

Sorrow and Joy

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[0 : 00] Can I say it is a great pleasure to be back in Orchard Park because we have been here before! And not long ago actually we were had been to Morocco, we're taking some of our 20s and 30s to Morocco to visit a mission partner there and just to raise the profile of world mission.

And on our way back we flew from Stansted and then we were having to go to Nottingham because one of our grandchildren was being dedicated in Nottingham on the Sunday morning, got back on the Saturday.

Our flight was delayed and we were aiming to stay at the Premier Inn just over there. In fact we did stay at the Premier Inn just over there. We arrived at 5am and we had to leave at 7am in order to get to Nottingham.

So I think probably in terms of cost per hour that was the most expensive Premier Inn stay ever. But it was very comfy for the two hours that we slept in our room in the Premier Inn just over there.

So it's good to be back in Orchard Park, let's pray and ask God to help us to understand this and put these words of his into practice. Father, we pray that you would speak to us through your word today. Help us to understand and help us, we pray, to live this out day by day. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[1 : 30] Amen. Well I wonder what's the best gift you've ever received? Maybe if you are... Are we coming?

Maybe if you just got engaged, say, your engagement ring might be the best gift that you've ever received. Or perhaps... Actually we've got some friends who they were actually given a house. They were, in Christian ministry, needed somewhere to live and some rather well-off friends of theirs clubbed together and bought them a house. Or perhaps a car. Maybe someone's given you a car at some point.

But if you're spiritually minded, any Christian person would, I hope, want to say, Actually, the best gift I've ever received is the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And within that, this morning, we're going to be thinking of three of the greatest gifts that the world has ever seen. Three of the greatest gifts the world has ever seen.

[2 : 31] And my suggestion this morning is that as we go away, we're wanting to... We'll be wanting to thank Jesus for three of these greatest gifts that the world has ever seen.

And we're going to see them in this passage from John 16, verses 16 to 34. It's not that easy to understand, I don't think. In fact, the Victorian Bishop J.C. Ryle, writing about this, he died in 1900, so a long time ago, But he said this, Nowhere in Scripture, I must honestly confess, do commentators appear to me to contribute so little light to the text as in their interpretation of this chapter.

So I just hope that in the last 125 years, some commentators that I have read in preparation for this have added more light than was available in J.C. Ryle's time. Now, before we get to these three greatest gifts, I think we need to just do a little bit of untangling in verses 16 to 22.

And especially, say, verse 16 there, Jesus says, In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me. Now, what does he mean by that?

Well, there are, broadly speaking, there are three or perhaps four possibilities. One is the focus, you won't see me, Jesus' death, you will see me, the resurrection. Or, it could be there's a focus on Jesus' ascension and then his second coming.

[3 : 59] So if you won't see me when he returns to heaven, you will see me when he returns to earth to end all things. And to bring in the new heaven and the new earth.

Or some people say it is the ascension and the giving of the Spirit. And there are others who say, well, it's a bit of a mix of all of them. It's a kind of hybrid version.

And I think, generally speaking, there are parts here where it's fairly obvious it's Jesus' death and resurrection that we're saying, you won't see me, you will see me.

But also, we're seeing parts here where, for instance, in verse 28, I think that's plainly obvious in verse 28, I came from the Father and entered the world.

I'm now leaving the world and going back to the Father. He's talking there about coming to this world and then the ascension after his death and resurrection. So I think it's mainly here, the focus is mainly on Jesus' death and then his resurrection.

[5 : 06] So, for instance, as you go on here, Jesus promises that there are going to be really hard times. Verse 20, And it seems, I think that is talking about Jewish leaders and crowds and the Romans rejoicing and getting rid of him.

But then Jesus promises that grief will turn to joy at the end of verse 20. And he illustrates that through the pain of childbirth. We've been through childbirth, incredibly painful. And then turns and gives way to joy, as you see at the end of verse 21 there.

And then look at 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're going to see in these points that we're going to look at this morning, that there is a significant role or part to play of joy in the Christian life.

