

Have you got the point?

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[0 : 00] If you're here for the first time, let me explain what we do at this point in our meeting. We have the Bible, we look at a section of it, and if we keep doing that we will have looked through the whole Bible at some point or other.

But we've been looking through this in John's Gospel. This is the story of Jesus written down by John, who was one of Jesus' close associates.

He's very keen to tell us that he noticed everything that Jesus did and listened to everything that Jesus said and has written it down very accurately. And we believe that these words are words of eternal life.

They're not simply records of ancient events, but they're very words of God and that God does things through his word. His word is powerful and affects things and affects people.

Well, that's what we Christians believe, and we put it to the test as we come and look at it this morning. When we started looking at this section, we asked the question whether Christianity without Jesus was possible.

[1 : 08] And you may remember, it's quite a while ago, about Ben and Jerry's ice cream. And I asked whether anybody here knew who Ben and Jerry were, and Adam knew, but not personally.

Would it matter if Ben and or Jerry had never existed, didn't exist? And I think the answer would be, it doesn't matter a whole large amount.

It's the ice cream that matters. Then I asked the question in religious terms and said, Could you be, perhaps, a good Anglican or Presbyterian or Brethren or whatever it is, if there were no Jesus?

And I'm sad to say that in some ways, I think people across the world probably think that is possible, that you're a good Anglican if you go to church at the right time, stand up when the minister comes in, kneel down when its prayers look a bit serious, sing the hymns a little bit, but let the choir do most of the work, and then go out and shake hands afterwards.

And that's being a good Anglican. That's a little bit cynical. But I think some people think that that's what it is. But for a Christian, Christianity is so much connected to the person of Jesus, that Christians, real Christians, feel instinctively a horror at the thought that Christianity could be anything at all without Jesus.

[2 : 35] How can anyone be a Christian without the living, personal presence of Jesus? And that raised the question that Jesus was talking about in this talk that he gives, because he says to his disciples, I'm going away.

Which all raises the question, how can Christianity exist if Jesus goes away? And the answers that he gave, we'll see in a moment. And I can just pause to say, I don't know what your view of Christianity is.

Do you think that Christianity is possible without Jesus? Do you think it's just a system that can exist without whether or not the inventor of it ever existed and lives now?

I'll just ask you that question. And the question that we're going to look at in a moment is the thing that Jesus says, what's going to happen in a little while?

So let's hold that thought for a moment and just say a little bit more about what Jesus has been saying. He's promised that the Christian life is possible even though he has gone away.

[3 : 51] And he ventures to say that there is something better if he goes away. There is something that is advantageous. He says that the sending mission of God will produce fruit.

And the strands that he uses as he talks about this, I've put some strands on the screen there, are things like the personal presence and ministry of the comforter, the counselor, the Holy Spirit.

That's Jesus, as it were, Jesus himself with us through his spirit. He also talks about the importance of keeping his words and obedience.

He also talks about love as the basic way that the Christian life operates and the Christian community operates. Love one another, he says.

Faith in his words is one of the things involved in keeping his words. And prayer, he puts a big emphasis on the ongoing nature of prayer.

[4 : 57] And you may remember last week, was it last week, we thought about the vine, the connections to Jesus, the branches being connected to the main stem. And he also taught about abiding, remaining in this sort of region.

You could think of it as a region where we're obeying God's commands, we're not stepping outside that area. We're communing with God in prayer, we're keeping his words, we're loving one another. And I think it was last week that Jesus also brought in this teaching about outside that area of communion with God is the world.

And he says there's two, you know, chalk and cheese. The world rejects the whole basis that the Christianity is built on. And the world will reject Christianity.

It will also, on some occasions, come into that circle through faith. But we're warned that there is an incompatibility between the world, the way people think and act and live, and Christianity.

[6 : 05] So, let's look at our bit today. And it starts off in verse 16. And it says, In a little while, this is Jesus speaking, You will see me no more, and then, after a little while, you will see me.

So here's the picture of that. Jesus is talking to his disciples. He says, In a little while, let's start the clock. So, in a little while, you will see me no more. And then, we see him no more.

