

The Cross and Joy

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[0 : 00] John chapter 16, beginning to read at verse 16. And this is Jesus speaking.

A little while, and you will see me no longer. And again a little while, and you will see me. So some of his disciples said to one another, 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'm going to the Father. So they were saying, what does he mean by a little while?

We do not know what he's talking about. Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him. So he said to them, is this what you are asking yourselves? What I meant by saying a little while, and you will not see me.

And again a little while, and you will see me. Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament. But the world will rejoice.

[1 : 04] You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come. But when she's delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish for joy that a human being has been born into the world.

So also, you have sorrow now, but I will see you again. And your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.

In that day, you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.

Until now, you've asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. I have said these things to you in figures of speech.

The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech, but will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day, you will ask in my name. And I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf.

[2 : 13] For the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I'm leaving the world and going to the Father.

His disciples said, Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech. Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you. This is why we believe that you came from God.

Jesus answered them, Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming. Indeed, it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone.

Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

Well, good morning. Do keep that passage open. My name is Andy. I'm one of the assistant pastors here at Grace Church.

[3 : 21] There's an outline, and it should come up on the screen, and also on the back of the server sheets. Let's pray before we begin. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have not left us in the dark about who you are, but that you reveal yourself to us in your words, and supremely the Lord Jesus.

We pray that as we look at your word now, you would help us learn more about you and your glorious Son. Amen. Well, our theme this morning has been joy.

And so let me start with perhaps a little bit of a silly question. Are you more of a Tigger or an Eeyore? I'm, of course, referring to the characters from Winnie the Pooh.

Tigger, the optimistic and bouncy tiger. Eeyore, the gloomy and pessimistic donkey. Which one are you more like?

I think as I get older and generally more tired, I'm veering towards Eeyore. Maybe that's some of us here this morning, pessimistic and gloomy.

[4 : 27] Perhaps even the mention of joy brings a sinking feeling. And you're slightly suspicious of those who claim they are joyful.

Well, over the last few months, we've been eavesdropping in a conversation Jesus has had with his followers the night before he died. He's preparing them for his departure.

He's been explaining what will happen when he leaves. And so one of the big issues for them is what to expect of the life following Jesus without Jesus physically present with them.

And that filters then down to us what we've been thinking about. What is the normal Christian experience of life now? What should we expect as we follow Jesus?

We've seen lots of answers to that question. But this morning, the answer is that the normal Christian experience is one of everlasting joy. It's there in verse 22, if you look down.

[5 : 30] So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you. Straight away, I wonder if that makes us a bit nervous.

We are theologically suspicious of the spiritual optimists of this world, aren't we? The spiritual tiggers, as we put it like that. But there is much preaching that goes by the name of prosperity teaching that says if you're a Christian, you can expect everything to be good in your life now. Follow Jesus and no money troubles. You'll be healthy, successful and live a sinless life. We're suspicious of anyone who claims too much for their Christian experience now, who bring the blessings of the future forward too much.

And yet I think to guard against being overly optimistic tiggers, we've gone too far the other way, potentially. We've become overly pessimistic eels when it comes to the Christian life.

In that we only expect trouble and suffering now. There's even an unofficial slogan for this, which is suffering now, glory later.

[6 : 47] Now is going to be grim, but there's a future that's going to be great. It's something I myself taught to the youth group recently. And yes, Jesus has given us a dose of realism, hasn't he?

That we saw a couple of weeks ago, it will be hard to be in a Christian in the world that hates Jesus. Even in this passage, Jesus says as much. Verse 33, right at the end.

In the world, you will have tribulation. So we are to expect hardship. But actually, we fall short of Jesus' teaching if we only expect trouble and tribulation now.

We are also to expect joy now. Both trouble and joy overlap in the Christian life. And this is not just for the spiritual high flyers or the really keen, but for all Christians.

But how? And where does the joy come from for a Christian in Ukraine? For a Christian experiencing terrible persecution or uncertainty about the future?

