desired for the people were wrong. I wanted them to grow. I wanted them to mature. I wanted them to become disciples who made disciples.

But the Spirit showed me that I could desire the right thing with the wrong posture.

I was trying to carry something that belonged to God.

I could teach.

I could pray.

I could encourage.

I could correct.

The older I get, the more convinced I become that some of the greatest miracles God has performed in my life have not happened through my hands. They have happened in my heart. He is making me more compassionate, more patient, more dependent, and more aware of my need for Jesus. That is the work of the Holy Spirit too.

The greatest evidence that Heaven has broken into your life is not that people are impressed by your gifts. It is that people begin to recognize Jesus in you.

Let me say it another way:

The Christian life is not trying to imitate Jesus from a distance. It is allowing the Holy Spirit to reproduce the life of Jesus within us.

And we need to hear that before we ever talk about spiritual gifts. Gifts without character can draw attention to a person. Character keeps pointing the attention back to Jesus.

The fruit is evidence that the Spirit has our hearts. The gifts are ways the Spirit works through our hands.

MOVEMENT FIVE

THE SPIRIT WORKS THROUGH US

The gifts of the Spirit are expressions of God's love for people and power for the mission of Jesus.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7; Acts 1:8

The Spirit changes us so He can love, serve, and reach others through us.

If the Holy Spirit only changed us, we would already have reason to be grateful. But God's heart has always been bigger than us.

He changes us so He can reach others through us.

The same Holy Spirit who works in us also desires to work through us.

Some believers have experienced salvation but have never discovered that God wants to use them. Others have discovered spiritual gifts but have forgotten that those gifts were never about themselves.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12, "A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other."

Did you catch that? To each of us. Not only pastors. Not only missionaries. Not only people with microphones. Every believer. Every member of the Body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit delights in working through ordinary people, because if God only used extraordinary people, most of us would feel disqualified.

But throughout Scripture, God chooses ordinary people and does extraordinary things through them.

A Better Question

Can I encourage you to stop asking only, "What is my gift?" and begin asking, "Holy Spirit, how do You want to love someone through me today?"

Sometimes we become so focused on identifying a category that we miss the person standing right in front of us.

Today He may prompt you to encourage someone. Tomorrow He may give you wisdom for a difficult conversation. Next week He may give you faith to pray for somebody who is sick.

The gifts are not trophies to collect. They are expressions of God's love.

The Holy Spirit does not distribute gifts so we can build our reputation. He distributes gifts so Jesus can build His Church.

Power Has a Purpose

Jesus said in Acts 1:8, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be My witnesses."

Notice He did not say, "You will receive power to become impressive." He said, "You will receive power to be My witnesses."

Jesus did not promise power merely so we could have better church services. He promised power so the Church could faithfully carry His witness to the world.

Every gift has a mission. Every gift has a purpose. Every gift ultimately serves the Gospel.

Power always has a purpose: to make Jesus known.

That is why the Book of Acts is not really the story of extraordinary Christians. It is the story of an extraordinary God working through ordinary Christians.

Peter was not fearless before Pentecost. Thomas was not naturally bold. The disciples were not transformed because they attended another seminar. They were transformed because the Holy Spirit filled them.

And the same Spirit who filled them lives in every believer today.

Whenever God uses me, I leave more grateful than impressed, because I know who I am apart from Christ.

I cannot heal anyone. I cannot change a heart. I cannot save a marriage. I cannot reveal the Father.

Only Jesus can do those things. The Holy Spirit simply invites us to participate in what He is already doing.

What an incredible privilege.

A Needed Correction for Both Sides

Can I lovingly say something to both sides of the Church?

Some believers are so cautious about spiritual gifts that they never step out in faith. Others become so fascinated with spiritual gifts that they forget the Giver.

Neither reflects the heart of Jesus.

The New Testament never asks us to choose between truth and power, character and gifting, sound doctrine and expectation.

It calls us to be rooted in Scripture, filled with the Spirit, growing in Christlike character, and available for God to use whenever He chooses.

