



Catalog No. 1387

John 16:16-33

Forty-ninth Message

John Hanneman

October 14th, 2007

JOY, LOVE, AND PEACE IN THE NEW AGE

Last words are important words. Many of us can vividly recall the last conversation we had with someone we loved. The words are embedded in our memory and we can replay them at any time. The last words of Jesus before his crucifixion are not just important but crucial. His words shaped the lives of those who were first to follow him, and they shape our lives too. If we don't take them to heart, we will live foolishly and badly. We will attempt to live our Christian life through the ways of the world, as a tack-on to our earthly existence. We will be frustrated and unfulfilled, because with the cross and the departure of Jesus came a new order and new dimension of living – life in the Holy Spirit, the potential to live actively in the age to come.

Life in the Spirit is difficult because it is so counter to the world. But the benefits are amazing. We experience a joy, love, and peace that the world cannot give. We have seen these three themes already in Jesus' discourse, and they occupy our attention this morning as we come to the last verses of the second upper room discourse. Again we find the disciples confused at Jesus' departure.

“A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.” Some of His disciples then said to one another, “What is this thing He is telling us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father?’” So they were saying, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is talking about.” Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, “Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me’? (John 6:16-19 NASB)

Nothing that Jesus is saying makes any sense to the disciples. They keep repeating his words, throwing in the comment from 16:10 about going to the Father. Jesus was right when he said that they couldn't bear what he was telling them. Jesus “knows” (6:19) and is fully aware of their confusion.

The phrase “a little while” is repeated seven times. Our word “micron” comes from this Greek term. It is the same word Jesus used with the Jews in 7:33, and the disciples in chapter 13:33, when he began the discourse. He is telling his disciples that he is going, but is promising to return in a short period of time.

Another repeated word is “see”: “you will not see Me and then you will see Me.” There are three doublets here and in each one there are two different Greek words. The same order appears in each doublet. John frequently varies his terms, with no discernible shift in meaning. But perhaps, when the disciples see Jesus again after the resurrection, they will see him in a new and different way. The resurrection ushers in a new age that will be consummated with the arrival of the new heavens and new earth.

Jesus now returns to the sorrow of the disciples mentioned earlier: “because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart” (16:6).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. (6:20-22)

When Jesus dies, there will be opposite reactions for the world and for the disciples. The world will rejoice because it thinks it has disposed of Jesus once and for all, but the disciples will lament and weep. The word for “weeping” is used by John in chapters 11 and 20 (11:31, 33; 20:11, 13, 15) in connection with death. Death and tears are unpleasant companions.

However, Jesus tells the disciples that their grief will not last. As the psalmist wrote,

Weeping may last for the night,

But a shout of joy comes in the morning. (Psa 30:5 NAS95S)

Clearly, whatever Jesus is saying about going away for a little while, he includes seeing the disciples after the resurrection. If Jesus is referring only to the second coming, then there is no joy on this earth – which is completely inconsistent with the rest of Scripture.

Jesus uses the analogy of childbirth to aid their understanding. Childbirth is an intensely painful experience. I watched my wife give birth to each of our three children. The first delivery was an all-night ordeal of 16 hours. Every mother is asked by friends and family to recount her labor story. And yet, remarkably, after the child is born, wonderful joy eclipses the pain; even its memory dissipates.

This analogy is a common Old Testament metaphor for the travail of God's people. The prophets frequently used birth pangs as an image of suffering, often stemming from judgment. (Is 13:8; 21:3; 26:17; 42:14; Jer 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 30:6; 49:22-24; 50:43; Mic 4:9-10; cf. Psa 48:6). Judah's exile to Babylon was an intensely painful experience, like childbirth, but there was the promise of joy and restoration. Some OT passages associate labor pains with giving birth to a new messianic era (Isa 66:7-10; Mic 5:1-4; cf. Isa 9:6; 53:12-54:1; 62:5; Hos 13:13-14).

