

164. The Gospel of John—16:16-22

“When Sorrow Turns to Joy”

A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier

(11/14/21)

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Let me begin this study in John’s Gospel the way I have for the last several weeks—by telling you that we are only hours from the Cross. At this point it is probably somewhere between 11 o’clock and midnight—Jesus would be hanging on the Cross by 9:00 AM the next morning.

The evening began in an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem where Jesus and His disciples celebrated the Passover together. At the end of Chapter 14, they left the upper room and began making their way through the streets of Jerusalem—guided by the light of the full moon.

Their destination being the Mount of Olives where Jesus would spend several hours in prayer before being arrested and forced to endure a couple of mock trials—one religious and the other civil before being murdered.

As they are walking, Jesus is teaching—a teaching that began in Chapter 13 and would continue through Chapter 16 when they finally reached the mount called *Olivet*.

We have been taking our time studying Jesus’ discourse to His disciples since it constituted His final words to them before His crucifixion—revisiting and reminding them of some of the most important teachings He had given to them over the course of His 3-½ year ministry.

Earlier in the evening, He had laid several ‘bombshells’ on them—that one of them would betray Him, that Peter would deny Him (not once but three times) and that He was soon going to be leaving them—and where He was going, they couldn’t go with Him.

These revelations devastated them and caused their hearts to be deeply troubled—to which Jesus responded by saying, *“Let not your hearts be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in Me...”* (John 14:1) From that point He proceeds to give them a series of promises designed to comfort their hearts in the moment and equip them for the difficult days ahead.

- The biggest promise He gave to them that evening was when He said—He wasn’t going to leave them alone and helpless like orphaned children.
- He promised He would send them another Helper, the Holy Spirit, Who would abide with them forever. (John 14:15-18)

So, with all of that as background, we come to John 16 verses 16-22 and a message I’m calling, *“When Sorrow Turns to Joy”*.

I’m building this message around 3 simple main points—

I. Jesus’ Proclamation—verse 16

II. The Disciples’ Consternation—verses 17-18

III. The Lord's Clarification—verses 19-22

A QUICK RECAP

I. Jesus' Proclamation—verse 16

John 16:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father."

Now please understand, these disciples were not Spirit-filled Christians at this time—that wouldn't happen until Pentecost a couple of months later (Acts 2:1-4). Having said that, there was a lot of things Jesus said to them that went '*over their heads*' so to speak—this being a prime example.

I mean these men *wanted* to understand Jesus' words to them—they really *tried* but their confusion gave way to *consternation*.

II. The Disciples' Consternation—verses 17-18

Consternation is a confusion that leads to frustration—in this case frustration for not being able to understand what Jesus meant by His somewhat cryptic proclamation—

"In a little while you won't see me—and in a little while you will see Me." (verse 16)

This led the disciples to let their confusion get the best of them—producing mild irritation and even some consternation—

John 16:17-18 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Then *some* of His disciples said among themselves, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" ¹⁸ They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying."

Now, be patient with these disciples who were confused and frustrated by the constant '*riddles*' Jesus seemed to use to communicate truth to them.

Jesus even *admitted* He wasn't speaking *plainly* to them—

John 16:25, 29 (NKJV)

²⁵ "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father..." ²⁹ His disciples said to Him, "See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech!"

But listen, these disciples were not the first (nor would they be the last) of God's people to be confused by someone teaching spiritual truth in the Bible.

You remember the words of Peter with regard to some of the writings of Paul when he said—"Some of the things Paul has written in his epistles are hard to understand..." (2 Peter 3:16)

Now, I say this so that you understand that some Christian scholars, professors, pastors, and other teachers today *still* aren't sure what Jesus fully meant when He said—

John 16:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father."

The key to understanding this statement lies in correctly interpreting the two uses of the phrase— "a little while".

Most scholars and commentators pretty much agree on the meaning of the first "*a little while*"— "**A little while, and you will not see Me...**" (verse 16a)

As one commentator put it—

"This speaks of how He was soon going to be arrested, and they would be scattered like sheep and separated from Him. He'd be crucified and buried. He would be absent a little while and they wouldn't see Him..."

It is the second "*a little while*" where differences of interpretation come into play—"**...and again a little while, and you will see Me...**" (verse 16b)

There are 3 main views about the meaning of this last "*a little while*"—

- ❖ The first interpretation believes that this is a reference to how after Jesus was crucified, they wouldn't see Him for a little while because His body would be laid in the tomb—but then in a little while (3 days later) He would rise from the dead and they would see Him again.
- ❖ The next interpretation believes that the second "*a little while and you will see Me*" is speaking of Jesus' Second Coming.

Those who hold to this view believe this primarily because Jesus used the illustration of a woman in labor (pain/sorrow) in verse 21 and how that when the child is born, she forgets the pain and there is great joy.

They compare this with Jesus' words in the Olivet Discourse to make their case for this interpretation—

Matthew 24:4-8 (NKJV)

⁴ And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these *are* the beginning of sorrows [the Greek is—"the beginning of birth pains"].

- ❖ The third interpretation is interesting in that it holds to the view that the second "*a little while and you [those disciples] will see Me...*"—refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost.