And then, in a little while, so let's move the clock on a little bit further, you will see me. That's what Jesus says. It's a statement that Jesus makes. It's a statement about time.

It's a statement about what happens after a little while, and after a little while. And he says, After a little while, you will see me. Okay. Okay. Now, one of the things about the way the Bible is written is, sometimes it emphasizes things.

And one of the ways of emphasizing, nowadays, we might put it in bold letters, but one of the ways the Bible does it is repeat it, and just be ready for a repetition. Verse 17.

[7 : 17] So 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. So, what does he mean by saying this? Let's do it again. Start the clock.

In a little while, you will see me no more. Again, in a little while, start the clock again, you will see me. What does he mean by that? And, there's another thing that he says, he's been saying we don't get, which is, I go to the Father.

So it's repeated. I think, just to make sure that the reader has understood the problem that's going on. And then, and then, they say, we don't understand what he's saying.

Then in verse 19, Jesus saw, no, I'm sorry, I've jumped to verse, haven't I? Verse 18. So, verse 18, they kept on saying, what does he mean by a little while?

[8 : 30] Have I gotten, yes, they kept on saying it. A little while, you will see me no more. A little while, you will see me. What's all that about? Let's repeat it again.

No? Verse 19, Jesus 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, start the clock, in a little while, you will see me no more, and then, again a little while, and you will see me.

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? Isn't that interesting?

John, either John had a lot of ink to spare, or he really wants us to get the point, this is their sticking point, they didn't get it.

The whole question about this little while, and then a little while, and then the going to the Father, what's it all about? So I want to simply spend some time this morning seeing if we get it, because they didn't get it, is it three times or four times we've had it spelled out, that's what they're stuck on, that's what they wanted to ask about, let's look at it.

[9 : 51] So there's the, if you like, in pictorial way, their question, this absence of Jesus, this short intermission, the presence of Jesus, and his going to the Father.

So let's see how Jesus responds to their misunderstanding. So we're now in verse 20, and Jesus starts off by saying, I tell you the truth.

Now that's one of the things that Jesus said from time to time, and we wanted to emphasize something, if you've got an authorized version, it might say, verily, verily?
Anybody got an authorized version? Truly, truly? Anybody got that? In the original, Jesus said, amen, amen, meaning, okay, guys, listen up, really important, this bit, it's true.
So he says, amen, amen. And he goes on to say, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices.
[11 : 01] So there's going to be a time coming up when you will be really, really sad. This is what he's saying to the people that are sitting with him all those years ago. You will weep and mourn, and the world, this is the area that's not Christian, they will be going, hooray, they will rejoice, they will think something really good's happened.

You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. Are we clear now?

I think probably not, but Jesus is telling us something here. And now he gives it, he puts it in a parable, a sort of figure of speech. No, it's not a figure of speech, it's an illustration. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come, now just the reference to timing, her time has come when her baby is, sorry, when 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. Jesus says this is a helpful likeness. So like when the time of labor pain comes, and then afterwards, Jesus says a little while, and every pregnant woman hopes that it would be just a little while, but it isn't always as quick as you might like.

[12 : 35] So, do you like my picture of this poor woman? Yes. I looked on Google for, I googled pregnancy and birth, and all the ladies on there look really, really happy, they're all going, you know, with the stomach and everything.

And I thought, that's not the picture that Jesus wants us to have. He says, pregnancy comes to a point where there is really hard work, and I'm sorry, I'm not trying to labor this point, but I couldn't think of another word there.

But there's pain, and there's distress, and anguish, hopefully not too much, but let's be realistic about that. But it's all worthwhile, because you end up with one of these at the end. And Jesus, so here's Jesus using a figure of speech, and says, there's something coming up, just quite soon, says Jesus to those disciples there, something coming up, which will be enormously painful.

It will be, you know, there'll be perhaps cries and tears, and all that sort of thing. But in a little while, the pain will turn to joy.

[13 : 54] And interestingly, in the Jewish tradition, in some parts of the Bible too, the coming of the age of Messiah is pictured as childbirth.

