

33. Grief Will Turn to Joy

John 16:16-33

The Gospel According to John

It was the last night before the Crucifixion of Christ. The disciples and Jesus had already spent the earlier part of the evening reclining around a table, enjoying their last supper before Jesus would give His life as the ransom payment for our sin. Judas had left some time before to bring the soldiers and the personal guards of the High Priest and Sanhedrin. It is likely that at the same time Jesus was speaking the words we are studying; Judas and the corrupt leaders and soldiers were lighting their lamps before leaving for the Garden of Gethsemane. Chapters fifteen and sixteen of the Gospel of John, the last instructions to the eleven before the drama of the night, was spoken on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, just to the east of the Temple Mount on the Mount of Olives. We know that they were no longer in the Upper Room because John tells us that they left the Upper Room after Christ's words written in chapter fourteen (John 14:31).

When the Lord told the eleven disciples that He would be leaving them, they were very sad and full of grief that they would no longer have Him with them (John 16:5-7). In our previous study (John 16:5-16), Jesus began to comfort them amid their sadness at His departure by telling them of the coming of the Holy Spirit and what He would do when He came. In the verses we are studying today, the Lord's goal was to bolster their faith by telling them they will see Him again.

A Little While and You Will See Me (vv. 16-22)

¹⁶Jesus went on to say, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me." ¹⁷At this, some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" ¹⁸They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying." ¹⁹Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'?" ²⁰Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. ²¹A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. ²²So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy (John 16:16-22).

Over the months previous to this night, Jesus had told the disciples that His mission was to give His life as a ransom payment for the sin of the world (John 6:33), and that in a little while you will see me no more, but now He told them that after a little while they would see Him (v. 16). Resurrection from the dead was a new concept for them. They knew of Enoch and Elijah being taken up to heaven without seeing death, and they had been there to witness the raising of Lazarus, but they knew that Lazarus still had to die. When we look back at the resurrection of Christ, it is a statement of history, and easier for us to understand what happened, but as Jesus told the disciples that night what would happen, they began to think how it could be possible for anyone to overcome death.

The following is a true story from the pages of the Manchester Evening Times in England:

Last Wednesday a passenger in a taxi heading for Salford station leaned over to ask the driver a question and gently tapped him on the shoulder to get his attention. The driver screamed, lost control of the cab, nearly hit a bus, drove up over the curb, and stopped just inches from a large plate window. For a few minutes, everything was silent in the cab. Then the shaking driver said, "Are you OK? I'm so sorry, but you scared the daylights out of me." The badly shaken passenger apologized to the driver and said, "I didn't realize that a mere tap on the shoulder would startle someone so badly." The driver replied, "No, no, I'm the one who is sorry; it's entirely my fault. Today is my very first day driving a cab. I've been driving a hearse for 25 years."

As in the case of the driver of that taxi, a dead person coming back to life was beyond the scope of their understanding. When you stop to think of it, it is a frightening thought. The disciples must have been puzzled by His words.

This passage we are studying today (verses 16-22), is what is known as a "double entendre," a word or phrase that is open to two interpretations. What is double entendre? Throughout the Scriptures, several phrases have a literal as well as a spiritual meaning. For instance, Paul in writing to the church at Ephesus about the marriage of a man and woman, talks on two levels: ³¹"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." ³²This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32). He writes about a relationship on a human level, a man and a woman being married, but, as he reveals, his thinking is in double entendre, about Christ and His church. We see a similar example in the prophecy by Ezekiel directed to the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 28:12-18. At one level the prophet is speaking to an earthly king, but at the same time, it becomes obvious that the Lord is also talking about Satan, the one that was a guardian cherub, and had been in the Garden of Eden. In our passage in the Gospel of John, Jesus told them in double entendre that in a little while, he will see them again when He is resurrected from the dead after three days. But the double entendre meaning is that He will also see all believers when He comes a second time in His Father's glory (Matthew 16:27), and what a day that will be!

Why Would the World Rejoice at the Death of Christ? "you will weep and mourn while the *world* rejoices" (John 16:20).

