

The Spirit of Truth

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We're looking closely at Jesus' final words before his death with the aim of becoming like Jesus, a people of biblical depth, spiritual growth and public faith. And this passage covers all three by addressing *a memory, an advantage, and a mission*.

A Memory

This week I landed at Bergstrom airport, walked out to the parking lot, and saw a man who came to faith in Jesus at City Life. I walked up to him and gave him a big hug and told him how good it was to see him. Then, I walked away praying for his soul. Do you know why? He also fell away from Jesus when he was at CL. Jesus says: "[I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away](#)" (1). The word "fall away" comes from a word that means to trip or stumble. Jesus is warning us that, if we're not careful, social pressure, cultural marginalization, physical persecution will cause us to trip and fall away from him. This doesn't happen overnight. It begins with lack of desire, preoccupation with worldly concerns, some self-deceit, withdraw from community and worship, *and before you know it you've fallen away*. Jesus loves us enough to warn *and* correct us. He says, [But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'](#) At first, this seems rather benign, but Jesus isn't indicting them just because they haven't asked the right question; [he's exposing their self-absorption](#). The disciples are so preoccupied with how Jesus' absence will affect *them*, they haven't given thought to how it will affect the *world*. Their mission has overshadowed Jesus' mission, their concerns trump his concerns. Ever find yourself in a spot where you're so focused on what you want, you miss out on what others need, what Jesus wants? A rough day at work, so instead of sharing it with friends, you withdraw from community (skip CG). Or facing some anxiety you allow it to so paralyze you, you resist opportunities to serve. To quote Winnie the Pooh, "[Sometimes the smallest things take up the most room in your heart](#)." It's easy to become absorbed with what we think is important we dismiss Jesus from our heart. Now, Jesus doesn't say all this coldly. Notice how attentive he is: "[But because I have said these things sorrow has filled your heart](#)" (6). Jesus sympathizes with their pain and sorrow, and will go on to comfort them with the promise of his Spirit. [But he also challenges them to put their suffering in context of his mission](#). Some of you need to put your suffering in context of his mission. You've been navel-gazing, coddling your woes and lost sight of Jesus' mission. We often make our mission a life of comfort, discipleship with little cost. But what good is that? How mature is your faith if it's never tested? Maturity isn't measured by passion but by perseverance. So how do we persevere and *not* fall away? "[But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you](#). How? Remember what I've told you, Jesus says. **Memory**. Memory can be very powerful. There have been times in our marriage when my wife chose not leave, not because of her great affection for me, *but because she remembered her vows to God*. Jesus says remember *my words*, and they'll keep you from being blown away. What is it about Jesus' words that ground us? They're *true*. "[I tell you the truth](#)," Jesus says (7). *Time* magazine announced this week that truth is dead. The lead article documents an abundance of political lying, the *true* condition of this administration. Truth matters, journalists cry out. If it matters in politics, what about matters of the soul? If truth matters in a 4-year presidency, how much

more for eternity? We need a more reliable authority, firmer ground to stand on so we're not blown away. Jesus comes along not only claiming to tell us the truth, but to *be the truth* (14:6). I am God incarnate. Listen to me. He tells a parable of two men built a house. One on sand, the other on a rock. When the winds of adversity blew, only one house remained. The one built on the Rock. Jesus says, "I'm the Rock." Stand on me and you won't fall. And if he is, we'd be *foolish* not to hang on his every word. So how do we **remember**? We remember through repeated exposure. We learn our favorite songs by heart *without ever setting out to memorize them*. Repeated exposure to God's Word enables us to recall it. We can **hear** it read aloud, taught, preached, counseled and even read it ourselves. And if we don't, we *start to forget the whole counsel of Christ, question bits we aren't familiar with, privilege our own views as true, and eventually fall away*. But surely Jesus is talking about *more* than sheer recall. My five year-old can recite entire Psalms from memory to our utter delight, *without understanding a bit of it*. Recall of Jesus words may make us knowledgeable but it doesn't make us wise. What makes us wise? **Standing** on words that don't blow away. Luther: *"Will you recant or will you not?" "Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures and by clear conscience...I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen."* Luther stood his ground, and underneath his feet was *the Rock*. What's beneath your feet? Jesus' words or fleeting opinions? Don't let trials derail you from God's mission. Allow them to show you just how big and sturdy the rock is. In a scene of a CLS story Aslan, a lion Christ figure and sovereign of Narnia, is followed by a group of royal children. Exhausted from a long journey they decide to make camp. When Lucy wakes up, sees Aslan and rushes to him, her heart bursting with joy, she throws her arms around him and showers him with kisses. His warm breath surrounds her and gazing into his large wise face she says, *"Aslan, you're bigger."* He replies, *"I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger."* The more we stand on Jesus words, the bigger Jesus will become.