[8 : 02] Where does joy come from for a Christian struggling with temptation when it's almost unbearable? Well, joy comes amidst trouble when we look to what Jesus has done for us in his death and resurrection.

Bringing us into a new relationship with God. So firstly then on our outline, the grounds of everlasting joy. Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus has just been speaking about the Holy Spirit empowering his followers to witness in the world. And now he says something a bit cryptic in verse 16.

A little while and you will see me no longer. And again a little while and you will see me. It's a little outline about what's going to happen over the first Easter weekend.

It will be a short time before he's gone. A matter of hours before Good Friday. But another short time before they will see him again on Easter Sunday. Well that sends his disciples in a bit of a muddle in verse 17 and 18.

[9 : 08] They know he's going. I think they've got that bit by now. But they're not sure how seeing him again fits into that. And whereabouts him going to the Father goes with all of this?

They can't quite put the pieces together. Jesus knows their confusion and he speaks to it in verse 20. Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament.

But the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful but your sorrow will turn into joy. And notice Jesus doesn't actually answer their particular confusion.

He doesn't get out a flow chart and say, well this is what's going to happen next. And then this one, draw some arrows. Instead he explains it in terms of what they're going to go through.

What they're going to experience. In a little while, the following day, Jesus will die on the cross and these followers will weep and mourn. It will be terrible for them.

[10:08] But the watching world will rejoice. At last, we've nailed this meddler to the cross. But the disciples' grief and the world's joy are short-lived.

Because in a little while, three days later, Jesus will triumphantly rise from the grave. And their grief will turn to joy. Jesus says it's a bit like a mother giving birth.

Verse 21, if you look down. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come. Now I'm aware I'm on shaky ground as I talk about childbirth.

I hope no one's going to come up and slap me in the face. And I'm aware giving birth is agony. And yet, the cry of pain on a labour ward is not the same as the cry of pain on a palliative care ward.

It's purposeful. Because it's pain that all things going well gives way to joy. Verse 21 again.

[11:15] But when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish for joy that a human being has been born into the world. However painful the experience of childbirth is, the pain gives way to joy very, very quickly.

It can be a matter of moments or a few minutes before the mother forgets the pain and experiences. And experiences deep joy as she has handed up a scrunched up bundle of new life.

And Jesus says it's going to be like that for his disciples. The thing that will cause them deep sorrow will be the grounds of deep and everlasting joy.

Verse 22. So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you. Jesus will see them again and they will rejoice.

And that's exactly what happens. If we were to read through the rest of John's Gospel, we get to John chapter 20, which the children are doing in Sunday Club this morning. The disciples are overjoyed.

[12:26] The same word. As they are reunited with the risen Lord Jesus. And so the grounds of Christian joy is the cross and resurrection in history.

And everything that it brings. We've seen from these chapters that Jesus' death and resurrection brings cleansing from sin.

In chapter 13, as Jesus washes his disciples' feet as a visual aid. From chapter 14, we've been given assurance that through Jesus' death and resurrection, a place in heaven is secure.

It's been prepared for us. A place in God's perfect new kingdom. Chapter 15, we saw Jesus' death and resurrection brings unity to Jesus and his love as we're grafted into the vine.

And even as we face hatred in the world, we are reassured that through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is with us. And his spirit is working in the world as we witness to him.

[13:32] So if you're a Christian here this morning and struggling for joy, spiritual eels, we can meditate again on these verses and chapters.

Because Christian joy does not mean that we'll never go through hard times. Or that we'll just be constantly happy all the time. But through the hard times, we can know deep-seated joy contentment of sins washed away.

A place in heaven secured. The presence of Jesus through his Holy Spirit. And that has been a testimony of many Christians. That in the hardest of times, the presence of the Lord Jesus and the assurance of heaven are especially precious.

We are not on our own. We'll never be on our own. And what a joy to have Jesus constantly with us. Well, if you're here this morning and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, a follower of Jesus, then may I ask the question, where are you looking for lasting joy?