When Jesus is speaking about the world, He was talking about this world's evil system opposed to God. The spirit of this world seeks to wipe out the name of God from all remnants of society. I believe there was a scream of delight, and maybe even a party among the evil spiritual forces when the Lord Jesus gave up His Spirit on the cross. John the apostle said that the whole world is under the control of the evil one (1 John 5:19), so the unseen evil spirits that exert their control over the leaders enjoyed the mocking of the leaders at the cross:

...the chief priests, scribes, and elders mocked Him, saying, ⁴²"He saved others, but He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel! Let Him come down now from the cross,

and we will believe in Him. ⁴³He trusts in God. Let God deliver Him now if He wants Him. For He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:41-42).

The rulers of Israel and the unseen evil spirits (the world) rejoiced as the Lord Jesus was brutalized and tortured before them. I believe their smiles and happiness changed at His death as His Spirit left His body and descended into the underworld of Sheol (Hebrew) or Hades, as it is known in the Greek language. They surely were enraged, as the impact of God's perfect plan to use Christ's death as a payment for the sin of the world, and to release all those who believe from Satan's grip. As we said in our last study, Christ's death was a surprise to the unseen evil spirits (1 Corinthians 2:8). Jesus confirmed that He went into the underworld when He said:

... for, as Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so shall the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40).

We are not told much about what happened while Jesus was in the underworld, but I would have loved to see the faces of Satan, and his evil angels and demons as the Lord Jesus grabbed the keys of death and Hades from our enemy, the devil (Revelation 1:18). Maybe we will be able to see a replay of that event when we get home! Three days later the disciples of Jesus experienced great joy when Jesus rose again from the dead. In this same way, the pain and sorrow we experience in this world will change to complete joy at the appearance of our Lord and Savior. The Lord refers to it as similar to the labors of a woman in childbirth (John 16:21). The pain and distress at going through the tribulation of this world will be forgotten at the joy of seeing the Lord and the complete transformation of our mortal bodies into our immortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). You'll be looking good that day if you are one of His!

The New Day of Prayer (vv. 23-30)

²³In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ²⁴Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. ²⁵"Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. ²⁶In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. ²⁷No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." ²⁹Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. ³⁰Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God" (John 16:23-30).

In verse twenty-three, Jesus told them what the new day of grace would usher in—access to the Father in prayer. While the Lord had been with the disciples for three and a half years, they had asked Him to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1). It seems likely that they felt ineffective in prayer until the coming of the Spirit. Perhaps they had even asked Him for specific prayers for family situations, or maybe they asked Him to pray for them. Now, Jesus tells them they will no longer ask Him for anything, for all disciples have direct access through prayer to the Father. He

said, “In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name” (John 16:23).

Three times in verses 23-30, Jesus mentions to ask in my name (vv. 23, 24, 26). What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus?

Verse 23 is the last of four places in the farewell talk of Jesus, chapters 14-16, where the Lord talked about the new day of prayer (John 14:13-14; 15:7, 16; 16:23-26) in the Church age. His mention of *that day* is not speaking of a literal day, instead, He is speaking of a time period which we are in now, a time period that began when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church. The eleven disciples, and we as believers, are given beautiful promises concerning prayer. When Jesus died on the cross, inside the temple itself, while the priests were ministering, the curtain separating man from God was torn from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:51). The curtain symbolized the separation between the Holy God and sinful humanity. When Christ died a substitutionary death for us and as us, God showed His people that a new way was now open between God and man through Christ’s payment of the debt of sin: “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). We can confidently come into the presence of God with a clean conscience because of our standing in Christ. The only condition was given us in John 15:7, where Jesus said, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you.” To *remain* is to be in relationship with Him, to have His organic life and power flowing into us and through us.

