

# Promised Comfort

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[ 0 : 00 ] Folks, lovely to see you today. Turn back to that chapter in John 14. It kind of feels like I should be doing a Christmas sermon today, but we're not. We're going to do one more week in this part of John's gospel, just as we finish off this little section. And what a wonderful passage it is.

Timely for us, I hope, as we enter this season, knowing where a lot of us are at, what stuff is going on in our lives. And I hope this is just a massive comfort to you today as we gaze upon Jesus and all his glory. So let me pray and we'll get into it together. Father, I thank you for your word. And I pray, Father, in keeping with what we're going to be thinking about today, that your spirit would come and he would illuminate these wonderful truths to us today, that we would capture something more of your beauty and your plans and your good purposes for us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So with the text open in front of you, here's a question for you. If you met the 10 years ago you, what one bit of advice would you give yourself? So we had a guy called Joe Barnard with us at our men's breakfast recently. That was the question I asked him. I said, what would the now early 50s year old version of you say to the early 40s year old version of you were you to meet him? And the answer that he gave, and if you were there, you'll know where I'm going with this. It was stay with me for two reasons. Firstly, because he said he honestly didn't know because he was still actually in his mid 40s rather than his mid 50s, as I'd wrongly assumed, which wasn't my finest moment, as a lot of you keep pointing out. But still up for playing ball in all seriousness, he took me on and he said this. He said, if I were to meet the 10 years ago version of me, I would say, and get this, don't get distracted by all the trimmings in life. He said, I just got so distracted when I was young growing up thinking about all the things that were ahead of me, getting on the property ladder, landing the dream job, saving for the kids college fund, going on that all-inclusive holiday. If I were to meet the 10 years ago me, I would say that they pale in comparison with taking up the invitation to come and behold and know the living God. And that's what the kids today call a mic drop moment.

Yeah. Come and know the living God for there is no more thrilling a thing than we can possibly do with our lives than to know him. And he was mirroring something that C.S. Lewis, a bit of a fan boy, he said so many years ago. He said, it would seem that Jesus finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures fooling about with drinking, sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. And then get this, we are far too easily pleased. And so into our all-too-easily-pleased world comes this loving invitation from Jesus to come and embrace the most wonderful possibility that could ever be held out to us in life. And remember that John 14, if you were here last week, this is all about assurance. Right? Jesus has told his disciples that he's going. And the big question in their minds is how will we experience knowing him when he's not physically around? Or is what he's telling us effectively that it's time to buy a photo frame, stick his photo in it, put it on the mantelpiece, and now life just becomes talking about the wonderful memories that we have of him. Sitting around drinking teas, I'm sure they did in the first century saying, do you remember the time when? Do you remember the time when Jesus did that?

[ 4 : 25 ] Is that what life is now? But see Jesus comfort them at verse 18. And I think this is the key for this little section here. He says, I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you.

And you ask yourself, how? Well, it's because of the one who Jesus says that presumably as he dies on the cross, he ascends to heaven and he's at the right hand of the Father, the one that he will ask the Father, verse 16, to send. The Holy Spirit. So the third person of the Godhead. Remember our God, the God of the Bible, one God in three equal yet distinct persons. The God of the Bible is wonderfully triune. And it's important to know that the Holy Spirit is a person, not a force.

Okay. He's not some kind of divine red bull that gives you wings. Am I splitting theological hairs? Let me tell you why that matters. It matters two reasons. First of all, because that's what the Bible says, talks about a he, but it also matters because this is all about a relationship with God, relationship with a person. Now the Greek word there is *paraclete*. Now some of your versions, your translations might use different words there. If you've got it in front of you, you might see the word helper or counselor or advocate. Let me just say they're all valid. I think the reason is that there is no one English word that adequately captures everything that's contained in that Greek word. But the word, the term is used to describe somebody who is sent and who comes alongside in order to help. And notice there's another helper. This is going to be another Jesus as it were.

Now remember what we saw last week. We saw our mistakes won't jeopardize the future. We saw that our limits won't hinder the mission. This is what Jesus was saying to his disciples.

And this week, hear Jesus say that our frailty won't prevent his presence. Now it was Charles Spurgeon, who was a famous preacher down in London in the early mid-18th century.

[ 7 : 08 ] He once did a kid's talk at his church and he said, children all gather around. So they gathered and what he did is he got a basin of water and he put his hands in the basin and he was silent for a minute. And then he turned to the kids and he said, kids, why am I drowning?

