

John 16:16-33

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[0:00] Let's pray together. Lord, these sweet promises that you've given to us, that our sorrow will be turned to joy, and that we can ask whatever we want in your name, and the Father will give it.

Lord, we pray that you would encourage us as your disciples with this love and this promise this morning. We pray you would open our hearts and minds to the amazing, amazing joy that you promised to those that love you. And we pray this in your name. Amen.

Well, how do you explain a reality that turns the world upside down? How do you explain it when something turns the world upside down?

When my wife was first pregnant, all the other new parents tried to explain labor and birth and parenthood. They said things like, it's joy and fatigue and love and wonder and time distortion. And we had no idea what they were talking about. Until the hour came for us.

And suddenly it made sense. Some things can't be explained. They have to be experienced. And Jesus' cross and resurrection is just like this. It's the event that turns the world upside down.

[1:36] And it couldn't be understood until it was accomplished. Despite Jesus explaining his reason for coming and parable and prophecy and speech and sign and perfect diction, Jesus says, I have to die. I will rise. But until he does it, nobody gets it.

And that's where we are in this passage. It's so close to the cross that we can feel its shadow. The hour has come, he says twice in his last teaching in John's gospel.

After this, it's just a prayer and then his arrest. And then we're right into his crucifixion. So we're right at that moment. The hour is about to be upon him. And the disciples are confused.

They have no category for what's going to happen. In a little while, you won't see me. In a little while, you will see me. We have no idea what he's talking about, the disciples say.

I love that finally they just come out and say it. We have no idea what he's talking about. Well, what he's talking about is what's going to happen directly next in the gospel.

[2:44] He will die on the cross and he'll be put in a tomb, becoming unseen. Then he'll be raised from the dead, seen once again. He'll ascend to the Father.

It's simple enough on this side of things. And that's exactly the point here. That Jesus' death is expected. It's purposeful. It's why he's come. But it only makes sense once he's done it.

It's only after he dies and rises that confusion turns into clarity. We understand Jesus' promises by what he accomplishes on the cross. And there's two big promises in this passage.

And we can only understand them by looking through the cross. So from this side of the cross, they become lively, just joyful promises to us. Whereas in the passage themselves, the disciples are totally confused about what's going on.

So we're going to look at these two promises through the cross, which is how we have to understand them. These are my two main points. The first is sorrow to joy. And the second is estrangement to access.

[3:49] So sorrow to joy. Verse 20. Truly, truly, truly, I say to you, this is a rock-solid promise. This is going to happen. That's what Jesus means when he says that.

Truly, truly, I say to you, you can count on this. Your sorrow will turn to joy. Yes, you will weep when I die.

While the world, the natural and spiritual order that's at war with God, will rejoice. But it's temporary. Your sorrow at Jesus' death will become endless, untakeable joy at his resurrection.

And Jesus gives us this example. It's just like labor and delivery. When the hour comes, it's unstoppable. It's trial. It's sorrow. He uses the word anguish here. But with the birth, anguish is forgotten.

The sorrow is contextualized. The pain is made purposeful by the joy of this new baby that's been born. So it will be for you, my disciples. When death is swallowed up in victory, sorrow is swallowed up in joy.

[5:02] You will have sorrow, but then I will see you again. And once that happens, your joy will become untakeable. So, Jesus has promised us, who are on this side of the cross and resurrection, untakeable joy.

Endless joy, starting now into forever. However, how can it be, we ask ourselves. I'll speak for myself. My joy is fickle and flighty.

Every day, there's a new war. There's a new death. There's a new struggle. There's a new grief. There's a new sin. Where's the joy? Jesus. Jesus. Well, we don't find the joy in here.

We don't find the joy out there. We find the joy in him. We look through the cross. The unshakable joy Jesus is talking about is found in his death and resurrection.

It's this joy of knowing that if he overturned death once, he can do it again and again and again. And this is true not just of our literal death, but the figurative deaths that we experience.

[6:12] The death-like parts of our life. So, pain, chronic illness, depression, grief, rejection, betrayal. Little deaths that remind us that big death is coming.

But if Jesus has defeated big death, then all its subsidiaries are under his feet. He says this in verse 33.

In the world, we will have tribulation. So, that word tribulation there is the same word as anguish that describes the pregnant woman.

So, in this world, you will be laboring. You will be sorrowing. But take heart. For God, I have overcome the world. Our sorrows and deaths, our pain is contextualized by his victory.

And so, that's how it works. We take all the death in our life. And we hold it up to Jesus. And just as Jesus was raised, we say, so shall I.