Thus we see several layers of fulfillment in Jesus' words. The analogy is true for Jesus. In John's gospel, the word “hour” alerts us to the hour of Jesus' death. The cross will be an intensely painful process, but it will give birth to a new age. The tomb will be the womb that will give birth to the age of the Spirit.

The analogy will be fulfilled in the disciples. They will grieve for a short while, but when Jesus is raised from the dead, joy will replace

pain. The world responds to the risen Lord with dismay, but John 20:20 says, the “disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.” And this joy will be permanent; no one can take it away. The phrase, “I will see you again,” indicates the importance on what Jesus does, not what we do in our relationship with him.

There will also be a greater fulfillment. The entire creation is in labor, longing to give birth to a new heavens and earth.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (Rom 8:18-19)

For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (Rom 8:22-23)

The word that Jesus spoke to the disciples also applies to us. Like the disciples, we experience the joy of the risen Lord that is present now in the age of the Spirit, despite the pain and grief of the world. This joy is a foretaste of what awaits us in the new heavens and new earth, when there will be no suffering. The sufferings of this present age are but “a little while” compared to the glory of the new creation. We might liken this journey to going to a vineyard to sample wine to taste expensive wines that might be beyond our budget. In the future, however, we will sit down to a banquet meal where the entire bottle is placed on the table before us.

Life in the age of the Spirit is marked with joy. What is joy, anyway? Certainly, it isn't happiness. “Happiness comes when things are going our way, which makes it only a forerunner to the unhappiness that inevitably follows when things stop going our way, as in the end they will stop for all of us.”¹ As Jesus spoke these words he could not have been happy, yet he could say, “These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full (15:11). Joy “is more precious than happiness because it is beyond the world's power either to give or take away.”²

Joy is inexplicable and unpredictable. Without warning, joy can bring tears to our eyes. We want to laugh and dance and cry all at the same time. Joy is seeing a newborn baby, a sight that vanquishes any pain of pregnancy or labor, or humanity itself. Joy is finding a long lost brother or sister. Joy is being reconciled with someone you haven't spoken to for 20 years. Joy is catching the sight of the “fathomless richness of the world that God has made. God created us in joy and created us for joy, and in the long run not all the darkness there is in the world and in ourselves can separate us finally from that joy, because whatever else it means to say that God created us in his image, I think it means that even when we cannot believe in him, even when we feel most spiritually bankrupt and deserted by him, his mark is deep within us. We have God's joy in our blood.”³

The Holy Spirit injects joy into our bloodstream. So committed is Jesus to our joy that he goes on to say that if the disciples ask anything in his name, the Father will give it.

“In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full. (6:23-24)

Again we see end-time language in the phrase “in that day.” In the day that Jesus leaves the world and the new order begins, the disciples will be able to ask the Father anything in Jesus' name and have the assurance of answered prayer. Three times earlier in the discourse, Jesus made mention of asking in his name (14:13-14; 15:7, 16). It seems there will be a change from questioning Jesus for information and asking the Father for fullness of life, and in particular the joy that Jesus is promising. The disciples will know and understand life in the age of the Spirit. Asking, receiving and joy reflect an abiding, fruit-bearing life.

Joy is what characterized the early church even when it was persecuted. Believers rejoiced because they had been “considered worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41). When people enter a church, they should witness the joy of God's people. This is the joy of the age that is “already, but not yet.”

Now we come to the theme of love.

“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father.” (6:25-28)

Again we see familiar language: the hour of the cross, in that day when the new age dawns, and asking in the name of the Jesus. The disciples love the Son and believe that he had come from God, so the Father loves them also. The Father's love completes the circle of the disciples' love for Jesus and Jesus' love for his own. The messianic age brings a new relationship with the Father. Followers of Jesus now have a direct, personal and intimate experience of the Father's love.