It's as though, as it were, God's history itself is in labor pains to produce the new world, the new age, the birth, you know, the regeneration of everything.

And it's likened to labor pains. And Jesus goes on to say, verse 22, so 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.

And we can begin to get a little bit of a clue of what Jesus is talking about here, because he says, you won't see me, it'll be sad, and you'll feel like the bottom has dropped out of your world, but then you will see me again.

So in that sentence, the thing that brings the joy is actually seeing Jesus alive, living, well, seeing him personally.

[15 : 17] And that joy will happen a little while later. And that joy will never be taken away. Now let's, yeah, so let's go back to the grief turns to joy thing.

Let's do, let's follow what Jesus says through again. Now he's just started in verse 23 to talk about prayer, but he comes in in verse 23, I tell you the truth.

So that's another amen, amen. So I think we go with an amen, amen in verse 23. So he says the same sort of thing again, but with a different content to it.

Now, what about that day? In that day, you will no longer ask me anything. My father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

Up till now, you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete or full.

[16 : 26] people. So this time, Jesus isn't talking about what we know to be his resurrection. He's talking about the way that the Christian life operates after that little while and that little while.

And he says something remarkable happens, that prayer becomes such a big feature of the life of my followers.

And you see how many times he emphasizes it. He says, at the moment you haven't asked in my name, ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

So, let's listen to what Jesus says. He says, there's coming a day in which asking God for things in prayer will be such a big feature of your life.

So I could ask you, are you a person of prayer? Do you realize what a huge promise Jesus has left post this grief and in this messianic age, if you like, he says, ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.

[17 : 43] So I've put down there in this little table of what happens on this side of that event, prayer and joy. And he goes on to say, though I have been speaking figuratively, verse 24, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my father.

Jesus is saying that on this side of these events, in order to communicate, Jesus uses figures of speech, one of them as being this of child birth, the vine.

But when we get across that time interval, things will be really different and there will be a clarity and a certainty that was not there before.

And you can see it exemplified because the disciples are full of questions. They're full of questions all the way through. And some of them, you think, well, a child could have answered that question. Well, that's because we're living this side.

And in the power of the Holy Spirit, we can live in an area where Christian truth is clear. And any believer will say, well, this is obvious.

[19 : 06] verse 26, in that day you will ask in my name.

I'm not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. Jesus is saying it's not going to be a big distance, a big chain of communications down which everything has to pass in a clunky sort of way. You ask me, I ask the Father. He says, no, it's going to be so close that the Father will, as it were, answer you directly.

And Jesus says that the reason for this is that the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and believe that I came from God.

The Father himself loves you. You've loved Jesus, you've believed him, and the Father now loves you. And I just stop to say what a precious thing that is.

[20 : 07] It's easy to whiz past it because we all know that the Bible's all about love and all stuff like that. But in fact, to be able to go through life and face its challenges and the knocks and blows that this world gives us with the knowledge that God himself loves us with the Father's love for us, his children.

That's just a remarkable thing, isn't it? And Jesus points this out. If you're a believing Christian, you've put your faith in Jesus Christ, you've come to love him, be assured that there is no big communication gap between you and the Father.

There is no big sense that he's busy doing, creating worlds and things and not really interested in me. Jesus wants to reassure us, the Father himself loves you.

Fill in your own name, not you in general, but you, you know, you, Rosemary, you, Katie, you, Maria. The Father loves you.

What a wonderful thing that is. And Jesus says in verse 28, I came from the Father and entered the world and now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father, which brings in that other thing that they didn't understand, Jesus going away.

[21 : 52] So we've gone through the things they didn't understand and the way Jesus answers them and I suspect the disciples still, well, we'll find out, they still actually don't get the point.

But we get the point, don't we? We're standing over in this part of the timetable and we're not puzzled by what Jesus says, are we?

We shouldn't be. When he said he was going away, what he meant was his death on the cross for us and for our sins. That's what he meant by going away.