Yes, there's struggles. Yes, there are difficulties. But here we're talking about proper, proper joy.

But it's talking here, focusing on Jesus' death and his resurrection.

[6 : 30] His death and his resurrection. Just a few weeks back, do you remember looking, there would have been that plane crash into the Potomac River in Washington? Remember seeing that? And you could see the lights, it was dark, and you could see the plane on its glide path coming into the runway.

The helicopter just rose up, and then they collided and ended up in the Potomac. It wasn't the first time that that had happened. Because back on January the 14th, 1982, there was another plane crashed into the, a bridge actually, and then sank into Potomac.

There were 79 passengers. Five were rescued. And all five of those who were rescued tell the same story. That they were rescued by a helicopter and the line coming down from the helicopter. And that line was lowered down to a guy who was in the water who gave it to them first. And one by one there, wouldn't shut up to the helicopter. When it went down the sixth time, he had gone under. And he had drowned in the process of saving them. Pain, sacrifice, and saving others.

[7 : 45] And that's what we see at the cross, isn't it? That's what Jesus is referring here, so you will not see me. He is talking about the pain and the suffering that he went through as he died for our rebellion against God.

And then that pain and that sacrifice giving way to the joy of the resurrection in Jesus' followers. There's a, it's C.S. Lewis in his book Miracles said, he has forced open a door that had been locked since the death of the first man.

He has met, fought, and beaten the king of death. Everything is different because he has done so. This is the beginning of the new creation. A new chapter in cosmic history has opened.

That is why there is joy in the resurrection. Jesus alive from the dead, alive forevermore. And the joy that gives Christian believers.

That's why Easter Sunday is such a brilliant and wonderful day. And we look forward to Easter weekend, of course, don't we? But a new chapter in cosmic history has been opened through the death and then the resurrection, the triumphal and victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

[9 : 06] So we're going to look at these things. And we're going to see that because of that, that's the foundation. And because of those great truths of Jesus' death and his resurrection, there are three great and wonderful gifts that he gives to all Christian people.

And we'll explain some of these little phrases and so on as we go through. But these three gifts are these. First of all, perfect access.

Perfect access. And we're going to be talking about the joy of perfect access to God. Second, the clarity of perfect knowledge of God.

And third, the reassurance of perfect peace with God. So thank God for those three wonderful things. The perfect access, perfect knowledge and perfect peace.

So first, enjoy the joy of perfect access to God. That's verses 19 to 28. Enjoy the joy of perfect access to God.

[10:12] There's a lot of joy here. So you look at the end of verse 21. Look at the end of verse 21. This is where Jesus is using an illustration of a woman giving birth. And he talks about her joy that a child is born into the world.

And then in verse 22, and no one will take away your joy. Now, and I don't know, we've seen three significant meetings in the Oval Office this week, haven't we?

With President Macron, Keir Starmer, and then that rather more infamous one with President Zelensky, haven't we? Now, I don't know about you, but I would rather like to have access to the Oval Office.

Not necessarily when those meetings happen, not the members of the Trippest Corps, but just to see what it's like. I've just got one of those things that would be interesting to know. And to have access to it, to be able to get past all security and everything, and go into the White House and walk down the corridor to the Oval Office.

I would love to do that, to have that access to it. Well, Jesus gave his life that we may have a hugely more significant access to Almighty God.

[11:33] You look at verses 23 and 24 here. It feels a little bit obscure, but Jesus is looking ahead to that day. In that day, you will no longer ask me anything.

This is after his death and resurrection, I think he's referring to that. You will no longer ask me anything. He's talking about access to God. And in verse 23, in that day, you will no longer ask me anything.

You'll no longer ask me as a go-between, as a link man between you and God. Because you will have direct access to your Heavenly Father.

Jesus asking the Father on your behalf, on our behalf, is stopping. Why? Because he's won for us direct access to God.

Always before, they've needed intermediaries. You read through the Old Testament, no end of times people say, well, would you pray for me? I've come to you that you might pray for me, or you might ask the Lord for me, and so on.