These words are not meant for us to ask for a new Ferrari or Lamborghini, but to pray in His name is to pray for things for His sake, or in line with His purposes. Anything we ask for that agrees with the will of God (in My Name) will be granted. Commentator Colin G. Kruse has this to say about prayer in the name of Jesus:

To ask in His name might mean to ask in a way that is in accordance with His character (in biblical times people’s names reflected their personalities). However, a more straightforward interpretation is that ‘in Jesus name’ means for Jesus’ sake, *i.e.*, in line with his desire and purpose to bring glory to his Father.¹

To many people in different religions today, God is viewed as angry at sinful man. Jesus came to reveal the Father’s heart of love for people. He said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Christ came to open the way for man to enjoy relationship with the Father, and for us to freely approach Him in prayer because of the finished work of Christ on the cross. When we ask the Father in Jesus name, it is as if we are asking the Father, standing in Christ and praying with His authority.

Nearly 2600 years ago, the prophet Isaiah spoke about the church age and this new time or day of prayer for the people of God. He prophesied there would come a time when God would answer prayer even before they ask.

¹ John, by Colin G. Kruse. The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, published by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Page 303.

...they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them.
²⁴**Before they call I will answer**; while they are still speaking I will hear (Isaiah 65:23-24).

What does the prophet mean by saying that God will answer prayer before it is asked? What do you think hinders prayer from being answered?

The following is a true story written by a doctor who worked in Africa:

“One night I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all we could do, she died, leaving us with a tiny, premature baby and a crying two-year-old daughter. We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive, as we had no incubator (we had no electricity to run an incubator). We also had no special feeding facilities.

Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts. One student midwife went for the box we had for such babies and the cotton wool that the baby would be wrapped in. Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly in distress to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst (rubber perishes easily in tropical climates). 'And it is our last hot water bottle!' she exclaimed. As in the West, it is no good crying over spilled milk, so in Central Africa, it might be considered no good crying over burst water bottles, they do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways. 'All right,' I said, 'put the baby as near the fire as you safely can, and sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm.'

The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with any of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby. I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle, and that the baby could so quickly die if it got chills. I also told them of the two-year-old sister, crying because her mother had died. During prayer time, one ten-year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt conciseness of our African children. 'Please, God' she prayed, 'Send us a hot water bottle today. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, as the baby will be dead, so please send it this afternoon.' While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added, 'And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl, so she'll know You really love her?' As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say 'Amen?' I did not believe that God could do this. Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything; the Bible says so. But there are limits, aren't there? The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending me a parcel from the homeland.

I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever, received a parcel from home. Anyway, if anyone did send me a package, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator! Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time I reached home, the car had gone, but there on the verandah was a large 22-pound parcel. I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the package alone, so I sent for the orphanage children. Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each

knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly. The excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box. From the top, I lifted out brightly colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children looked a little bored. Then came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas - that would make a batch of buns for the weekend. Then, as I put my hand in again, I felt the...could it really be? I grasped it and pulled it out. Yes, a brand new, rubber hot water bottle. I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could.

Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying out, 'If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!' Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully dressed dolly. Her eyes shone! She had never doubted! Looking up at me, she asked, 'Can I go over with you and give this dolly to that little girl, so that she'll know that Jesus really loves her?' 'Of course,' I replied! That parcel had been on the way for five whole months, packed up by my former Sunday school class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator. And one of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child - five months before, in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it 'that afternoon.' Before they call, I will answer' (Isaiah 65:24).

What a beautiful answer to a very specific prayer. It is life-changing joy to receive a clear specific answer to prayer for a child of God, knowing that God sees, and knows your need. God keeps His promises and is mindful of us. The Lord Jesus comforts the hearts of the eleven disciples by telling them that the Holy Spirit when He comes, will usher in this new day of prayer to the Father.

The Disciples Will Be Scattered (vv. 31-33).

³¹“Do you now believe?” Jesus replied. ³²“A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. ³³“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:31-33).

Before they continue on their journey to the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ warned them again of what will happen in the hours ahead, that they will be scattered and go home, and leave Him all alone. Jesus knew exactly what would happen ahead of time and wanted them to know that His love was not dependent on their faithfulness to stand with Him at His hour of trial. The enemy would be quick to step in with guilt and point the finger of accusation at their failure to walk with Him. Zechariah the prophet, more than five hundred years beforehand, had spoken of the time when the shepherd would be struck, and the sheep scattered:

“Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!” declares the Lord Almighty. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered (Zechariah 13:7).

