

John 16:16–33

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Preacher: Bing Nieh

[0 : 00] found in the book of John chapter 16 verses 16 through 33. Jesus went on to say, in a little while you will see me no more and then after a little while you will see me. At 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, they kept asking, what does he mean by a little while? We don't understand what he is saying. Jesus thought 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? Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. He will grieve but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come but when her baby is born and she forgets the English because of her joy that a child is born into the world. 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. 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. Until now you have not asked me anything in my name, ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.

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. In that day you will ask in my name. I'm not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf.

No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father. Then Jesus' disciples said, Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now 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.

Now, do you now believe? Jesus replied. A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. He will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. 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. This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Good to God. God. It's a joy to be together this morning. And as we turn to the word of the Lord, let's turn to the Lord of the word and just a brief prayer. Father, you are our help. And so would you help me? Would you loosen my stammering tongue to tell of thy love immense and measurable? Would you loosen our stopped ears?

[3 : 04] That we would hear of your grace and mercy in the Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to this end, we pray. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Amen. Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return, doubtful, honor and recognition in case of success.

These were the purported words in the ad taken in the London Times in 1900 by a man named Sir Ernest Shackleton as he assembled the crew for a trans Antarctic expedition.

It would become a harrowing experience and become what Time Magazine would call the voyage, the most storied epic of survival. The Christian call runs along similar lines.

Jesus' farewell speech, his final words to his disciples is coming to a close this morning. If you have a Bible that has indicates Jesus' speech in red, you will see it began in chapter 13, verse 31. And for the most part, it's been red text. Occasionally, he's been interrupted by the disciples asking for clarity along the way. But Jesus has been doing most of the speaking.

[4 : 41] And as he's giving his final words, he's foretelling the future experiences of his disciples. The disciples are disheartened, we know, because Jesus is leaving.

If the loss of constant companionship was not enough, he has now told them in chapter 15 that they would be despised by the world.

In chapter 16, in our reading this morning, they will be despondent and despairing. And they will continue to experience tribulation and difficulty.

And if that were not enough to dissuade them from following, they are told of their forthcoming defection. John's recruitment into discipleship would read something along these lines.

Men and women, boys and girls, wanted for a disheartening journey, you will be despised, despondent, engulfed in difficulty, faithfulness, doubtful, defection, likely.

[5 : 50] To borrow the words of St. Paul, you will be afflicted in every way, perplexed, persecuted, struck down, always carrying about in the body the death of the Lord Jesus.

And if you have yet to hear this up to this point as a Christian, allow me to say this up front. Being a Christian will be the most difficult thing you do in life.

Being a Christian will be the most difficult thing you do in this lifetime. You see, this is the most absurd invitation to the world ever extended.

And perhaps you're hearing today, while you're hearing this today, and you are wondering, what good is it to follow Jesus? And this morning, I want to answer from this text this question.

Why should I follow Jesus? Why should I follow Jesus? Is he worth it? Can a call of that nature be worth it?

[7 : 07] Well, I want to give you two points. There's many along the way, and you'll find them. But two headings I want to present to you.

Follow Jesus, because he turns all sorrow into joy. Secondly, follow Jesus, because he gives peace in tribulation.

Follow Jesus, because he turns sorrow into joy. Our text begins with a confused bunch of disciples. And the phrase that perplexes them is repeated an unusual number of times in the opening verses. You see it. A little while, and you will see me longer. Again, a little while. And some of the disciples are saying, what does he mean by a little while you'll see me, and a little while?

The phrase is, a little while. John the writer finally records in verse 18, the words of the disciples saying, what does he mean?

[8 : 11] We do not know what he is talking about. John is using this phrase with some ambiguity, and you'll see this if you read commentaries.

They're divided. A little while is certainly an undisclosed period of time. What could Jesus mean? Is he speaking about the little while between his impending death and his imminent resurrection?

The two days in the grave and his reappearing? Is that the little while? Is John referring to a little while after Jesus ascends to heaven, and he will return in the clouds at the end of time?

Could he possibly have meant both of these? A double meaning. There's a lot of discussion going on here. And Jesus is aware of their confusion.