[12:39] But actually, this is saying, no, it's direct access now. You don't need a priest. You don't need a prophet. No, actually, you've got a direct access to God.

I don't know about you, but often when I phone up someone like my broadband supplier, or an insurance company, or something like that, and you get an automated reply, and the speech recognition software they have, or AI, or whatever it is, never seems to work properly.

And I'm just sitting there thinking, or saying out loud to myself, please, can I speak to a human being? It's access, isn't it? It's access to a human being who might be able to help you.

And Jesus here is looking forward to a day of access. So in verse 25, a time is coming. Verse 26, in that day. Look forward to that day of perfect access.

Well, the time has come. We're in that day. We have perfect access to our Heavenly Father. Father. So when we pray, thank you for our prayers this morning.

[13:46] When we pray, it is directly speaking to our Heavenly Father. So just think, tomorrow morning, you wake up tomorrow morning at six o'clock, say. You can just see the first rays of sun at six o'clock in the morning, can't you, this time of year?

But you wake up before the alarm. Say the children are still asleep. A house is quiet. The heating has just come on. And as you lie in bed, with your eyes shut, but you are awake, you think, I have access, direct access to my Heavenly Father.

And I can pray to Him now. Lord, before I open my eyes and before I get up, before this day really begins, I thank you for this day and for this night's sleep.

And please may I live a life for you today. Speaking directly to God. That's meant to be a joyful thought.

Sometimes, I guess, we take that for granted, don't we? Sometimes we haven't really pondered it enough to let it sink in. And frankly, we're not terribly joyful about it, but actually, we're meant to be joyful that we have direct access.

[14:59] Not through anyone else, not dependent on anyone else, but just you and our Heavenly Father. Are we going to say the Lord's Prayer as part of the communion? Not today, but sometimes we might.

Because when you say the Lord's Prayer, whether on your own or with your people, our Father, who art in heaven, and we're speaking to Him.

Isn't that glorious? What a joy. Second thing is this. Anticipate the clarity of perfect knowledge. We're drooping here, aren't we?

Anticipate. Thanks, Chris. There's a progression. Cross, resurrection, giving of the Spirit, second coming, and at each magnificent event, there's revelation as people see more and knowledge grows.

But it starts from a pretty low base. Look at verses 29 to 30. Excuse me. Now, the disciples are making progress, and they think they've got it.

[16:07] They think they've understood it. They think the pen is dropped. But they haven't actually got terribly far. And as someone said about this, no misunderstanding is more pathetic than that which thinks it no longer exists.

And Jesus says here, the time for clarity, the time for perfect knowledge, is ahead. They think it's arrived.

They think they now know all they need to know. But there's far more to see and to learn and to understand. And of course, actually, that day of perfect knowledge will be the day when we go to be with Him in the new creation forever.

But of course, that revelation develops over time, doesn't it? The Spirit is given. There's a linear movement here as the development of revelation, as it grows and grows, as time is going on, as the clouds lift and as the sun comes out.

You can see so much more clearly than they could. Because we live this side of Jesus' death, this side of Jesus' resurrection, this side of His ascension, this side of the coming of the Spirit, for which we must surely give thanks to God.

[17:23] But also, we look ahead to that day and anticipate it. I hope you're thrilled as you look forward to the day when Jesus returns or the day when you're there with Him.

In the perfect knowledge and the perfect understanding, and we praise God for all eternity in that situation. We look forward to that day, either the day of our own passing from this earth or the day of Jesus' return.

Even now, even after the cross, after the resurrection, after the ascension, after the Spirit has come, even now, we don't have perfect knowledge. The disciples certainly didn't.

But we're so much better off now, aren't we, than they could ever have been. Than they could ever have been. And we know God's not finished yet, as we look forward to the day of clarity, of seeing more, knowing more, that perfect knowledge.

A friend of ours up in Norwich, in our church there, he's 70. He's got diabetes. He's got fairly poor eyesight. And just about three weeks ago now, I guess it was, he had an eye test for his driving, and he failed it.