And that is the painful, sad, shocking, unfair, cruel, terrible thing that Jesus went through, like the labor pains of that woman.

And Jesus' cross shows us the glory of God, that God was prepared to do that for us.

[22 : 54] What a wonderful God who would send his son and his son to willingly bear the sins of us obnoxious people so that we could know the love of God.

That's pretty fantastic, isn't it? That's what he meant by going away. And what did he mean by coming back a little while later? Well, he meant his resurrection and the little while, there's the three, why is there a three?

on the third day. Yes, he came back on the third day, three days later. So Jesus rose from the dead. And this is foretold, it's triumphant, it shows the power of God over death and his triumph shows God's glory.

So there's another glorious thing, he died on the cross, he rose from the dead and he ascended into heaven so he goes to be with the father and that arrow of resurrection sort of continues up into the heavenly places and Jesus in his own physical body rose from the dead and was taken into heaven and wherever heaven is, where God is, there is a human being.

Jesus remains human at the right hand of God on the throne of heaven and Jesus is glorified with the glory that belongs to him, that he used to have before he left heaven's glory, he retains that and more because of all that he's done and there's Jesus in heaven and he sends the counsellor, so let's put a downward arrow, as Jesus himself is absent, in a sense he comes in the person of the Holy Spirit and in due course, are we there yet, not yet, are we there yet, not yet, but in due course, Jesus will return again physically, every eye will see him and the whole universe will be remade as he has been remade in newness, without sin, as things were meant to be and the whole universe will be remade, there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

[25 : 07] So, that is on the last day, the return of Jesus to save his people and judge unbelief. So, we weren't too puzzled, the disciples were puzzled, they didn't get it, but we get that, don't we?

We get that, don't we? Yeah, I thought we did, yes. Well, let's follow the disciples through because verse 29, Jesus' disciples said, now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech, now we can see that you know all things and you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. Where did they get that idea that Jesus needed people to ask him questions? I don't know where they got that idea from. This makes us believe that you came from God and Jesus says, you believe at last, do you?

Already you believe, do you? It's sort of a little bit ironic the way he's saying it. There's perhaps a little bit of a sigh and they're saying, yeah, we got it now, we got it, we absolutely got it, we nailed it now, Jesus.

And Jesus says, no, I don't think you have actually, don't think you have, we know you know all things, yes, we believe you came from God, good, right, but Jesus says, no, you haven't actually got it yet.

[26 : 28] a time is coming, verse 32, and has come when you will be scattered each to his own home, you will all leave me alone.

In other words, the disciples are saying, yeah, we've got that now, we've graduated from the University of Faith and Discipleship, we've got our diploma, Jesus says, no, sorry, you haven't. And it will be shown because in just a few minutes probably, they're going to arrest me, says Jesus, and none of you will have sufficient strong faith to stand with me.

You'll all cave in, you'll all disappear, you'll all be scattered. No, you haven't got it yet. The cross is coming, but I will do that alone.

You will leave me all alone. It won't be a team effort, this salvation that I produce for you, says Jesus. It won't be a team effort. I'm sorry to say, it will be me and me alone that goes to the cross and pays for your sins.

[27 : 41] And it will be entirely me doing it for you. And there won't be a single bit in which you'll be able to say, well we helped Jesus with that. I don't know whether that's how you feel about your sins.

There's a conviction in you that it was entirely Jesus' work. I don't know whether you're thinking, well I helped Jesus quite a bit on that. I contributed quite a bit. Because Jesus says, no you didn't. I did it all for you. You have to accept that or there's no deal. Mind you, says Jesus, it's not that I am completely alone.

The Father is with me. If you want to think of a teamwork, you think of the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are co-working your salvation.

Jesus says, I've told you these things and I've told them so that you can have peace.

[28 : 43] In this world you'll have trouble, thlipsis, which means tribulation, problems, suffering, persecution. That's what it will be.

In me you'll have peace. peace. So if you're looking for peace, don't go and look in the pages of the Guardian and expect you'll find peace there.

Or don't look on your TV and expect that's where you'll find peace. Because in this world you don't get that. If you want to find peace, the place to look is in Jesus. In me you will have peace.