And so he begins to offer a clarification. And instead of telling them how long is a little while, he would tell them, instead he will tell them about the effects of his leaving and his return.

[9 : 18] His disappearance and his reappearance have a transformative effect on the disciples. How long will you be gone, Jesus? That's what they're wondering.

Instead, Jesus is going to tell them how they will be changed while he's away. He uses this illustration of an expectant mother entering into the agony of childbirth before modern medicine and epidurals.

At the onset of contraction and birth pains, the mother is overwhelmed by pain, by anguish, by sorrow. But these will soon give way to joy and elation upon the arrival of a newborn child.

The amount of time is uncertain. Some babies arrive quickly. Others, I can't attest to it, but I've heard stories, arrive hours, perhaps even days after initial contractions.

The amount of time is unknown, but the result is clear. It is the same. Sorrow turns into joy. For the disciples, the pendulum of human emotions would swing from one end to the other, and it would be so significant that the original suffering is seemingly forgotten.

[10 : 38] The disciples would experience this, certainly not the pain and pleasure of literal childbirth, but they would undergo this emotive transformation. They had sorrow now, according to verse 22.

But once they beheld Jesus, their hearts would be filled with joy. When they are reunited, the disciples would rejoice.

And it's noteworthy that Jesus uses this image of childbirth. Replete in the Bible, the image of childbirth is emblematic of something new. A new start of sorts.

For your homework, you can go read Isaiah 26. A new age, bringing God's judgment and justice. But moreover, the language of sorrow and joy is the language of God's signatory on the document of the new covenant.

It's no wonder why in Jeremiah 31, one of these pinnacles in your Bible that you should be familiar with, the prophet foretells a day where God's people would be given new hearts, that they would languish no more.

[11 : 48] The text actually tells us in Jeremiah 31 that the young women will rejoice and dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. Why?

Because the Lord says, I will turn their mourning into joy. I will comfort them, and I will give them gladness for their sorrow. You see, for John the writer, the gospel writer, this is the dawning of a new age.

Something is starting in the life of Jesus. What will unfold will usher in something new and steer the course of world history and capture the hearts of many who are wayward.

John is telling us that Jesus is inaugurating something new. How do I know? The text tells us that the joy that is imparted is permanent.

No one will take your joy from you. It's a joy that rests upon the disciple. It's a joy that follows the disciple.

[12 : 49] It's a joy that shackles itself to the disciple. It cannot be lifted. It cannot be removed. It cannot be dampened. For the disciple, there would be elation in their heart that no one can take away.

No one could take away. It's interesting. Another prophet, Isaiah, has this image of this huge throng of people in Isaiah 35. It's a mass gathering of sorts.

And they're walking. They're walking to Zion, the heavenly city. And what is indicative of this crowd, this throng that's walking toward the heavenly city, it reads this.

They come to Zion with singing. Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

You see, the joy that the disciples receive would be permanent. It's a staggering assertion.

Staggering.

[14 : 01] No one. No one can take it away. No enemy can take it away. No loved one can take away. Take it away. No perpetrator can take it away.

No human authority can take it away. I think of my own household. No older sibling can take it away. No circumstance can take it away.

No situation can take it away. No poverty can take it away. No persecution can take it away. No loss can take it away, no hurt can take it away. I can go on and on, amass all the circumstances you could think of, and the Bible says none can take it away.

Wow. For the twelve, they would know this joy, and in an increasing manner, they would know this joy. You see, for the Christian, you and I, it's important that we're reminded that our sorrows, though so significant and substantial, they are but temporary.

Our sorrows are being driven out as we live in this new age. We mourn, but our mourning is turning into dancing. We lament, but our tears are turning into song.

[15 : 18] Why follow Jesus? Because he takes your anguish and agony and transforms it into delight. You may not have noticed it, but this joy is actually contingent on Jesus seeing them again.

I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice. You see, for the disciples, it would be Jesus' resurrection that secures their permanent joy.