That is the kind of Christian I want to become: not somebody chasing experiences, and not somebody afraid of experiences, but somebody whose life is so surrendered that the Holy Spirit can do whatever He desires.

Imagine This Church Fully Alive

Imagine what would happen if every believer in this room woke up tomorrow morning believing, "The Holy Spirit wants to work through me today."

Imagine the conversations, prayers, encouragement, compassion, courage, generosity, healings, restored relationships, neighbors who encounter Christ, coworkers who hear the Gospel, and lonely people who receive a timely word of hope.

That is not fantasy. That is the vision Jesus had when He said, "It is to your advantage that I go away."

The mission did not shrink. It expanded.

The presence of Jesus would no longer be experienced by one group in one geographic location. Through the Spirit, the life and mission of Jesus would be carried by His people to the ends of the earth.

CONCLUSION

LIVING IN THE ADVANTAGE

Ephesians 3:14-21 - *verses 16-21*

Church, can I ask you one more question?

What if Jesus was telling the truth?

I know that sounds obvious. Of course He was telling the truth. But what if we actually lived as though His words were true?

What if we are not living at a disadvantage because we were not born in the first century?

What if the very presence of God really does live within every person who belongs to Christ?

What if you are never actually alone?

What if every morning the Helper walks with you? What if every temptation, hospital room, parenting moment, lonely season, difficult conversation, and opportunity to share your faith is met by the presence of God Himself?

Church, that changes everything.

Paul Ends on His Knees

After Paul spends three chapters explaining what God has done for us in Christ, he does not end with another lesson. He ends on his knees.

Good theology does not merely fill your notebook. It bends your knees.

Paul prays that the Father would strengthen believers with power through His Spirit, that Christ would make His home in their hearts, that they would know the love of Christ, and that they would be filled with all the fullness of God.

Do you see the beauty of the Trinity?

The Father strengthens us through the Spirit so that Christ is at home in us.

This has always been God's desire: not simply that we know about Him, but that we live in communion with Him.

Then Paul says God is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine, according to His power that is already at work within us.

Not just power available somewhere in the distance. Power already at work within His people.

The Christian life is not trying to imitate Jesus from a distance. It is allowing the Holy Spirit to reproduce the life of Jesus within us.

Maybe you are here today and you have been trying to live the Christian life in your own strength. You have been striving, pushing, and promising yourself that next week will be different.

You were never meant to live this life alone. Jesus sent the Helper.

Maybe you love Jesus and have followed Him for years, but somewhere along the way your relationship with the Holy Spirit became more of a doctrine than a daily reality.

You believe in Him, but you have not been intentionally walking with Him.

He has not abandoned you. He is inviting you into deeper fellowship.

And maybe you have never surrendered your life to Christ. Everything we have talked about begins with Jesus. The Spirit does not replace the Gospel. He makes the Gospel real in our hearts and leads us to the Son.

MINISTRY RESPONSE

FRESH SURRENDER

Would you stand with me?

If you are comfortable, would you open your hands in front of you? There is nothing magical about that posture. Open hands simply remind us that we are here to receive.

Prayer

Father, thank You for loving us enough to send Your Son.

Jesus, thank You for laying down Your life, rising again, and keeping Your promise.

Holy Spirit, thank You for never abandoning Your Church.

Thank You for teaching us, convicting us, comforting us, leading us, transforming us, and empowering us.

Today we do not merely ask for more experiences. We ask for deeper fellowship.

Teach us to recognize Your voice.

Teach us to obey quickly.

Teach us to love boldly.

Produce Your fruit within us.

Release Your gifts through us.

Make us more like Jesus.

And let every part of our lives bring glory to Him.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Before we leave, I do not want to rush past this moment. I believe the Holy Spirit is already at work.

Some of you need encouragement today. Some need healing. Some need freedom. Some need direction. Some simply need another believer to stand with you in prayer.

If that is you, our prayer team is going to come forward, and we would be honored to pray with you.

Maybe you are carrying a burden that feels too heavy. Maybe you need to surrender your life to Jesus. Do not leave carrying alone what Jesus has already made provision for.

The Holy Spirit is our Helper. Let us allow Him to help us today.
