

Living in the Age of Joy

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 0 0] well let's pray father we thank you for your words given to us through the apostles and we pray right now that as we read through these words again that lord you might speak to us and you might change us by the power of the holy spirit amen well keep your bibles open to the gospel of john chapter 16 the one that today i just read and there are a few bits and pieces in your newsletter and i'll outline and then we'll get to this little mystery diagram in a while well friends i'm going to begin by asking you a question what do you value in life to be happy or to be joyful which is more important to you joy or happiness now some of you might be thinking oh i didn't know there was a difference same thing isn't it so let me try and explain and make the distinction um happiness is when you what how you feel when things are going well right when your wishes come through when your days are trouble free you're happy because life is good joy on the other hand is something you have whether things are going well or not it's a sort of an immovable rock in your life even in the midst of pain and suffering something that gives you hope and peace even in the midst of trials in other words happiness is a reaction to your circumstances whereas joy exists in spite of them so for instance happiness may be when a bride what a bride feels on her wedding day because the weather is perfect for photos she's managed to fit into her wedding dress and the band turns up sober and plays the music she asked for joy on the other hand may come when years later she sits next to her husband as he's going through chemotherapy but she's filled with joy because there's no other person she would rather be with well in today's passage we discover that what jesus promises his disciples is joy in life joy not happiness and i want to explore this distinction as we look at our passage tonight and think through why that's important for us as christians why as christians what we have is joy rather than just happiness but first let's set the scene we spent the last many weeks looking at jesus's teaching on the night of the last supper john's so-called upper room discourse but actually many commentators think and i agree that at this point in john's gospel jesus is no longer in the upper room so if you look back at chapter 14 and verse 31 jesus had said come now let us leave and so it's at that point that jesus and his disciples would have left the upper room and began and began their journey to the garden of gethsemane and so imagine as they wound their way to the narrow streets of jerusalem in twos or threes they would have all been able to listen in as jesus talk but they are not in one single group and so from time to time as they heard jesus they would whisper to each other and say things as we find in the start of our passage so jesus announces in verse 16 in a little while you will see me no more and then after a little while you will see me and i'm sure the disciples may have been looking at each other at this point and gesturing and going what on earth does this little wild business is you know what does he mean by all that now we know what jesus is talking about because we live after the events

so in a little while jesus is going to die and they wouldn't see him but then a little while after that he will rise again and they will see him again but then he will leave them again when he goes to the father but he will still be with them because of the holy spirit which is given to them until he returns again and so when jesus in verses 23 and 26 uses the phrase in that day the period that he's talking about is the time between his resurrection and his return and we too are as it were living in that day on the other hand when he says until now what he refers to is the time up to his death and so throughout this passage jesus compares our lives in that day with the lives of the disciples before that day and the event that separates these two periods is the death and resurrection of jesus now this is not just a convenient point in history but one of great significance because something amazing happened on the cross that fundamentally changed the world so that it separates the until now period from the in that day period and the first thing that's changed and that's our first point is that in that day the disciples will have lasting joy that's a promise that results from his resurrection but before the joy there is grief so verse 20 very truly i tell you you will weep