It is Jesus' return, the fact that he will come back and see them again, that he's able to give the disciple and you and I delight. As the world rejoices in his death, the text tells us, the devil's most piercing and permanent weapon actually becomes Jesus' very means of imparting joy and delight. See, it's not that joy simply takes the place of sorrow. But sorrow itself, in this passage, seems to become joy.

And what I mean by that is, the cross, what happens to Jesus in the cross is not for Christians this stumbling block that is just removed by the resurrection. It is not simply defeat that has been canceled by a subsequent victory.

[16:37] It itself, the cross itself, is the triumph. Because what was the devil's worst has actually become God's best.

Why follow Jesus? Because he turns sorrow into joy. Well, secondly, follow Jesus because he gives you peace and tribulation.

Peace and tribulation. The text continues in verse 25 to the end. After Jesus' clarification, the disciples hastily give their confession.

Jesus summarizes his mission in verse 28. I came from the Father into the world. And now I'm leaving the world and going back to the Father. In verse 29, the shroud of confusion is lifted from the disciples.

They now, with apparent clarity, believe Jesus' divine origin. Jesus! We get it! We believe! What you used to speak figuratively, we get it!

[17:42] We grasp it! We got it! And upon their profession, they assert their confidence to follow. But what immediately follows is Jesus' prediction that they will fail to follow.

And the text shows us the feebleness of their profession. It can be said that up to this point, the disciples see Jesus' departure from them as leaving them as orphans.

And never mind, I'm guessing, oh, Jesus is leaving. He's leaving us. He's departing from us. The text has actually strongly emphasized that.

But here, in our passage, in verse 32, the text tells us it's not Jesus leaving. It's actually the disciples leaving him.

As Jesus goes into his final day, his great tribulation, he would be left by his earthly entourage.

[18:53] He would only be accompanied by heaven's entourage of one, the text shows us. The crowds that once pressed in on him, wanting something from him.

The multitudes that marched with him from city to city. The collective shouts that welcomed him into Jerusalem, coronating him, crowning him as a king.

The twelve that just dined with him. All would no longer walk with him. But now watch him. He would go into this final day alone.

Emblematic of what he was about to do, only he could do. That if you were able to amass all of humanity, we could not do it.

If you were to muster the armies of the whole world, they could not do it. If you were to collect all the scholars of every academy, they could not do it.

[19:59] If you were to put together the wealth of Wall Street, they could not do it. If you added up the love and affection of every mother and father, it could not do it.

Only Jesus could and can. And so he goes alone. He would face the tribulation of the cross abandoned. But not alone.

Rather, he tells us his father will accompany him. It's perhaps the most mind-boggling picture.

Close your eyes. Imagine a father holding the hand of his son.

hand in the distance. In the distance, you see a towering cross.

It's impossible to imagine a father walking a son to undergo a fate so horrific in order to demonstrate a love so lavish.

[21:06] I know of no greater love for me than this very picture. Hand in hand, step for step, shoulder by shoulder, with the silhouette of the altar of the cross in front of them.

And in my readings this past week, I came across this quote that was so arresting. And this pastor writes, you may not feel it. You may not even believe it.

But the reality is that God loves you more than he loves himself. And he gave us his life for yours.

God would walk with himself to the cross. Jesus does so to glorify his father and to gain you and I for himself.

Well, the disciples have asserted their confident confession only to be confronted with their destined defection. It's as if John is writing.

[22:14] We got it. In that moment, we got it. We figured it out. But then we were told we didn't get it. Our enthusiastic confession of faith, it was, in my mind, I mean, imagine I'm John.

I believed it. I owned it. I seized it. I grabbed it. But actually, I was told that I would walk away from it. You see, this is one of these inner apologetic things.

How do I know this book is legit? Because the disciples themselves discredit themselves in a way.

You see, the disciples were to be continually reminded that God would do with them something not sourced in their own ability, rather their inability to follow.

The very work they needed would be accomplished by Jesus' faithfulness in their frailty. The truth that is being shouted from this text is that Jesus' faithfulness is what achieves victory for the disciple.

I mean, the speech began in 1331. It ends here in 1633. And do you want to know what brackets the ends of these speeches?

[23 : 36] Defection. Lord, where are you going? Peter said. Oh, where I'm going, Peter, you can't come. Oh, no, no, I'm going to follow. I'm going to go wherever you go.

Well, let me tell you, Peter, you're going to fail. At the end of this speech, I'm going to follow. We get it all the way.

We're in. Let me tell you, you're going to fail. And I think it's important as Christians that maybe if you're becoming a Christian, that I say from the outset, as the hymnist says, prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.

It's astonishing that the longest discourse by Jesus in the entirety of the Bible is framed by frailty, frailty of the disciples.

You will desert. You will defect. When we encounter tribulation, opposition, and persecution, I'm often reminded of my inability to speak up when Jesus is being mocked.

[24 : 52] I'm reminded of my stopped tongue when I don't defend Jesus. The twelve would be struck, or would be scattered as their shepherd is struck.

The confession that was once so tangible, real, and confident would become muted, deserted, and abandoned. But this is the phenomenal news of Jesus.

He is faithful in our failure. He is victorious when we feel vanquished. Why be a Christian?

Because it's not dependent on me. I can't do it. I'm vanquished a hundred percent of the time.

And still Jesus says, hey, that victory I accomplished, hey, I'm going to pass it off to you. Someone needs to hear this this morning. I need to hear this this morning, that Jesus is faithful when I'm feeble and frail and fail, when he is victorious, when I'm vanquished.

[26 : 06] And though you may be overwhelmed, you will never be overcome. And so as you follow Jesus, you'll falter. But he's faithful.

And this is the source of that steadying peace. He gives peace in tribulation. This is the peace that he leaves.

This is the peace that is found in Jesus. Because at the end of each day, regardless of how you feel, regardless of how bad that day's attempt was to live well, God's embrace is eager to welcome you when you walk in the door at the end of that day.

This is the peace, the reconciliation with God at the end of each day, that you hear the gentle words, I love being your dad.

Right? This is what it says in verse 27. The Father himself loves you. He loves being your dad.

Why? Because God is faithful in your preservation.

[27 : 24] Therefore, you're able to have peace. We are at peace because God preserves, upholds, sustains, reconciles us. The peace of God is so significant that the Apostle Paul gives letters upon letters upon letters to it.

And here John just gives us the word. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world. The world will give you tribulation.

But did you catch that? That little phrase right here. Verse 33, I have said these things to you. In me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation.

The distinction is clear. In the world you know what you're going to get. Tribulation. In Jesus you know what you're going to get.

Peace. And here's the Venn diagram, right? A giant circle in the world. A giant circle in Jesus. And there in that little overlapping space where the two sets meet and overlap is where we live.

[28 : 34] I live in tribulation and I live at peace. But one day, Jesus, in a little while, Jesus is pulling all of us out and that Venn diagram will be two independent circles and you will sit in a circle where all you will know is peace.

all you will know is peace. Take heart. Jesus has overcome the world. The very world that put him to death, he stands over in victory.

He appears to be the victim in the schemes of men and of evil. In reality, he is the victor who is triumphant. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it.

Well, therefore, do not lose heart. Take heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day, Paul writes for this light and momentary affliction is achieving for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Take heart. Jesus has overcome the world. Well, the call of Jesus, men and women, boys and girls, wanted for a disheartening journey.

[30 : 10] You will be despised, despondent, engulfed in difficulty, faithfulness, doubtful, defection, likely. Men and women, boys and girls, wanted for a joy-filled journey.

Unconditional love promised, supernatural peace secured, everlasting delight provided, guaranteed from now through eternity.

So have you answered this invitation? Have you heeded this call? Have you taken hold of the gospel of the Lord Jesus?

Well, come. Let's walk together. It's worth it. Father, we come to you this morning because for some of us, we've tasted a little bit of that.

You've turned our mourning into dancing, our grieving into laughter, our frowns into smiles. You've given us peace in tribulation, serenity in turmoil.

[31 : 35] And Father, I pray for all of us that we would take hold, we would take heart, knowing that you are victorious not only over the world, but over sin, hell, and the devil, and that victory is gifted to us.

And so may we walk in it. May it be true of us. We ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.