And one little girl piped up in the front door and she said, you're not drowning because your head's not in the water. And he said, precisely. Because if your head's okay, if your head's alive, the rest of your body is alive. And that's what Jesus means, verse 19, when he says to his disciples, because I live, you also will live. He shares his life with his people. And that means that as weak as you might be here feeling today, both physically, and I know the cold is doing the rounds at the minute, okay, but also maybe how you're feeling inside. As broken as you might be, as weak as you might be, as worried as you might be today, Jesus, our living head, has not left his people on their own.

Friends, he is not a savior who shortchanges his people. And make no mistake, what is described in John 14 is nothing less than the greatest gift that the crucified, risen, living and reigning Jesus has given to his people.

Now, four things that Jesus wants us to know about the Holy Spirit, and we're going to rattle through these real quick. But they are so profound. Here's the first one. He inhabits us. So he's the one, verse 17, through whom, and get this, our three-in-one God comes to live in the very hearts of his people.

As we're going to think about in the weeks to come, about who he is, Emmanuel, he is God with us. With the sending of the Spirit, this promise to be God with us, it kicks on to new levels.

[ 9 : 23 ] Now, a little English lesson here. Notice the preposition. Okay, remember the cat sat on the mat. That's the preposition, the on, right?

Notice the preposition here. In the Old Testament, generally speaking, the Holy Spirit, he comes on people to accomplish a certain job. Think of Samson. It's a good example from the Old Testament. But now, from the very moment that we believe, the very moment that we put our faith in Christ, he comes to live in his people.

So the Spirit, having opened our eyes to the truth of who Jesus is, now resides in us, not as a casual dweller, not as somebody who is there, and controversial this week, I know, who's there on a short-term lease arrangement.

The Spirit comes as a permanent dweller into the lives of God's people. He doesn't just have the keys. He doesn't just have access.

[ 10 : 32 ] No, his name is on the title deeds of our lives. Which means that if you are a Christian here today, you've got to hear Jesus say to us that the most important thing about you today, the most defining feature of your life right now, is not who you think you are, how you think you're feeling, or what you think you have on earth below.

The most important thing about us is what Jesus says is true of us in the heavenly places above. He has not left us as orphans.

We were meeting so many people in the States when we were there a couple of, a year and a half ago, who adopted. The lady who took us in, the five of us, for the five weeks that we were with them, adopted a girl from Romania, a boy from Romania, rather.

Remember she telling us about the process, going all the way over to get him, doing all the legal stuff, bringing him all the way back, and in that moment, just, his future completely changed.

Adopted into their family, new home, new way of living, new customs. Through his work on the cross, we have been adopted into the very family of God as sons and daughters.

[ 12 : 03 ] The father didn't send the son to save us, dear friends, and then put us on probation period in the relationship, saying, let's give it six months, and we'll see how it goes.

Because where would any of us be if that's what he had done? Hear the definitive and decisive way which Jesus crafts the words of verse 23, and we will come to them, and we will make our home with them.

And that's you today. If your faith is in this Christ, he lives in you by his spirit. I love this by a man called J.I. Packer, who went to be with the Lord a couple of years ago.

In his book, Knowing God, he writes this, to be right with God the judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is greater.

He inhabits us. And secondly, he enables us. Jesus talks, verse 23, do you see that there, about obedience to him.

[ 13 : 15 ] And so here is the equation. A spirit-filled believer equals a word-obeying believer. And a word-obeying believer is a spirit-filled believer.

These two are like Sinatra's love and marriage. They go together like a horse in carriage. We don't obey to get his love.

No, salvation is not a I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine kind of deal. We are saved by grace. Jesus is a savior who comes at us with no strings attached.

We had no desire to want to obey Jesus before the spirit invaded our lives. But the spirit awakened in us and created a desire to live for Jesus, stemming from that deep love for Jesus that he put in our hearts.

And the spirit there, dear friends, he is in the business. And I love this. I think it was Dallas Willard who came up with this phrase. Love it. He's in the business of renovating our hearts.

[ 14 : 27 ] Just think of it, and this is how I like to think of it. I'm a simple person. Think of it like one of those home makeover shows. I mean, when we first got married, we loved nothing better than to watch Homes Under the Hammer together.

You know what it is? People of my generation do this all the time. They buy the doer upper. This is what goes on in this show. Somebody buys at auction the doer upper and the camera pans to the presenter interviewing them in their new home.

And they honestly say, what on earth did you see in this? What did you see? What were you thinking? What's the plan? And the person who bought the property, the new owner tells them, we're going to strip off the wallpaper.

We're taking the sink out. New towels in the bathroom. We're knocking down the stud wall, patio in the garden. And we've got plans for this. I know you can't see them. I know you think we're crazy, but we've got plans for this.

Friends, God's blueprint for our lives, and this is his will for our lives, is that we would become more like Jesus. More like him.

[ 15 : 39 ] It's a question that we started asking ourselves as a staff team on a Monday when we debriefed last week. Now, previously, a couple of years ago, the question we used to say was, what did we do last week?

And it's been so helpful for us just to flip it around and say, where did we see God's grace at work last week? Where did we see the evidence of the Spirit working?

And the things that we come out with are that I was chatting to that person, and I heard them speak, and do you know what? They were not speaking like that six months ago. That person, I heard about that decision they made this week, and they were not thinking like that six months to a year ago.

Dear friends, I see the Spirit at work in you, and the things that you think don't make that much of a difference in your life, the decisions that you're making, the way that you want to live.

I'm trying not to name to embarrass people, but we see it in you. See it in you. The ways that some of you come up and ask for prayer after the service, even in our growth group this week, the prayer points that people were coming out with, the Spirit is at work in us.

[ 16 : 54 ] You see, that is the matrix by which we need to assess growth in this church. And the problem is, I think, that so often we're impatient to see the results.

It's the world that we live in, isn't it? You know, according to research, the average person waits five seconds for a website to load on the computer before they call it quits. We want to be able to microwave Christ-likeness.

Let me just say God is in no rush. It doesn't work to our timetable. His purposes and plans are so much bigger and better than that.

And he does it through what we so often wrongly categorize as the mundane things of our everyday lives. Changing nappies, being a friend, the mistakes that we make and how we respond to them, your witness at work, all of these are in fact the crucible for character building.

You know, God is, and I'm sure John Piper said this years ago, God is up to a thousand different things in our lives right now, according to this purpose. And we're probably aware of one of them.

[18:07] He has got us right where he wants us. He is teaching us the exact things that we need to learn in this stage of life that we're at. And see, when you see it like that, repentance, being convicted that how we acted in that moment or how we're living in this moment isn't right, friends, that is not so much God outing us as it is God wanting to redeem us.

What wonderful grace when his spirit in us convicts us of a wrong way of living, a wrong pattern of behavior, and just draws us back to the person and work of Jesus.

That is incredible grace. Let me just ask you a couple of questions I asked myself this week. Is there a way that you're not being obedient to Jesus right now in your life?

What one area of your character would you love to change? You know, is there unforgiveness that's lurking in your heart, and you know what Jesus has called you to do, but just the possibility of that just seems so distant and so far above what you can do in your own.

Let me just say, dear friends, don't underestimate the spirit. Maybe today would be the start of that road where you go, no, Lord, I want to change.

[19:33] Think about it like this, okay? Again, I'm simple. This is how I think about it. If you imagine the old us, the flesh over here, and Jesus and his ways over here.

Everything in my heart, the old me, wants to go that way. But what the spirit does is he puts the desires in our heart to go that way.

And if you're in the fight of faith right now, if you're struggling in the battle, know that that is not a sign of failure. That is a sign of the spirit at work in you.

That is a sign of faith. And so can I urge you to go with the grain of the spirit, walk in step with the spirit. If he's put something on your heart that needs to change, because do you see how much obedience means to Jesus?

And it is us regaining our humanity when we go towards him and not towards ourselves. Obedience is the visible expression of that spirit-inspired, invisible faith.

[20:49] Some of you might remember that old hymn by William Cowper, Oh, for a closer walk with God. I love it. It's just got that chorus in it. The dearest idol I have known, whatever that idol be, help me to tear it from thy throne and worship only thee.

The spirit, he enables us. And thirdly, he teaches us, verse 26. And this was a promise first made to the disciples.

We have to understand that the spirit will help them not just to recall the facts, but to understand the spiritual significance of the facts as they remember who Jesus is.

It's why it's right for us to refer to our Bibles as being spirit-inspired. As God spoke by his spirit through human beings. Just think about it like wind in the sails of a boat.

But it's also got a huge application for us today. Do you know a great prayer to pray as you pick up your Bible in the morning is to pray, Dear Holy Spirit, residing in me, take this word that you inspired and illuminate its meaning to me.

[22:09] Show me Christ. Now, just think of his work like the sun when it hits a stained glass window. You know, when there's no light, you can't really make anything out of the design and the color and the way that it's been put together.