In this world you will have trouble. but Jesus says, but take heart because I have overcome the world.

When I died on the cross, says Jesus, there's a sense in which a resounding victory was scored and this victory is the basis on which there is peace for you.

[29 : 48] So let me go back. Yeah. so the disciples thought they got it but they hadn't got it. So just let's ask ourselves once again, have we got it?

Because what we see with these disciples is the rather frightening possibility that people can quite blithely think, oh yeah, I've got the hang of that. But when the trial comes, they just cave in and fall away because they haven't got it at all.

So I'm very keen for everybody who's sitting here this morning that you would get it and that you would get it in such a way that when trials and troubles come, you don't cave in and melt away and flop.

So I think what I've put here is the things that we're meant to get. So starting off with who Jesus is, the person of Jesus Christ.

The disciples did get that. We know that you have come from God. So that's who Jesus is. And if you're not sure, how hard have you looked?

[31 : 00] So you might have come this morning thinking, well I know Christianity is rubbish. You can't believe any of that. And then I'm going to ask you, how hard have you looked? Have you actually read it?

Have you read it in a grown up sort of way? Or are you just taking the propaganda that's been fed to you by the media? Have you actually read John's gospel? Have you looked at it in a thoughtful way?

As you would if you were examining any other important document. He is the divine son of the father. So that's his identity.

And then there is his work. Because this is all about his work. The sequence of things that he did.

And until we've got that, we don't have the whole picture.

His work, his pre-existence, he didn't just get born like you and I are born. He came into this world from outside.

[31 : 58] He was with the father before and now he's come down to earth in his incarnation. And then having taught for three years, so we believe, he then went to death on the cross.

So that's a physical death. He really died at a particular moment. He then on the third day rose again from the dead.

So not picture language about some fairy tale, but a historical fact. He rose from the dead.

He stayed on earth for 40 days, teaching his disciples all the stuff that we've got in the Bible.

people. He ascended into heaven and he tells us that he is enthroned in heaven at the right hand of the father.

When he went to the right hand of the father, he sent the Holy Spirit. This is what he said he was going to do and this is what happened on the day of Pentecost. the life that a Christian believes is linked to all of those things intimately and powerfully.

[33 : 11] We live a life of fellowship with the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, keeping the words of Jesus in faith and obedience, loving one another in community, communing with God in answered prayer.

and we wait for the return of the Savior when we will have the same experience that gave joy to the apostles, which is they saw his face.

Your grief will turn to joy because I will see you, says Jesus. And we're not the apostles, we didn't see Jesus on earth, but this is the hope that we have, that we will see him when he returns.

And like so many things, it's worth it. The aggro that Jesus says we'll have in this world is worth it when we see his face.

Now, that's Christianity. And I want to ask again, have you got it? Is that what you are locked into? There's all sorts of versions of Christianity that are completely substandard.

[34 : 24] cultural Christianity, fairytale Christianity, but this is the real one. And I want to ask again, is this what you've got?

Don't settle for anything less than that. Don't settle for a cultural Christianity which means I go to church twice a year, I'm a Christian. Or sort of passport Christianity, religion, Church of England, this is the real thing.

And you don't have it by nature. To begin with, people don't understand this, but when the Holy Spirit opens your eyes, you see it, and you see it with clarity and assurance and definiteness, and it all fits into place.

And I'm asking again, has it fitted into place for you, or are you still thinking, I'll get bits of it, but it doesn't seem to work for me. If that's the case, I urge you to keep asking God, I need to get this clear.

This is so important, I need to get it. I understand a miracle is needed for me to get it, please do that miracle, because I can't live unless you do that.

[35 : 42] Don't get it wrong. After all this time of the things that you've heard, don't get it wrong. Let's sing together.

We're going to sing about the final coming of the Lord Jesus. It's in number 516. 516. 516. 516. 516. 516.

516. 516. 516. 516. 716. 716.

716. 716. 716. 716. 716. 716. 716. 716. the one that makes it all worthwhile because...