and mourn while the world rejoices you will grieve but your grief will turn into joy now this grief is compounded by the fact that the world rejoices even as they mourn to see their teacher on the cross the world will rejoice the crowds will shout for his execution the jewish leaders scheme and succeed for his downfall and the roman soldiers will mock him making a spectacle of him flogging the one that the disciples love and nailing him on the cross but jesus knows that there is no other way that is only true this most grievous event that can give them joy because without jesus death there's no salvation for them without his death there is no resurrection so jesus compares it to childbirth in verse 21 a woman giving birth to a child has pain because the 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 most of you mothers would know that there's just no way around the pain if you want to have a baby and mothers willingly go through it because of the joy that comes after and once the baby is born unless the mom's health is in danger she doesn't talk about the pain anymore does she instead all her attention is on the baby and on the joy of having him or her so you mothers can correct me if i'm wrong but the only but that joy is probably the only reason why you come back for more otherwise probably no same mother would do it again my mom's actually here today so i can say it she had such joy from having me that my brother came along as this overwhelming joy that now jesus holds out as a promise to the disciples that while they may be overcome by grief that will turn to joy and so jesus wants them to hang in there even in that grief because while the grief is temporary the joy that comes after will be everlasting so let's go on 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 that is that's going to be a lasting joy now notice that no one will take away that joy because no one can take away from them the fact that jesus is alive that is their joy is actually grounded in this great unchangeable this objective reality that nothing in the world can change nothing in the world can take away not their circumstances in life not how they're feeling nothing will change the fact that jesus is alive and that's the same for us that if we place our hope in jesus then our joy is secure as well become because it comes from knowing that jesus is alive that jesus will always be alive and that he is really alive well jesus promises more than that because not only do we do have do we have an everlasting joy jesus also shows them how in that day the disciples can complete their joy and so our second point is that jesus shows them the path to complete joy that's in verses 23 to 28 that path jesus summarizes actually in that one verse in verse 24 and it says ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete now we need to explain a bit more of this word complete it's not that somehow the initial joy that jesus gives to them is incomplete and they have to ask and receive in order for the joy to be made complete instead i think we have to visualize a joy which is already full but then becoming full to overflowing so it's a bit like getting um for example the entire cd collection of your favorite band there's nothing lacking in that in that is there your joy is in one sense complete no more cds to collect but in another sense how will you complete that joy by listening to them of course right over and over again and enjoying the cd because that's why you bought them in the first place and so i think that's how it is here that the disciples will be overjoyed to see jesus alive again um but actually why does that give them joy because it means now that they have a living relationship with god you see what they have is not just a memory of a good teacher and his words to inspire them no they actually have a relationship with the living god and this relationship is not just with jesus it's with the father through him as well and the proof of that relationship comes in their ability to ask the father and receive from him so that has not been the case until now and again jesus compares it with the in that day period so look at with me at verse 23 he says 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 in my name now the point here is not that they no longer need jesus jesus is still the way the only way to the father and they still have to ask in jesus name but remember that jesus will soon no longer be with them physically and so jesus is making the point that even then when jesus is no longer with them physically they will be able to speak directly to the father until now they have not done so because jesus work had not been done on the cross and so sin still separated them from the father but also until the events of the cross the disciples were incapable of understanding god's plan they were incapable of knowing the father for who he truly is nor being able to see jesus for who he really is

so it's a bit like this little um diagram um it says what can you see um i'm not sure whether anyone can see it um you can't see it on that you actually have to look at it on this piece of paper because i tried to do it and i can't get it on the screen uh but if you look and stare carefully enough it's a 3d

picture of a shark okay um if you can't get it right now put it down you can do it over supper um but the thing is that um until you see it you cannot see it right but once you've seen it you cannot see it okay trust me um and so it's you know knowing the father is a bit uh like this 3d picture before the cross they couldn't see it but after the cross uh it comes into clear focus now that's why jesus can only speak figuratively until now verse 24 but once the events of the cross occur jesus's revelation what he said up to now will come into clear focus that blurry image comes into sharp 3d focus so he says in verse 25 he will no longer use this kind of language but will tell them plainly about the father in that day they will know the father uh he says no need to ask me to ask for you jesus says in verse 26 just ask the father directly in my name because he's now their father too because now god loves them because they love jesus now incidentally as a side point um that's why when we pray we ask the father in jesus name so we pray to the father in jesus name by the spirit and so i encourage you to develop this habit um because sometimes otherwise we end up for example thanking the father for dying for us on the cross which is wrong um but this is where we get um our model from prayer form but i wanted to just think for a moment now on this relationship that we have with the father because he's none other than the creator of the universe the one who made each and every one of us who formed us and who knows us inside out he's the lord of history who has every day of our lives in his hands he knows what has been and what will be and whatever he says will come to pass and now jesus is saying that this is the very person that we as mere humans can have the audacity to ask to ask and receive so that our joy is complete it's it's mind-boggling isn't it because as we've heard read in psalm 8 tonight it says what is mankind that you are mindful of them human beings that you care for them where mere specks in this vast universe are just a small spark that's gone in a flash of time and yet jesus now says ask and you will receive ask from the father and your joy will be complete so friends let's never take for granted what a privilege we have to be able to pray to the father to be able to ask from him and to receive from him and it should encourage our shunin to use more and more of this great gift knowing that there is no situation that's beyond him and no request that's too big to come to the father with now that's not to say however that god will answer every selfish request that we have we don't have a limitless credit card that we can abuse like a spoiled child rather as we come to know the father as our love for jesus grows then the things that we ask will be in keeping with jesus name

