

JOHN 16

John 16:5–15. The Spirit of Truth

Jesus now attempts to soothe His disciples' pain at losing Him. As He explains, it is better for Him to go since His departure will bring the Comforter. Though we may think that it would be expedient for the disciples to always have Jesus physically present, we can later see that it is only through the mediation of the Spirit that they finally come to a true and full understanding of Jesus. Ironically, they can never fully understand Jesus as long as He is with them.

The word “reprove” (Greek *elenchō*) here is difficult to understand. The Greek reminds one of the sort of argument used by Socrates (called *elenchus*) to prove his points about virtue and other topics. In his *elenchus* arguments, Socrates employed a series of questions and premises to demonstrate the correct answer to his interlocutor. In this vein of thought, Catholic scholar Raymond Brown prefers the translation “he will prove the world wrong” for *elenchō*.¹ The Spirit's guidance will demonstrate that the world has fundamentally flawed ideas about sin, righteousness, and judgment by revealing the true nature of these things.

John 16:16–33. A Plain Declaration of the Return

As their reaction to Jesus's statement in verse 16 indicates, the disciples still do not understand what is going to happen to Jesus (verses 17–18). Perhaps they have finally been able to stomach the idea that He may soon be gone, but what of this talk about a return? The parable that Jesus offers in response focuses on the importance of His return: in childbirth, the most significant element is not the pain, as severe as it may be, but rather the celebration of a new human life. There may be more to the parable than the comparison between pain and joy; the departure of Jesus will also bring new life into the world.

Following this, Jesus gives the most succinct, direct explanation of His itinerary: “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world and go to the Father.” The meaning of this is not lost on the disciples, who are relieved to finally hear Jesus speak “plainly” (Greek *parrēssia*). But Jesus knows that their understanding is still incomplete. He calls their faith into question in verse 31 and predicts their abandonment of Him. As indicated earlier, the disciples will not come to a full understanding until after Jesus’s death and Resurrection. Their current confidence is misplaced, as their subsequent actions will demonstrate.

Jesus ends the Farewell Discourse on an optimistic note. Despite the coming trouble, Jesus’s intention is that the disciples may have peace in Him. Note that suffering is not eliminated; rather, it is promised. The assurance is not that the path of discipleship offers an escape from suffering but that it offers a way to persevere through and to overcome it.

Notes

- 1 Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII–XXI* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 705.

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