[18:40] And it's really difficult, because his wife is in a nursing home, and he wants to go and see her every day, advanced dementia and so on. But very, very hard. As I read this, I think of Nigel, and I think, well, he's had some treatment on his eye, and he might be able to get some better, as that kind of beds in, if you like.

But I'm thinking of Nigel now, and I'm thinking, actually, there will come a day when he will have perfect physical eyesight, but he will also have the perfect sight of seeing and understanding the Lord God in all his glory.

What a great day that will be. Anticipate it. Look forward to it. And then the third thing is rest in the reassurance of perfect peace.

And look at verses 31 to 33 here. Verse 32. A time is coming, and in fact has come, when you will be scattered.

Now, that could be referring to when Jesus died, or it could, for instance, be referring to, say, in Acts 8. It talks about the church being scattered because of the persecution of the early church.

[19:54] But Jesus has overcome the world at the cross and in his resurrection. Look at verse 33. I've told you these things, so in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I've overcome the world.

I've overcome the world, which is in rebellion against God. This rebellious, harm-intending world. The world that causes trouble has been overcome by Jesus in his death and in his resurrection.

I've overcome the world. So if you're in me, no matter what the trouble, you can have peace. You really can.

And Helmut Thielecker, the theologian guy, said, Peace is not dull stagnation, but it's a soaring, stirring, happy thing. And then, have you noticed here, the peace is only, only to be found, Jesus says, in me.

In me. In me. Nowhere else. He is the one place we can rightly expect to have peace in a relationship with him.

[21 : 10] As a Christian. Committed to Jesus. Peace with God. Peace in this world. You'll have trouble. There will be trouble. There'll be trouble because you're a Christian in this world.

Excluded and so on. And it happens. And Jesus has not promised to take the trouble away. But he does promise to give us peace in the trouble.

He's beaten a troublesome world. At the cross. And in his resurrection. So we'll have peace with God.

Peace for you. Peace for you. But also in our day-to-day lives now. As we know the author of life. Peace for you. As you maybe face unjust accusations from a work colleague.

Peace for you. As you sit in a consultation. And the consultant begins it by saying, I'm really sorry. Peace for you.

[22 : 15] Peace for you. Peace for you. Peace for you. When your spouse has just walked out. And of course, at the end of the day.

At the end of the world. Eternal peace. And of course, it is possible to rest. In the face of any and all of those scenarios.

Ridiculous as it may sound. Towards the end of our time in Hove. A very good friend of ours was. Had about a year in bed before he passed away. And lovely Christian guy. And Anna and I used to go and visit him fairly frequently. And once I walked in.

And Ian said, in a rather gruff voice. He always spoke like this. He said, Phil! I said, Phil, I really, really, really want to die. And I thought, oh dear, that's tricky.

[23 : 14] What do I say now? And then he said this. It'll be like a hundred Christmas Day mornings all rolled into one. And I thought, okay, you've got that right. You've got that sorted in, haven't you?

And it was absolutely brilliant. He actually got a hundred Christmas Day mornings and Easter Day. Because he died on Easter Day three years ago. And wasn't that brilliant? I really, really, really want to die.

Because I'm ready for it. I'm at peace with the whole idea of this. Because it'll be like a hundred Christmas Day mornings all rolled into one. So what great gifts we have for us.

Because we're Christian believers. That peace, that gift of perfect access to God. Perfect knowledge of God. And perfect peace with God.

Let's enjoy the perfect access. Let's anticipate that clarity of perfect knowledge that we will see one day.

[24 : 13] And let's rest in the reassurance of perfect peace. in all the troubles and all the difficulties. But that perfect peace, which can be ours now, and will be ours on the day, when we go to be with him.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, thank you that in this passage, we see these great gifts of yours to Christian believers.

And we thank you so much for all that you have done for us. and the gifts that you give us for us to enjoy.

And to take into our lives. And we pray, Father, you'd help us to respond rightly to your generosity to us for your name's sake. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.