Because we all want it. We can look for lasting joy in all sorts of places. At success, at school or work or our sports team.

[14:48] We look for lasting joy in stuff. The latest games and gadgets, clothes, cars, kitchens. We look for lasting joy in other people.

Friendships, relationships, marriages. But if we pin our joy on those things or any external reality, we will be sorely disappointed in the end.

Because they can't deliver. They cannot deliver lasting joy. Like water through a sieve, the joy always runs out and death will ultimately put an end to it all.

But we see from these verses that Jesus delivers everlasting joy. When we look away from ourselves and look to Jesus' death and resurrection and come to him in repentance and faith, Jesus says we can have lasting joy all the way through the ups and downs of life.

So lasting joy is not found in external realities but eternal realities. So then the grounds of everlasting joy, Jesus' death and resurrection.

[16:03] Yet Jesus wants to see here that although the grounds of joy is the historical death and resurrection of himself, we can experience joy today through our relationship with God.

And so secondly, the experience of everlasting joy, a new relationship with the Father. The disciples are then told by Jesus their relationship with God is going to move to a whole new footing.

Verse 23. In that day you will ask nothing of me. Up until now, if they've had a need or haven't understood anything, which has been fairly often, they've gone straight to Jesus.

It's a pretty good setup. I don't understand something. Jesus, can you just explain that to me?

Yeah, sure. Here you go. But that system is going to change.

Now, soon they're not going to ask Jesus anything. Not because he's had enough of their questions or he needs some me time away from them. It's because Jesus' death and resurrection will mean that they can go straight to the Father and receive straight from him.

[17:16] Have a look at verse 23 again. Truly, truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name.

Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full. I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I no longer speak to you in figures of speech, but will tell you plainly about the Father.

In that day you will ask in my name. And I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf. For the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

Jesus spells out that through his death and resurrection, his followers will experience direct access to God. A new relationship, knowing God as Father.

And on the screen is a famous picture you may have seen. Sorry, it's not come out that well. It was taken in October 1963 by Alan Tretik. And it pictures the U.S. President John F. Kennedy working at the Resolute Desk whilst his son, JFK Jr., played underneath.

[18:26] It's a little picture. It's direct access. Only the son of the president can enjoy. Only the son of the president has that kind of access.

To perhaps the most powerful person on the planet. No one else can stroll into the Oval Office and play under the desk. And this is a small picture of the direct access that Jesus' disciples and all Jesus' followers now can enjoy with the God of the universe.

The most powerful being. Extraordinary. That we can call the creator of the universe by the name we use for one of our most intimate relationships.

Father. Yes, still trouble and tribulation now. But the relationship with God of unimaginable intimacy. Thanks, Ed.

The American pastor, Tim Keller, said this. The only person who dares wake up a king at 3 a.m. for a glass of water is a child.

[19:37] We have that kind of access. We have that access to the Father now through Jesus. And we can enjoy that access through prayer.

We don't get to enter the Oval Office but approach the throne room of heaven. And prayer reminds us that we're not just pardoned as sinners. But we are adopted as children.

Did you spot the shocking promise in verse 23? Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Now, this is one of the Bible verses that makes us quite nervous.

And we can end up picturing God as the genie in the lamp, granting our every wish. Don't need to revise. Perfect exam results if I pray for them. Perfect health.

No money troubles. As long as we use the magic words in Jesus' name. Well, of course, verses like these are abused like that. But we do have to read this within the whole teaching of the Bible.

[20:45] Jesus is not promising perfect health, perfect exam results, and freedom from sin now. But he still is offering something really profound.

He is talking about a Father who loves to hear our prayers and answer them. Praying in Jesus' name then is coming before the Father, trusting in the finished work of Jesus' death and resurrection for us.

And then as we come to pray in Jesus' name, we pray in line with his character and in line with his priorities and promises. That includes what we've seen in these chapters that we can pray in.

