

Your Sorrow Will Turn to Joy

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[0 : 0 0] Well, turn with me in your Bibles to John chapter 16. That's page 848 in the Pew Bible, if you want to turn there. John chapter 16, we're going to look at verses 16 through 24 this morning as we continue our series in this portion of John's Gospel, the Farewell Discourse.

So let me pray for us as we turn to God's Word. God, thank you for the clarity and the sufficiency of your written Word. Thank you, most of all, how you continue to reveal yourself to us through your written Word so that we might see and that we might savor and we might praise the incarnate Word, Jesus, all the more. God, we pray for this time now when we meditate on this passage that it would honor you and that it would edify us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

All right, John 16, verses 16 through 24. Jesus says this, he says, 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 am 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. 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 has 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 have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

How can we find joy in a world full of inevitable sorrow? How can we find joy in a world full of inevitable sorrow? That's the theme of our passage today. And I'm guessing I don't need to say much to convince us that that's a worthwhile topic to consider. After all, who isn't looking for lasting joy? But then again, often we are like the apostles in this passage. We can be a bit confused.

[3 : 06] Remember, Jesus here is with his closest followers near the very end of his earthly ministry, and he's preparing them for his imminent departure and for their upcoming mission. And Jesus says something here that really confuses them at first. He says, in a little while, you're not going to see me. But then in a little while, you will see me. And the disciples are asking, what on earth does Jesus mean? They all believe that Jesus was Israel's long-awaited king, the Messiah. They all believe that he would triumph over evil and re-establish God's people. That's what the Messiah was supposed to do according to the scriptures. So all this talk about a little while, them not seeing and then seeing Jesus, it didn't really make much sense. The game plan, as far as the apostles were concerned, for the Messiah, who they believed was Jesus, was unmitigated, uninterrupted conquest. Defeat the Romans, cleanse the temple, rule the nations, done deal. That's how it's supposed to happen. But Jesus here is telling them and telling us that being his follower isn't that simple. The true Messiah's mission wasn't one of simple triumph. No, he says first there would be sorrow. And through sorrow, then there would come lasting joy. A little while, and they would not see him. There will be sorrow. And then a little while, they would see him. And there will be joy. A joy that no one can take away. So what I want to do is I want to look a little more closely at those two ideas, sorrow and then joy. And let's see if we can learn where this lasting joy in a world of sorrow can be found, according to Jesus. So first, let's look at sorrow. Jesus says, in a little while, you will not see me. And that confuses the disciples, understandably, as we just said. And you know what? It has confused many interpreters of John's gospel too, down through the ages. What is Jesus referring to here? Is he referring maybe to his ascension to the Father, to his return to the Father? Is that what he means when he says in a little while, I'm going to go away and you won't see me anymore? Well, that's maybe a good guess.

Jesus often talks about returning to the Father in John's gospel. And in the book of Acts, we read Luke's account of the ascension. And Jesus is indeed taken from our sight, taken from their sight. But here's the thing. In the account of Jesus's ascension in Luke 24 and then again in Acts 1, the disciples are not in that moment filled with grief. In fact, Luke writes at the end of his gospel, when he's talking about the ascension, he says they were filled with great joy.

And then they go back to the city and worship and praise. So Jesus must be referring to something else when he says in a little while, you will see me no longer. So what is it?

Well, it's what Jesus has slowly been preparing his disciples for throughout his ministry. He's been slowly preparing them for the fact that the climax of his earthly work would not be a deed of obvious triumph, but an act that from the outside looked like utter defeat.

In a little while, Jesus says, probably less than 24 hours, Jesus would be arrested, condemned, shamefully crucified, and buried. The one with whom the disciples had spent nearly every day for the last three years eating together, traveling, learning, ministering, they would see him no more. He would be killed and buried, no more to be seen. And in a little while because of that, they would experience excruciating sorrow. The one they loved would be taken from them. The one in whom they had placed all their hopes, the one in whom they had begun to dream these most soul-thrilling, vivid dreams.

[7 : 14] But look again at verse 20. Jesus says, truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. Here would be perhaps the most bitter part of the pill to swallow. While the apostles grieved their dead teacher, friend, and Lord, the world around them would be rejoicing.

The secular Roman authority and the religious Jewish authorities would both rejoice that they had finally gotten rid of Jesus, the troublemaker from Galilee, the would-be king of the Jews.

Now, friends, pause with me here for a moment. Jesus is telling his disciples that sorrow is soon to be inevitable for them. I wonder, do you and I live under the illusion that somehow we can be immune from sorrow in this world? Can we be immune from weeping and lamenting, as verse 20 says?

Where are you placing your hopes for joy? Many of us are placing our hopes in a good career. Many of us are placing our hopes in a healthy family. Many of us are placing our hopes for joy in cultural pursuits or an intellectual growth. But can any of these things really last?

They're all good things in their own right, in their own place, but will they keep you immune from the inevitable sorrow that will come? Beth and I recently watched a movie about the American author Thomas Wolfe and his editor named Maxwell something or other, played by Colin Firth. It's actually kind of a cool movie. But Thomas Wolfe was from Asheville, North Carolina, and he published his first book in 1929, before he had even turned 30. He was 29 years old and wrote a novel. And then he would go on to publish another novel in 1935. And soon, Thomas Wolfe was being lauded as one of the greatest writers of his generation. And he was even being compared with some of the greatest novelists of all time.

[9 : 28] Can you imagine being in your mid-30s and having reached the pinnacle of artistic success, that people are mentioning your name in the same breath as Dickens and Dostoevsky and James Joyce and Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald? Can you imagine joining the pantheon of these great novelists and you haven't even turned 40? Now, maybe you don't care a snap about novelists and writing, but whatever it is, imagine what it would be like. Whatever your field or whatever your pursuit or whatever your desire might be, that you're one of the greats and you haven't even gotten started yet.

And yet in a little while, it would all slip away for Wolfe. He fell sick with pneumonia while visiting a sister in Seattle, was diagnosed with miliary tuberculosis, which is sort of lesions that just begin to spread throughout your whole body. They feared that these things had gotten worse and worse and worse. So he traveled to Baltimore to get the best treatment in the country from the world's most renowned, the country's most renowned neurosurgeon at Johns Hopkins. But despite it all, 18 days before his 38th birthday, Wolfe tragically dies at Johns Hopkins Hospital.

Life is so unbelievably frail. And sorrow, friends, is inevitable.

Are you and I under the illusion that it will not come for us? But it will. So what hope is there for us? Where can we find lasting joy when every hope seems to slip through our fingers in the end? And when eventually death will steal it all away?

Well, Jesus here points the way. He tells his disciples first about that sorrow that is coming and coming soon. But then he says, and again in a little while, you will see me.

[11 : 34] And that brings us to the second big idea of our passage, joy. Look again at verse 20, which is really the center of this whole passage. 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.

Your sorrow will turn into joy. What is Jesus referring to here? If they were going to see him no longer, how could they possibly see him again? What could possibly turn sorrow into joy?

Well, friends, Jesus can only be referring to one thing. There's only one way that the apostles could truly see him again. There's only one way that seeing him again would take all their sorrow and turn it into joy. Only one thing. And it's the proclamation of the church from the very beginning.

The very thing that makes Christianity what it is from now until the end of time and into eternity. The fact that Jesus, the crucified Messiah, has been raised from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the one and only thing that can give lasting joy. Why?

Well, in verse 21, Jesus gives the analogy of a pregnant mother. Picture Jesus as a mother writhing in the pain of childbirth. Now, I don't need to tell you that I have not given birth, but I have watched it happen three times. And what I have learned from observation is that birth pains are incredibly intense. They're all consuming and they get worse as time goes on. But then Jesus says, even though birth pains are some of the worst a human will ever experience, the pains of birth give way to indescribable joy. A joy so great that the pains are almost forgotten. Why? Because a human being has come into the world. And not just any human being, a son, a daughter, a beloved child.

[13 : 48] And when you see that beloved, Jesus says, the pain and sorrow melt away and you are awash in joy. Jesus says to his disciples, it's going to be like that. When you see me again, your sorrow will give way to joy. Because then, because then you'll know that your hopes and your labors and your sacrifices and your dreams, Jesus says to his apostles, above all, you'll know that your love for me, it wasn't in vain.

Because I'm alive forevermore and nothing, nothing will take me away from you. That's why the joy is everlasting. That's why Jesus can say, no one will take your joy away from you.

Because if your joy is Christ and Christ has conquered even death, what could possibly take it away now? The world tried ridiculing Jesus. The world tried condemning Jesus. The world even tried killing Jesus once and for all. And yet none of it worked. Not even death could hold him back.

But you know, there's a deeper layer here. When Jesus talks about the woman in labor, he's picking up actually an Old Testament theme that runs throughout many of the prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures.

In fact, our reading from Isaiah 26 earlier was, is one of those passages. The prophets saw a time when God's people would undergo great distress before his final victory and salvation came. In Jesus' day, picking up on these Old Testament themes, they would often speak of the birth pains of the Messiah to refer to a period of trouble and terrible travail that would precede the kind of coming and consummation of God's salvation. So there's this theme running through Scripture running about in Jesus' day that birth pains are coming before God does his victorious act.

[16 : 02] But friends, don't you see? Who's the real mother in this story? Is not joy? Who's the one who lives in this story?

Who is the one who admired it? Who is the one who endured unspeakable sorrow so that another might be given life? Is not Jesus the true mother in the story of salvation?

the prophets saw that the people would suffer before salvation would come but Jesus our king stepped into that suffering on our behalf he endured the pain so that all who believe in him could be born into everlasting life and he rose again so that we might know it can never be taken from us how is it that our sorrows can turn into joy friends if God gave us what we deserve we would only get sorrow but Jesus like a mother in childbirth suffered so that we might have life and joy he writhed and cried out on a cross so that you and I could be born anew because at the cross there was an exchange that happened your sin for his righteousness he took your sin and sorrow that your sins deserved so that you could have the joy of the righteousness that his life deserved and that's the promise for all who turn and place their trust in Jesus forgiveness of sins now righteousness before God an unshakable joy to come friends does what you believe include anything like what I just described what the bible talks about does your worldview include anything like a God who loves you so much that he would suffer bleed and die for you many world religions many spiritualities speak about God as a great mother but only

Christianity speaks of a God who actually took flesh and who actually suffered like a mother in pains even more excruciating than childbirth for you though you did not deserve it so that you might live why would you not believe and trust in a God like that why would you not put your trust in the God of the Bible the God of Jesus Christ and notice as well Jesus doesn't say that your sorrow will be replaced by joy could have easily said that right the day is coming when your sorrow is going to be replaced by joy he says this he says your sorrow is going to turn into joy well that's a funny expression isn't it but do you see what that means it means that the church that those who trust in Christ can always be hopeful and never despairing because no matter how bad it gets Jesus is able to turn sorrow into joy how do we know this well when Christ rose on the third day the apostles saw that the cross was actually our salvation they saw and understood and proclaimed that God was able to use one of the cruelest inventions of human evil

Roman crucifixion to bring about the greatest of heavenly good and likewise when Christ returns in glory all of us will see how even the deepest sorrows of the church age will be swallowed up in victory healed restored redeemed these momentary afflictions Paul says are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory your sorrows will turn into joy but what will be the crowning moment of it all what was the crowning moment for the first disciples on Easter Sunday what will it be for all the church on the last day what will be the sort of pinnacle of the joy look at verse 22 Jesus says quite simply I will see you again beholding Christ face to face that will be glory when the mother sees the face of her child she knows it was all worth it and when we see Christ face to face not just when we see him notice what Jesus says when he sees us

[20 : 39] I will see you when we see him seeing us with eyes of eternal love and endless beauty with eyes that know our deepest flaws and yet love us with unmistakable and unrelenting passion when he sees us we'll know it was all worth it just like the first disciples on Easter Sunday all our hopes all our labors all our sacrifice all our dreams yes even all our sorrows will know that they were not in vain I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice so you see the resurrection of Jesus Christ the conquering of death the conquering of sin holds forth indestructible joy but if we're living only for this life if our joys are grounded only in the things of this life then all of our joys will turn to sorrow in the end just like the warmest fire only turns into ash if you wait long enough so if we put our hopes in earthly joys it's only going to eventually turn into ash in the end but in the gospel friends this good news rings forth for all who hear and receive the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ the sorrows of this life will turn into joy in the gospel even our sorrows will turn into joy and the joys of this life will only get fuller listen to how our passage ends in verse 23 and 24 just look at those verses with me as we walk through and as we finish up in that day