An Advantage

When we're in the thick of doubt or trial we may think, "If only Jesus was standing right in front of me, like Aslan, then it would be easier to believe." But that's not true because believing isn't a matter of seeing; it's a matter of trusting, trusting Jesus words. My wife saw quite the opposite of what she'd like, but chose to trust God when marriage got hard. Jesus himself challenges the idea that seeing is believing when he says, *Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you*" (7). In what way, is Jesus' absence our advantage? We gain the presence of the Helper, the Holy Spirit. This means it's not just you and Jesus' words. Not just your memory of the truth. The Spirit of God, who can be with all God's people at once in a way that Jesus could not, helps us stand on what's true. Jesus explains his help in three ways that work with everyone in the world: *"And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment"* (8). The Spirit convicts the world regarding **sin**. Sin is not merely merely choosing an immoral act; it is choosing another God. If you choose to lust, you choose to come under its rule, cherish its satisfaction more than the Savior. He explains, *"concerning sin, because they do not believe in me"* (9). Sin is unbelief in Jesus' trustworthy words. Unbelief, not immorality, is what keeps us from enjoying Christ. During Spring Break, my family got away for a week to Colorado where we agreed I would do some

writing. So there I was with dedicated time, a publishing contract, energizing ideas, and a blank sheet. But as my family got ready to leave for the day, I felt like I was in quicksand. If I leaned toward work, I sank, and if I leaned toward joining them for rest, I sank. But then someone threw me a rope. Suddenly I remembered Jesus' words, "*Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest*" (11:28). The Holy Spirit used Jesus' words to call me to rest by convicting me of sin. What sin? My heart felt obliged to a duty of productivity. I had to lift my belief out of obligation and productivity and put it into Jesus' promise of rest. I didn't write a word, to the glory of God. The Spirit convicts us of unbelief and shows us what to believe. Next, the Spirit helps us by convicting us about **righteousness**. Six views on this. D.A. Carson is right when he notes each of the three has to do with guilt. How guilty of righteousness? This is probably a kind of *self-righteousness*. For the religious, this can emerge in thinking highly of ourselves because we haven't made certain moral missteps. For the irreligious, it can come from privileging our own words over Jesus' words, a pretentiousness that says what matters most is what *I think is true*. Both locate what is right within themselves. Jesus says you need the Spirit to convince you of a righteousness that far outside yourself. Because you if you don't have him, you'll settle for a righteous duty of obligation or righteousness of being true to self. I'll watch that show, withdraw from community, because that's what I *feel* like. I'm not going to betray my feelings; I'll be true to self. Jesus knows we need help but he's leaving to go to the Father. So, he sends the Spirit into the world to expose our self-righteousness *and* to electrify belief in a righteousness of Jesus Christ. His way, his mission is better. Finally, **judgment**. It's not enough to acknowledge unbelief, identify self-righteousness, and go on our merry way. That's exactly what the ruler of this world (a reference to Satan) wants us to do. He wants us to take judgment into our own hands, admit it and do nothing about it. But the Spirit has come to **convict** the world of true judgment. The word carries the meaning of *proving guilt* (8:46). The Spirit plays a unique role in our cosmic trial before God; he proves our unbelief, self-righteousness, and deserved judgment. Another way to say this is he ministers to people in the world by revealing their true condition to them. He tells us the truth. We desperately need Jesus. His words, not our words, are solid ground to stand on.

Mission

The Spirit wants to liberate the world from its fatal condition and he has chosen his followers to do it. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth (13). The Spirit doesn't just tell us the truth; he guides *into* it, which requires more than memory. How get inside the truth? We have to move in, live there. How? Who's the truth? Jesus. When Lucy rushed to Aslan, we're told she nuzzled herself into his mane, that she fell between his paws, and felt his warm breath all around her. We move into the truth by getting close to Jesus, close enough to feel his breath. And when we've moved into him, telling the world about Jesus is easier because we've felt his breath, his strength, his rest. The Spirit doesn't just suggest this. He *declares* it to us. And, like him, you become willing to sacrifice anything for people to move into the truth, to gain real righteousness, to enjoy Jesus for eternity. Why? The Spirit will glorify me. The Spirit doesn't glorify his gifts or our theology; he glorifies Jesus. Here's the real opportunity. To live for a glory greater than your own. To live for Jesus. Let's abandon the mission of personal comfort and join the mission of the Spirit—by moving into and telling the truth.