Our love relationship with the Father is personal. God is a personal, relational God. He lives in community with the Son and the Spirit, and he invites us into this community. God is never an impersonal force or influence, an abstract idea, truth or principle. Throughout the pages of the Bible, we hear God speaking, relating, warning, calling to his people. He is involved personally and relationally with us.

We are not used to this. We are schooled in institutions that train us in the acquisition of facts and data, of definitions and diagrams, of explanations and analysis. Our schools are very good at doing this. When we study persons, whether God or humans, we bring the same methods to the work: analyzing, defining, typing, charting, profiling. The uniquely personal and particular is expunged from the curriculum; and that means the removal of the most important thing about us – love and hope and faith, sin and forgiveness and grace, obedience and loyalty and prayer ...⁴

God wants to have a very personal relationship with us.

In our love relationship the Father is accessible. In the name of Jesus we can walk right in and sit right down. Our heavenly Father is not distant and cold. He does not live in an ivory tower. He gives us free access to him any time night or day. We can enter into his presence without guilt, fear or self-consciousness.

We are used to scheduling appointments and standing in lines, to feel like we are an interruption. We are used to being made inferior in the presence of someone with a higher rank. If we have failed, we

enter with great fear about what will happen. Our insecurities make us tentative and passive. Our relationships with our families, with friends and at work teach us to feel this way.

But this isn't true with our Heavenly Father. In the new order of the messianic age we can come to God with complete freedom, knowing he will accept and welcome us. He will be the type of father who matches our ideal of a father is. We will hear his loving words, "You're terrific. You're precious. Great job."

Jesus has been speaking to the disciples, using metaphor and obscure language, and they have been bewildered and confused. But now he says he will speak to them plainly, and the disciples will understand. They respond enthusiastically.

His disciples said, "Lo, now You are speaking plainly and are not using a figure of speech. Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God." (6:29-30)

The disciples feel like they are on board and understand. They make a confident confession about Jesus, in three ways. First, Jesus "knows all things." They are saying that he supremely reveals God and tells them all about him. Second, no one needs to question or test Jesus as to his identity. And third, the disciples believe he comes from God. This is a true conclusion, but it has a faulty foundation. Even Nicodemus could say as much (3:2).

Jesus responds with a rebuke, cutting them down to size:

Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? "Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. (6:31-32)

The disciples think they understand, but in reality they don't. The confession is true, but their faith is wanting. Peter had already been warned of failure; now this prediction embraces them all. Jesus casts the disciples' failure in the language of Zechariah 13:7, quoted in Mark 14:27. They will scatter and flee. They will be scattered like sheep without a shepherd. The shepherd will face the foe alone. Yet even though the disciples will abandon him, Jesus is assured of his Father's support. Even on the cross, when Jesus felt a total sense of abandonment for a brief time, he was not left alone. His Father was faithful.

In quoting Dodd, D. A. Carson makes an astute observation: "It is part of the character and genius of the Church that its foundation members were discredited men; it owed its existence not to their faith, courage, or virtue, but to what Christ had done with them; and this they could never forget."⁵

We can make bold pronouncements of what we are going to do for God and fall flat on our face; we can feel that because of some sin in our life we can never be used by God, but this doesn't seem to bother God. God can use us despite of our weaknesses and failures. He takes imperfect people and uses them for his glory.

Jesus doesn't leave the disciples with this thought. He gives them one more promise.

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (6:33)

After the collapse, restoration will follow. Jesus has spoken these things about life in the new age so that in him the disciples could have peace.

There are two spheres of existence: "in me," and "in the world." In the world there is tribulation, i.e., persecution and suffering. Tribulation puts a heavy weight, a seemingly unbearable pressure on all of us. When tribulation comes upon us, it produces fear, anxiety and a frenetic attempt to save ourselves. The disciples would fall under great tribulation for their faithful witness. But in Jesus we have peace, the peace that only he can give. This is the peace which he himself enjoys and now gives in the age of the Spirit.