[7:14] This is my death. Jesus was raised from his death. This is my death. Jesus raised me up from it. That's the promise of untakable joy.

And these are very bold things to say in a world that's filled with deep pain. But remember, it's not based on our experience of joy. This is not the triumph of the human spirit that we're talking about. It's the historical work of Jesus and what it means to the world. Jesus has stamped sorrow into a new shape. He's stamped it and said it cannot persist forever.

Pain and death are the prelude to eternal joy. And we're invited to look at every aspect of our life through that lens. He lies dead and three days he will rise.

I lie dead. And yet in him, I will rise. So, the first promise through the cross is sorrow to joy. The second promise is estrangement to access.

[8:18] This is verses 23 to 32. The promise here is direct access to the Father. Father, both in understanding and in prayer. So, Jesus is very clear in these.

It's actually kind of shocking in these verses. They do not have access to this as he's speaking to them in the upper room. Before the cross, they do not have access to these things. Before his death, they don't understand the Father.

That's what Jesus is saying. Their understanding is like figures of speech. It's like veiled metaphor. They think they get it. So, down in verse 30, they say, Yes, Jesus, we know that you know all things.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. You came from God, right? Yeah, we get it. And Jesus says, no, you don't get it. You're going to be scattered. Because it isn't about knowing somebody that knows something. You're estranged. You have to know the Father directly. That happens after the cross. Before the cross, they don't have understanding. They don't have access to the Father.

[9:18] Jesus says, until now, you have asked nothing in my name. They haven't come into the presence of the Father by the merit of Jesus and asked anything.

They don't have access to the Father in the way that is being promised. They're still like strangers. They don't understand. They don't have access. Because Jesus hasn't opened the way. He does that by his death.

When Jesus takes on humanity's sin and suffers and dies and raises, he changes our standing with God the Father. And so, though they didn't have it before the cross, Jesus promises that we do have it through him.

So, imagine what Jesus is saying here. After the cross, he's saying, you will understand the Father plainly. He says, I'm going to come back and I'm going to make the Father like an open book to you. You will understand him. That's an incredible thing to say. And it's not that we could ever fathom the height or the depth or the width of God. We can't fathom. We don't know God completely.

[10:24] But by Jesus' post-resurrection teaching in the scriptures, by his atonement, by his spirit, we can truly say the Father has become plain to us.

We really know him. We truly know God the Father. And as we understand his speech to us, we're bold to answer back to him.

That's the other part of the promise. Verse 23. Truly, truly, I say to you, this is a rock-solid promise. Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.

Until now, you have asked nothing in my name. But now, in my name, we ask, right? Ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full.

So, this is not verse 26. This is not Jesus asking on our behalf. He's directly saying, I'm not going to ask on your behalf. Isn't that interesting? It's not that he's not mediating.

[11:22] He is. But the Father himself is listening to us. For the Father himself loves you. Jesus' promise here is that in our prayers, when we pray to God the Father, they ring in his ears as the requests of beloved children.

He receives our prayers directly and gladly. We have the Father's direct number. He always picks up. If God is in a meeting, he says, this is my son, this is my daughter.

I have to take this. He loves us. He always takes our calls. And in that moment, you are on the speaker in the throne room of heaven.

It means that prayer in Jesus' name, when we pray in Jesus' name, we're not talking about a game of telephone. Where we're like passing a message to Jesus and then he's passing a message to God the Father.

Jesus is not a messenger on our behalf. Rather, as we love and put our faith in him, he has given us a new status. We have become, through his work, those who understand and speak and are answered by God the Father.

[12:32] Jesus doesn't pass notes for us. He gives us a new status. Where we can speak directly to the Father. And he hears us in love. And he answers according to his will.

And this is the immense gift that Jesus wins for us by the cross. And I think the implication is to treasure prayer.

For what it is. To understand the power and privilege and wonder behind the words that he teaches his disciples. Our Father, who art in heaven.

And then we can ask boldly, like a child asks their parent. For all the things that somebody asks for in Jesus' name. For the lost to know him. For world governments to honor him.

For the church to serve him. For his name to triumph. His kingdom to advance. His good and perfect will to come. For everything we need in our lives to serve him and know him and bless each other.

[13:30] And for help in forgiving each other. And for being forgiven. And all the protection that we need from temptation and evil. All of these things, when we pray them, ring in the Father's ears.

And he hears and he answers. Because the Father himself loves us. Because Jesus has gone to the cross. These promises are ours.

Sorrow is turned to joy. Estrangement has become access. 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. Amen.