Praying that we would abide in Jesus' words. Praying that we would keep trusting our place in heaven is prepared. Keep praying for the Spirit's help in bearing witness to Jesus. Praying for strength in a really tough situation. Praying for strength in a really tough time. Praying for strength in a really tough time. And so all through this, Jesus is teaching us that coming before the Father in prayer is not so much another activity that we need to do on the list.

[22 : 03] But instead we're being encouraged to think about the person that we come before. Our Heavenly Father who loves us. Even though our coldness and guilt screams otherwise, we must believe the Most High God is our loving Father.

Sometimes I think we can get into our heads that salvation is a bit like a package deal. Come to God and get forgiveness from sin and new life, all for the cut price of repentance and faith. Like the, we can treat salvation like a king throwing peasants some bags of gold and they take the gold and just run off to spend as they like. But salvation is not a transaction, a thing.

It's the relationship that we can have with God. Indeed, verse 28 outlines the great lengths Jesus went to to secure this new relationship. It's a summary of his ministry.

A summary of John's Gospel perhaps, verse 28. I came from the Father. I've come into the world. And now I'm leaving the world and going to the Father. And so Jesus' work of salvation is much more like the prince who leaves heaven.

[23 : 18] He leaves his palace. And at great cost brings the deserted orphan into his family and to be treated as a son just like he is.

The orphan's not just given stuff to run away and enjoy as they like. The salvation is the new relationship. Joy is not something God throws at us to enjoy and run away with how we like, but it's something that flows out of our relationship with God as we experience it.

That's why in chapter 15, verses 10 and 11, this joy is linked to our obedience. And it's why now in chapter 16, that joy is linked to relating to God in prayer.

Verse 24. Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full. We're told in both places that we are, and we can, grow in joy.

How do we do that? You want more joy in your life? Jesus says, chapter 15, well obey. We want more joy in our life? Chapter 16, Jesus says, well pray.

[24 : 28] So for us this morning, if we're struggling to experience joy or have any kind of sense of God's love for us, it's worth asking the question, are we praying?

Because verse 27, it's as we grasp our access to God and our relationship with him and pray, we are assured of his love for us as he hears our prayers.

And then we look back at what we prayed and see how he lovingly answered our prayers for our best. And yet it's my assumption this morning that most of us struggle with prayer at least some of the time.

And so it's good then, I think, just to try and put our finger on why. Is it that we don't want to pray? Well then we've probably forgotten the one we pray to.

Verse 27. We pray to the one who loves us, the mighty Father, who's gone to great lengths to draw us into his family. Perhaps what keeps us from prayer is that it often seems like another thing on the list.

[25 : 41] Something we have to do. And for busy people it seems like a chore. We have to remind ourselves is that prayer is how we live out this new relationship.

Jesus has one for us. Or perhaps the issue for us is that we don't really think prayer does anything. Well if that's us, then we need to learn verses 23 and 24 again.

We have a heavenly Father who delights to hear and answers our prayers according to his sovereign will. So then what is the normal experience of the Christian life?

What should we expect? Yes, trouble now. Yes, tribulation now. But also joy now. And that is a helpful corrective for us to keep us from being overly optimistic spiritual tiggers.

But equally from being overly pessimistic spiritual eels in the Christian life. And so our modified unofficial slogan can be suffering now, joy now, glory later.

[26 : 57] Joy is not something we just put in the future box of blessings. But the normal Christian experience that we can expect now, long for now, fight for now.

Jesus wants us to realise the access and loving relationship that his death and resurrection has made possible. He has made it possible for us to experience real lasting joy, whatever our circumstances, through our direct access to our loving Heavenly Father and prayerful involvement

in his work.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we praise you that you are our Heavenly Father who loves to hear us.

And we thank you for the death of the Lord Jesus which has made our relationship with you possible. Please help us, Father, when we are feeling cold and guilty to remember your love for us, that our sins are washed away and that we can approach you, the throne of heaven.

Amen. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.