This strategy of the enemy in accusing us of our failures is a common experience for Christians today as it has always been. Satan's strategies have not changed. He is not called the accuser of the brothers for nothing (Revelation 12:10). The accuser would like us to believe that there is no going forward after failure to overcome sin. His voice is one of condemnation and finality to us. The enemy whispers in our ears, "you've done it now, you have committed the unpardonable sin, you have failed to be obedient to Jesus. You may as well completely abandon your faith now because God does not love you." What a lie out of the pit of hell! The Lord knew that when the going got tough, the disciple's faith would collapse, but things would be different once the Spirit came and fortified their hearts. Jesus saw beyond their falling away to the time when they would be conquerors over the world system, even amid the persecution that they would go through. We also are more than conquerors through Him who loves us (Romans 8:37).

He went on to say, "You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me" (John 16:32). Some would say that this is a contradictory statement by Jesus. They would remind us that while He was on the cross, He had cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Habakkuk the prophet spoke of God in this way, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong" (Habakkuk 1:13). Paul, the apostle, wrote that the Lord Jesus carried your sin and mine in His body on the cross (1 Peter 3:18). It is possible that the Father could not look upon His Son as He carried your sin and mine, but I believe God's presence was still with His Son. Earlier on in His ministry, Jesus had said, "when you have lifted up the Son of Man on the cross, then you will understand that I AM he...And the one who sent me is with me—He has not deserted me" (John 8:28-29).

Trouble and Peace in this World (Verse 33)

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Now and then I come across those who say that as believers we will not have tribulation. They see tribulation as punishment, and we know that God has not ordained us to His wrath. But we are to expect tribulation and trials. The Scriptures never call the time of tribulation the wrath and punishment of God, this is an assumption by some teachers. The Greek word used in this passage describes the darkness the disciples would endure in the days ahead. It is the Greek word, *thlipsis* (translated as 'trouble' in the New International Version (NIV)). This same Greek word is used to describe the time of trouble (tribulation) before the second coming of the Lord Jesus. The King James Version translates it as Tribulation, whereas the New International Version uses the word distress:

We should not be expecting to depart from this world before the time of trouble that comes on the planet. Instead, we are called to overcome. Isn't that what Jesus did? His last words of instruction before going to the cross is that He has overcome the world, and with the coming of the Spirit, we can also overcome the Antichrist and the world system in the same way Jesus did.

They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (Revelation 12:11).

Whatever the church has to go through, Jesus said that in the midst of it, we would know His peace. When that night would be over, the disciples would feel the accusations of the enemy but Jesus told them ahead of time they would have His peace.

Can you imagine, not only the pain that Jesus endured for us, but also the mental anguish as He knew He was approaching His time of suffering for humankind? He had to face not only the physical pain but also the pain of being rejected by His nation, and His close friends for a time as He hung on the cross, made sin for you and me.

Have you ever been accused of something you did not do? Did you ever receive an unjust punishment for something that was not your fault? If you are able, briefly share your experience.

What helped Jesus endure? It is the great reunion day when He will see the reward: “Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, **he will see his offspring** and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand” (Isaiah 53:10).

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. **For the joy set before him he endured the cross**, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).

He did it for the joy set before Him as He looked into the future and saw that it would buy each one that trusts in Him. He knew that life for you and I would come out of His death, that the sorrow would be swallowed up in joy. In the same way, we need to look forward to the joy that is set before us, when each of us will stand before Him in His righteousness. Those kinds of thoughts will give us peace in this world, no matter what we have to go through in this life.

Do you have a situation today in which you need to experience God’s peace? Let’s take time to pray for one another or anyone you know who needs to experience God’s peace right now.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for your peace amid any trouble that we may go through as believers. We so look forward to that day when we will see you! Amen!

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