that's what jesus means by asking in his name we will ask according to the father's will and that's exactly what happened with the disciples so i want you to turn with me to acts chapter 4 that's on page 1094 and see what they actually did now this is the time after jesus had ascended into heaven and the apostles have started teaching and they faced persecution and imprisonment so here was their chance to ask the father in jesus name but i want you to notice what they actually asked the father for did they ask for persecution to stop or to be kept safe no so read with me from verse 24 when they heard this they raised their voices together in prayer to god sovereign lord they said you made the heavens and the earth and the sea and everything in them you spoke by the holy spirit through the mouth of your servant our father david why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain the kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against lord and against his anointed one indeed herod and pontius pilate met together with the gentiles and the people of israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant jesus whom you anointed they did what your power and your will had decided beforehand should happen now lord consider their threats and what do they ask for this and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant jesus so what is it that they ask in jesus name nothing about ending their suffering but merely to speak god's word with boldness and if you read the rest of acts they receive exactly what they asked and their joy was made complete so it says in the next chapter chapter 5 in verse 41 that the apostles rejoiced because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name of jesus so they had joy they rejoiced in the midst of suffering because of the name of jesus which brings us to our third point tonight on your outline and that is there is an inherent paradox with christian joy so often we think that joy only happens when there is no suffering now we may not say it like that but often our choices in life actually betray that attitude and so we spend our lives don't we trying to avoid pain at all costs thinking that's how we'll be happy that's how we find joy but the paradox of christian joy is that often it is in the midst of suffering that we experience our deepest joy because that's when we know god who he truly is the loving father in our hour of greatest need there's a great contrast isn't it the apostles that we see in x in that day and the disciples in john until now in this passage so in verse 29 at this point the disciples are only beginning to understand so come back with me to john

and so they say in verse 29 to jesus now you're 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 you are from god now at one level what the disciples say is true right they did understand a few things they're right to say that jesus came from god and they're right to say that he knows all things and i think jesus is sort of in genuine when he replies in verse 31 do you now believe i'm not i don't think he's being sarcastic maybe a little relieved but whatever it is i think jesus knows however that they still haven't quite got it not fully

[20 : 11] anyway because if you think about it in the next few hours in just the next few hours they will act like all fallen humans and they will run away at the first sign of trouble and jesus says so he says but a time is coming and has come when you will be scattered each to his own home you will leave me leave me all alone so think about this if they truly got it they wouldn't have scattered to their homes would they if they truly believed that jesus is from god they would have stayed with him and not leave him alone and by contrast what do we have but jesus example who did not run away from trouble he stayed the course even in the face of death as the writer of hebrews says in chapter 12 and verse 2 for the joy that was set before him jesus endured the cross scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of god so even when everyone deserts him jesus remains true to his mission because he knew the joy that was before him that of returning back to the father after he'd finished his work and so even now jesus knew his father was with him verse 32 yet i am not alone for my father is with me and so this is the same way that jesus wants them to follow and so he encourages them one final time verse 33 i've thought 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 there will be trouble to come because as we learned last week the world will hate us the world will hate those who love jesus but take heart jesus says for i have overcome the world peace is there as jesus says because he has conquered the world friends i'm sure you've heard it before but if not let me say this it's likely that we will be called to endure suffering for the sake of following jesus but we need to know this that even as we're going through it there's no need for us to conquer the world there are no enemies to overcome not even death because the victory has already won by jesus and that's exactly what easter is all about isn't it the empty tomb proves that jesus has won the victory that i have overcome the world has been fulfilled and that all we need to do is to rest in that victory many of you may have read c.s.

lewis's book surprised by joy in it he describes his quest c.s. lewis by the way is a prominent author who wrote chronicles of narnia in it he describes his quest for joy as an atheist and he describes it as that elusive state of mind that experience of bliss that he keeps eluding him that's what i've been called i think i've been calling i think happiness tonight how he was pursuing it and not finding it but then by the time he becomes a christian he realizes that real joy lasting and complete joy comes not from chasing an experience or state of mind but from finding the right object for his devotion in other words joy is not an experience to be had in and of itself but it's the result of a secure relationship with god and that's true of life generally isn't it so belief is useless if your faith is in something that's false love is empty if what you're seeking is just the experience of love rather than the person that you're trying to love and so it is with joy it's the object of our joy that's the thing that gives us lasting joy not the experience of it and there's a deep irony in all of this isn't there because we spend all our lives chasing happiness that fleeting experience of bliss when the way to be truly joyful is to actually commit to following jesus to doing what he wants us to do to doing what is right and then to know the father through him and that the more we know him the more we know the object of our love and our joy the more our joy will increase to overflowing because only god can give us that lasting and complete joy because only he's the one that is the great i am the unchangeable the unmovable only he's perfect only he's complete everything else is shifting shadows he's the only one who lives from everlasting to everlasting so friends tonight i want to ask i want to encourage you to keep asking and keep receiving from this one unchangeable this person god the father and as you do more and more your joy will be complete let's pray father as we approach easter good friday we thank you again for what you've done on the cross through your son you sent your son to die on our behalf so that sin can be dealt with before holy god and that because jesus is alive we have a living relationship with the father through him help us lord to see everything else as shifting sands things that cannot bear the burden of our object of devotion because it will fall away it will not last it will change but that it's only in you the creator of this universe the lord of history that we have a secure and lasting basis for joy help us to cling to that all the rest of our lives that our joy may be complete

we pray this in jesus name amen you you you you you you you you