You say, "*How does the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost relate to the words of Jesus when He told these men—'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me...*'"

John 14:15-18 (NKJV)

¹⁵ "If you love Me, keep My commandments. ¹⁶ And I will pray the Father [after My resurrection and return to My Father in heaven], and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever-- ¹⁷ the Spirit

of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.¹⁸ I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

Those who hold to this third interpretation point to the last phrase of verse 16 as proof this is what Jesus had in mind—"A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father"

Warren Wiersbe—

"Jesus was speaking primarily about His return to the Father (*"Because I go to the Father"*—John 16:16). This ties in with John 16:10—*"Because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more."* The disciples did not live to see the return of Christ, but they did die and see Him when they arrived in glory. In comparison to eternity, the time that the church has been awaiting the Lord's return has really been but *"a little while"* (see 2 Cor. 4:16–18). In fact, the phrase *"a little while"* is used in this very sense in Hebrews 10:37—*"For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry."*

So, with all of that as background, we come to John 16 verses 16-22 *our third main point*—

III. Jesus' Clarification—verses 19-22

A. The Explanation—verses 19-20

John 16:19-20 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'?"

²⁰ Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.

I believe that all 3 of the interpretations we just mentioned are valid—and in some ways Jesus probably had all three in mind when He spoke these words to His disciples that evening. **I believe the disciples' joy started with Jesus' resurrection from the dead—and ramped up when He returned to His Father and the Holy Spirit was sent from the Father upon them at Pentecost.**

But the greatest joy they would know would be upon His return to establish His Kingdom and the joy that would come from living in a Kingdom of true righteousness, peace, and love—as Jesus said in verse 22 this would be a joy no one would ever be able to take from them.

B. The Illustration—verse 21

John 16:21 (NKJV)

²¹ A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.

Now, I realize that I'm in the tenuous position of trying (as a man) to explain to mothers—the pain surrounding childbirth—I know that. But it's not the actual *pain* associated with childbirth that I think we need to focus on—it's the *principle* that Jesus is communicating through the process of childbirth.

Listen carefully everyone, **the Lord Jesus Christ is stating a principle that is the very 'soul' of what it means to "take up your cross and follow Jesus."**

It is a principle that no true believer in Christ can escape (Jesus certainly didn't)—because it defines what being a Christian ("a follower of Christ") truly means.

To ignore this principle or to be ignorant of it is to not understand what the Christian life is really all about and the purpose God has for all believers in living it for His glory.

Let me state the principle taken from the illustration that Jesus gave of a woman in labor and the birth of her child—and then we'll apply it into our lives.

Here is the principle (the fundamental principle of the Christian life), and that is that—**“God brings joy to our lives, not by *substitution*, but by *transformation*”**— His illustration of the woman giving birth makes this clear.

In childbirth, God does not *substitute* something else to relieve the mother's pain—instead He uses the very baby that caused the pain to be the very instrument that brings her great joy!

Again, it is not the principle of *substitution* but the principle of *transformation* that is at work!

One pastor and author described this process well—

“Every parent knows what it is like to have an unhappy child because a toy is broken, or a playmate has gone home. The parent can do one of two things: substitute something else for the broken toy or absent friend—or transform the situation into a new experience for the unhappy child.

If Mother always gets a new toy for the child each time a toy is broken, that child will grow up expecting every problem to be solved by *substitution*. If Mother always phones another playmate and invites him or her over—the child will grow up expecting people to come to his rescue whenever there is a crisis. The result either way is a spoiled child who will not be able to cope with reality.

The way of *substitution* for solving problems is the way of immaturity. The way of *transformation* is the way of faith and maturity. We cannot mature emotionally or spiritually if somebody is always replacing our ‘broken toys’.

Jesus did not say that the mother's sorrow (pain) was *replaced* by joy—but that the sorrow was *transformed* into joy—the same baby that caused the pain also caused the joy! And so it is in the Christian life: God takes seemingly impossible situations, adds the miracle of His grace, and transforms trial into triumph and sorrow into joy—

**‘...but the LORD your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you.’
(Deut.23:5)**

Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave, and Potiphar put him into prison as a criminal; but God transformed that hopeless situation of defeat into victory. What Joseph's brothers intended for evil God used for good—the same situation that brought such sorrow into Joseph's life was the very thing God used to bring great joy.

King Saul's murderous pursuit of David only made him more a man of God and helped produce the psalms that encourage our hearts today.

Even Jesus took the cross, a symbol of defeat and shame, and transformed it into a symbol of victory and glory.

The Lord knows what tomorrow is going to bring. That's why He says, ‘As difficult as this might seem, it's absolutely necessary that I put you through the pain of today to prepare and perfect you for the work of tomorrow!’”

C. The Application—verse 22

John 16:22 (NKJV)

²² Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.

Of course, in the short term, the Lord was speaking of the cross and His death to be the source of their sorrow, but when they would see Him again after His resurrection—the cross, the very thing that brought sorrow, would be the very thing that would bring them great joy—in that without the cross, none of us could be saved!

Hebrews 12:2 (NKJV)

² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Earlier, Jesus had told these men that they couldn't be His disciples if they didn't ***deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow Him***. Now, just hours before He takes up His cross in death, He elaborates on what He meant by giving them this fundamental principle of the Christian life.

This principle will only help you deal with the difficult and devastating circumstances of life—if you're mature enough to see that the whole purpose of your Christian life is to be used to bring God glorify—and not think His whole purpose is to constantly placate you by replacing your 'broken toys.'

The way He does it is by transforming your painful circumstances into opportunities to be used by Him which turns tragedy into triumph and sorrow into joy!

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (NKJV)

³ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

**It's the principle of *transformation at work* —
the same event that caused the pain was used by God
to bring great joy! — or in other words,
“*What Satan intends for evil; God uses for good.*”**

LISTEN FOR: Erica Fye story—“Clay in His Hands Ministry”

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

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