But see, when the sun is shining right through it, boy, is it beautiful. The spirit, he teaches us.

He illuminates God's word to us. And fourthly, he assures us. Look at what Jesus says at verse 27 and hear these words in our world today.

You know, the world can wish peace. The world can hope for peace. But only Jesus, dear friends, can give peace. Where do you look to for peace?

And I take it Jesus is talking there not about just the calm in the world. He's talking about inner peace, I take it. The one that knows that we're right with God and that he's for us as our father.

[23:17] He's got us. He holds us. He loves us. He knows us. Where do you look to for your peace? You know, here's how so often it works out in my life.

And I wonder if you're the same. What was the devil's line in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3? Did God really see? And it's almost as if nothing's changed.

That is his play. How often does that line slip into my mind so often in life? You've blown it this time. See you, if they only knew what goes on in your mind at times, if they only knew, did God really say that you can be forgiven?

Did God really say that he loves you? Did God really say that you've got any kind of hope for tomorrow? Did God really say that he was going to build his church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it?

And it's the spirit almost who jumps in at that point. And it's why some of our translations run with that word advocate. Because this is a legal term.

[ 24 : 32 ] Have you ever watched one of those courtroom dramas, right? I used to love them back in the day when I was training to be a lawyer. It's what the defense lawyer always says. Objection, my Lord.

Objection. Objection. What they are saying is not true. And do you know the grounds for me objecting? It's almost like the spirit, he just at that point just spotlights Jesus.

He is my grounds for objecting. Jesus at the right hand of the Father as our great saviour, as our great priest, as the one who intercedes for us.

And here's what I want you to know today. That there is never a moment when he isn't on our side as an ever-present reminder in the place of all power in heaven.

That everything possible, everything needed has been done for you and I to be brought into the very family of God. The spirit, he inhabits us, he enables us, he teaches us, and he assures us.

[ 25 : 44 ] And just as we close, maybe, let me tell you how this has played out for me this week. So our youngest daughter, Eve, she did it again this morning.

Most days she runs up to us and she says with a book in her hands, she says, Peppa story. Peppa story. So she wants me to read Peppa Pig to her.

Peppa story, dad, Peppa story. And so you're there, you're reading it and you have no idea whether she understands it or not. But without fail, you'll get to the end and she'll say, daddy again, daddy again.

And you know you've read it too many times when you start overanalyzing things in the plot of a kid's story. Yeah. You're thinking about how daddy pig needs to stop being so harsh.

Anyway, the next morning, I'm sitting there with my Bible and I'm tired and I'm weary and I'm worried.

[ 26 : 52 ] I'm sitting there with my Bible open and it strikes me that the relationship has completely flipped. And I'm Eve sitting there with my Bible open.

I'm the child and I'm sitting there saying to my father, father, tell me again. Tell me the gospel again. Tell me it's true. I don't understand it. Things in John 14 that should blow our minds will never get to the bottom of the magnificence of it. But father, tell me again.

Dad, tell me again. Tell me that I'm loved. Can I really be forgiven? Is your love for me truly unconditional? Is it really based on grace?

Are you really at work today in the mundaneness of my life? Do you really have good works prepared in advance for me to do in walking? Am I really in the right place where I should be right now in my life?

[ 27 : 51 ] Lord, how do I know what the future holds? Are you really with me? And it's almost as if at that point the Spirit brings that wonderful knowledge of Jesus and says, my son, the answer to all your questions, I know you don't understand it.

I know you've got things going on. The answer to your questions, look at him and see that they're yes. He has not left us as orphans.

He has come to us in the Spirit. And that would seem just a really good place to stop and just to pray. And so here's what I want you to do. I just want us to be silent for a minute and know that everything that we have read this morning is true and bring your prayers and your honest thoughts and ambitions and worries to your heavenly Father and know that he cares for you.

And then we're going to pray to close. So Father, I thank you, Lord, for your commitment to us.

And Father, we just pray particularly this morning for those, Lord, who are perhaps hearing the whisper from the evil one. Did God really say?

[ 29 : 25 ] And Father, I pray that you would help us to know the answer to that is that yes, our Father really did say. And we thank you, Lord, that you've not left us this morning.

And I pray that your Spirit would be at work in our hearts right now in ways, Lord, that many of us won't be aware of, the hurts and the pains and the worries that are carried in this room.

And Father, I pray that you would be at work in the deepest places of our hearts, bringing that knowledge of the glory and the beauty of Jesus.

And so it's to him that we look today and we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.