Jesus says that is when Jesus is risen from the dead and his work is complete in that day you'll ask nothing of me you see up to this point the disciples have gone to Jesus with all their questions and all their needs but on the basis of his finished work post-resurrection there's a new reality that's opened up you'll no longer need to ask anything of me what's the reality 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 Jesus says ask and you will receive that your joy may be full because Jesus has dealt with our sin finally and fully at the cross because he's been raised as our Lord and heavenly mediator now he's saying we have free and open access to the heart of God the father that's what Jesus says that's what Jesus means when he says you won't need to ask anything of me anymore now you can go straight to the father and ask anything in my name now to ask to ask in Jesus' name isn't some sort of empty phrase that we tack on to the end of our prayers for good measure you know like when you're using a CB and you say over and out you know this isn't

Jesus' name isn't sort of like over and out God I'm done now no it means something to pray in Jesus' name means to pray to the father on the basis of all that Jesus has accomplished we don't go in our name or in someone else's name we go in Jesus' name on the basis of what he's done and it also means to pray not just on the basis of what Jesus has accomplished but it also means to pray to the father in line with all that Jesus has instructed we pray to the father in Jesus' name in line with all that Jesus has taught us and when we pray like that Jesus says the father hears and answers our prayers of course God is much wiser than us so he won't always answer prayer the way we think we want and God is a very patient and long-suffering God so we won't always answer prayer when we think we want but God is a faithful God and his story of redemption is heading to a magnificent conclusion and he has promised to include us in that story and bring us all the way home you see in prayer in genuine prayer prayer to the father in the name of Jesus we can take all of our life every sorrow every joy and we can bring it before him and then we can do something revolutionary we can ask do you ask it's pretty vulnerable to ask for something isn't it it's pretty risky to ask for something so often we don't ask because we're afraid to open ourselves up to weakness to disappointment to rejection in short one of the reasons we don't ask God anything is because we're afraid it's just going to lead to more sorrow underneath so much of our prayerlessness is a hidden fear that our prayers won't be answered and we're just going to increase our sorrow so unconsciously it seems better just to stick it out on our own but here again the words of Jesus in this passage friends he says beloved don't give in to your fears

I've died for you I've risen again so that you might go to my father who is now your father and ask ask that you might receive ask that your joy might be full so here's where our passage ends all this unshakable lasting joy that Jesus has won for us in the resurrection a joy that cannot be taken away where do we experience it here and now well everywhere and in everything yes but the highest and deepest and most fundamental place of all where we experience the joy that Jesus has won for us is in prayer the heart in simple faith speaking to God and asking our father for all that our needs and fears and sorrows and joys require Jesus promises there your joy will be full so this joy that can't be taken away this lasting joy in the midst of the world's sorrow the joy of the resurrection it's a bit like a cup of water on a hot summer day

Christ has risen from the dead he has given you life he's opened your hand and granted you faith and united you to the father he's placed a cup of cold water in your hands and it is yours forever and nothing can take it away and prayer prayer is like taking that cup of water and drinking it taking deep long drinks of cold water day by day by day by day a joy that cannot be taken away a joy that you can go on enjoying so brothers and sisters pray drink drink the cup of joy that's been granted to you and let your joy be full so church let us be a joyful people even in the midst of sorrow because our Lord is risen and let us be a prayerful people because it is there that our joy will be full amen let's pray together our Father in heaven we pray that by your spirit you would take these words of our Savior that we've read and that we've spoken about and we've meditated on and you'd work them into our hearts

[28 : 40] Lord many of us today are sorrowful would you help us to grasp again the resurrection of Jesus in the midst of our sorrow and rekindle joy in our hearts God rekindle hope and Lord many of us have become stale in our prayers to you Lord open up for us again the joy of prayer that our joy may be full we pray this in Jesus name amen may or may may may may may may may runners x feet may traffic attachments in