"This peace doesn't come from a detached, philosophical attitude. It isn't a matter of saying, 'Oh well, these things happen.' It isn't a shrug of the shoulders, resigning yourself to the world being a nasty place and there being nothing much you can do about it."⁶

"The peace that Jesus offers, ... has nothing to do with the things that are going on at the moment he offers it, which are for the most part tragic and terrible things. It is a peace beyond the reach of tragic and terrible. It is a profound and inward peace that sees with the unflinching clarity the tragic and terrible things that are happening and yet is not shattered by them."⁷

The reason we can have peace is because Jesus conquered the world. He has defeated the prince of the world and claimed total victory. The world's opposition is pointless. The decisive battle has been fought and won. The world continues to attack, but those in Christ share his victory "The victory is totally his. At the end, the triumph song of the Church will not be 'We have overcome' but 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain'" (Rev 5:12).⁸

The exhortation then is to take courage, to not lose heart. Believers conquer with Christ and have his peace. Courage means to have confidence and firmness of purpose in the face of danger or testing, a confidence that fills the heart. In the OT, the word is mostly used for the phrase "fear not." In a number of languages, "courage" is rendered by an idiomatic expression, for example, "to not move," "to be deaf to threats," and "to have a heart like iron."

Life is tough and unfair at best. Our faithful witness to Jesus through our actions and words calls for courage. We don't respond to the difficulties of life with the ability to outthink or outwit the opposition. We stand firm because we know that in Christ we have conquered.

"So the long discourse which began with the double theme of glory and separation (13:31-33) ends with a restatement of the same theme in reverse order: the scattering of the disciples and the victory of the Lord."⁹

As we finish these last words, let me say two things.

First, we have encountered the themes of joy, love, and peace previously in this gospel: "My joy, My love, My peace." We all desire these things. We long for them in the deepest places of our hearts. They speak of the home for which we yearn. But implied in this text and through the entire discourse is the fact that, more often than not, the experiences of joy, love, and peace come through sorrow. This makes no sense to us. It is totally counter to the world. But in the age of the Spirit, it is through our wounds, our brokenness, suffering and failures that we experience the deepest longings of our heart. We don't experience these things when we try to eliminate pain or despite the pain. Joy, love, and peace come through the pain, even while it is still present.

Second, life in the Spirit age comes as a package. When you purchase a car, you select the packages you want: the Sport package, the Towing package, the Luxury package. When we become a fol-

lower of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, indwells our life. But we don't just get the Spirit, we get the Spirit package. Included in this package is the love of the Father, the peace of the Son, and the joy of the Spirit. You cannot order the Spirit without the package. You can't just get love and peace without joy. The promise is ours through the Spirit as we ask for joy, love, and peace in the name of Jesus.

Some texts are more personal than others; they hit closer to the heart. That has been the case for me over these past few weeks as I keep thinking about joy, love, and peace. I have had deep experiences of the love the God in my life, and I have shared those previously. But joy and peace have been much more difficult for me, perhaps because of my struggle with depression, anxiety and an obsessive mind. So I have been praying in Jesus' name for the package. I want the package. Three weeks ago, God spoke to my heart. He said, "John, get in the back of the bus." I said, "What do you mean?" "I want you to stop driving and get in the back." I said, "Who will drive the bus?" He said, "I will." I asked him if he had a driver's license. He said he owned the bus. That little conversation took a burden off my back and brought me great joy and peace. Maybe that is an encouragement to all of us, to keep praying through the pain and struggles we face for the supernatural gifts of God in the age of the Spirit.

1 Frederick Buechner, *Longing for Home* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 128.

2 *Longing for Home*, 128.

3 *Longing for Home*, 128-129.

4 Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 304

5 D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 549.

6 N.T. Wright, *John for Everyone, Part 2, Chapters 11-21* (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, London, 2002), 89.

7 *Longing for Home*, 110.

8 Leslie Newbigin, *The Light Has Come* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 222.

9 *The Light Has Come*, 222.

© 2007 Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino