

What is True Joy Worth to You?

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[0 : 00] What would joy be worth to you?

What would you be willing to endure for the sake of true joy? A deep-seated, genuine, heartfelt, overflowing, overwhelming, never-ending, never-fading, all-consuming joy.

Would the confident expectation of a joy like that help you to endure the hardships of this life?

Would the promise of that kind of joy comfort you as you grieve the death of your loved ones? Would it give you hope to go on in the daily grind of life?

Would it give you peace in the face of stresses at work, stresses at home, stresses about your health or your lack of health?

[1 : 23] Would it give you strength when you feel like the people around you hate you without cause? Would it sustain you if you felt like your whole life of following Jesus was just getting too hard or too long or too different, making you feel too different from the people around you?

Our gospel passage this morning is taken from a long section in John's gospel. It stretches from the end of chapter 13 to the end of chapter 17.

And the setting is the upper room. It is the night of Jesus' betrayal, the night before his crucifixion. And he spends much of this final evening caring for his closest disciples, preparing them for what is about to happen.

And towards the end of the whole conversation, he tells them clearly the reason, tells them his purpose in this conversation.

If you have your pew Bibles at hand, you can open them to page 936 once again, or in your own Bibles, John chapter 16.

[2 : 45] So he tells them what he's up to in this final evening. He says in chapter 16, verse 1, These things I've spoken to you that you should not be made to stumble.

And at the end of chapter 16, verse 33, he says, These things I've spoken to you that in me you may have peace. So he doesn't want them to stumble.

And he wants to provide them with peace. And one of the main things that he wants them to understand in order that these things would happen is that he is about to leave them.

He is leaving them. Right at the beginning, he says so. In chapter 13, in verse 33, he says, It's a recurring theme throughout the conversation.

He's repeatedly telling them, I'm about to leave you. I'm about to leave you. And then in our passage that George read for us, He repeats the point again.

[4 : 03] But he says it almost in the form of a riddle, a cryptic way of speaking, perhaps to see if they really understood what he's been telling them.

And actually, from their response, it becomes painfully obvious that they haven't at all understood what he's been telling them. He says in 16 and verse 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. 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. They said, therefore, what is this that he says, A little while? We do not know what he's saying. 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. The repetition over and over again, A little while, a little while.

[5 : 11] It allows us to enter in to the disciples' bewilderment as they spin in a circle, as it were. A little while.

What's he saying? A little while. We go around with them. And it sets us up for Jesus' bold and strong and clear declaration in verse 20.

But just before we look at that, he begins that by saying, Most assuredly, I say to you. And many of you know, when he says at the beginning of something in your Bible, in your Bible, most assuredly, I say to you, or truly, truly, I say to you, he's saying, peel back your ears.

Peel back your eyes. Dig out your ears. Heads up. Everything he says is important. He says himself in chapter 5, Thanks, brother.

That his words are the very words of God. But when he says that, he's underlining it and putting it in bold and highlighting it.

[6 : 23] Caps. Heads up. So what does he say? Most assuredly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.

And you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. So the heart of what he's saying is there's a strong contrast between what the disciples are about to experience, the followers of Jesus, and the world.

On the one hand, it's not going to go very well for them. You will weep. They will rejoice. You will mourn. They will rejoice.

You will grieve. You will be sorrowful. You will lament. They will rejoice. The hour of darkness was coming. Jesus was about to be betrayed, arrested, crucified, dead, and buried.

It was to be the darkest time that the disciples had ever known. And the enemies of Jesus, who had hated him for years and plotted against him, seemed to finally have triumphed.

[7 : 38] And as it were, they are celebrating their victory, toasting one another with champagne. And the disciples were shattered and scattered and running for their lives.

They were weeping, crying, mourning, lamenting. But, Jesus says, but, your grief will turn to joy.

A little while, he says to them, a little while, a little while. And after a little while, your grief will turn to joy.

And he goes on to compare their experience to the experience of a woman in labor. The woman in labor has intense pain and grief when the hour of delivery comes.

For many women, it is physically, at least, the most difficult and painful experience of their life. And yet, astonishingly, if all goes well, and we're not speaking here of those exceptionally difficult times when all does not go well, but if all goes well, amazingly, the pain of labor is instantly overcome, overwhelmed and drowned out by the joy of the new baby that has been born into the world.

[9 : 04] Actually, just as an aside, some of you may question whether Jesus has overstated the point here when he says, she no longer remembers the anguish.

Probably, many of you who have had babies would have no trouble remembering the anguish if you wanted to, if you called it to mind. But this doesn't need to cause us to stumble because the word that many English translations put as remember could just as well be to think of, to set your mind on, to call to mind.

And that is a better representation, I would put to you, of what Jesus is saying. When the baby has been born, the mother is no longer thinking about the pain of labor.

She no longer is setting her mind on those things and keeping them in mind, but she's entirely focused on the baby, on the joy and the delight in the new little boy or the new little girl that's been born.

And so like the laboring mother, Jesus says, you will have grief now. I am being taken away from you. But also like her, the grief will only be for a short time and then it will be swallowed up with joy.

[10 : 26] He returns to the disciples in verse 22 and in this verse he draws together all that he's been saying so far. So look with me at it.

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.

We see, we see here the source of the joy that he's been talking to them about. It's in coming face to face with the risen Lord.

The joy that he's been telling them about is found in meeting Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, face to face. Earlier he said, in a little while you will see me again.

now he changes it ever so slightly and he says, in a little while I will see you again. And by doing this what he does is he completes the picture of of an intimate face to face reunion.

[11 : 44] It's not as though it's true when he says you will see me again. But it's not it's not as though when you go to a concert and you're in your place in row ZZ seat 19 and you see the singer as small as an ant on the stage.

It's not and it's not like when Bill Clinton was here a few weeks or a couple of months ago and you might have seen him being hustled through a crowd and surrounded by burly bodyguards and you caught a glimpse of his elbow or something.

It's not like that at all. You will see him. He says you will see me yes but I will see you. It will be an experience of face to face reunion of true fellowship.

You will see me again. I will see you again. This is the source of the disciples joy. And we also see the depth of their joy.

He says I will see you again and your heart will rejoice. Your heart will rejoice. You will have joy at the very center of your being.

[13 : 02] It will be joy like the mother of the newborn baby. A joy that is so strong and so powerful and so overwhelming that in her case the agony of labor is all but forgotten.

Completely drowned out by the joy of something far greater. This is the kind of joy that Jesus promises to those who will see him face to face.

I will see you again and your heart will rejoice and your joy no one will take from you.

The joy that he promises is secure. No one will take it from you. When Jesus was crucified the world rejoiced.

But when he rose from the dead again that world that was opposed to him and hostile to him didn't cease to exist. It still is hostile. It still threatens.

[14 : 09] It still is opposed to him and those who name his name. And Jesus warns his disciples that there will be those who try to take their joy away.

But they're doomed to failure. They cannot succeed. The joy that comes with seeing the risen Lord is a joy that is secure.

The overwhelming joy that drives out weeping and mourning and lamenting. No one can take away from you. And so what about us?

What about those of us here this morning? How does this relate to us? Brothers and sisters, the experience of the disciples that first Easter weekend is in a capsule form.

The same experience of all true followers of Jesus in every age. We do not see our Lord face to face.

[15 : 17] It is true that he has been taken away. He has left us. Now, it is also true that when he left he did not leave us orphans.

When he ascended to the Father he poured out the Holy Spirit upon us to come and to live within us and to fill us and to give us power and strength in this life.

And in fact, Jesus even said it is to your advantage that I go away so that I can send the Holy Spirit to you. And so, it is true that for us today we are even in a greater situation than the disciples that lived with him and walked with him and talked with him during his earthly ministry.

All these things are true and I don't want to say anything to minimize or diminish the wonder of the gift of the Holy Spirit and his power and the joy.

And in fact, he is the foretaste, the deposit, the down payment of the joy that will one day be ours in fullness. But nevertheless, the hope of the Christian remains future-oriented.

[16 : 28] One day, we will come face-to-face with the risen Lord Jesus. That is the Christian's hope. We will stand before the Lord face-to-face in glory.

And this is not only our hope and our joy and our longing and expectation, but it's even the desire of the Lord himself.

As Jesus prayed, Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am to see my glory.

Amen. And so in the meantime, the world does seem to be on top at times, doesn't it?

Those who are hostile to Jesus continue to threaten. And now that he has departed, that unwanted attention that was focused on him has now been redirected to his followers, to his people.

[17 : 37] It began right away in the days of the disciples. And Jesus told them in this upper room preparation, he warned them, he said, if the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you.

And they will put you out of the synagogue. Yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. In the world, you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer.

I have overcome the world. And so for the early disciples, and also for us, these sufferings are just for a little while.

For a little while. Like the pains of the laboring woman, they are soon to be replaced with joy. And this is the constant biblical pattern.

pattern. We sometimes long for the glory now without going through the suffering, but all through the scriptures, that's the pattern. It was true for Joseph. He had to be a slave, and he had to suffer in prison before he was exalted in Egypt.

[18 : 51] And David had to be hunted like an animal, running for his life from Saul before he took the crown and the throne. And Jesus wandered homeless and had to endure the cross before he came to glory.

And that is the experience of all of his people. Suffering comes before glory. So we do not lose heart, as Paul says, because this slight, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. So, Christian, do not be surprised by trials.

Do not be discouraged by hardship, or heart ache, or suffering. Don't be surprised when the world hates you. It hated him before it hated you.

But instead, set your minds on the hope that he gives us, on the hope that we've been given of seeing the Lord face to face.

[20 : 15] Let your minds often return to this thought. Keep them before you, especially, especially when the way becomes difficult. world.

Set your minds on the hope of glory, and let this promise be a source of strength to you. You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

God. Finally, I close with a word to those who do not yet name Jesus as Lord and Savior.

These are very great and precious promises that we've been hearing this morning. Jesus offers true joy, joy, a deep inner joy, a joy of the heart, a joy that will one day overcome all sorrow and all heartache, and all that this world can throw at you.

Like the sorrow of the woman in labor, it will be forgotten when the baby is born. The joy that Jesus offers is permanent, and it's personal, and it's secure.

[21 : 43] No one can ever take it from you. And what can the world offer to compete with this? What superficial pleasures can the world entice you with?

What fleeting pleasures can it produce? Where do you seek joy? joy? Come to Christ, turn to him, and become an heir of this great joy.

You need to know for certain that the way will at times be hard. This joy comes at a cost. The world was hostile to him, and it still is, and it will hate you too.

you will have sorrow, but your sorrow will turn into joy. Amen.