

From Sorrow To Joy

John 16:16-28

Call: Ps 139:7-12 (NIV)

Scripture: 1 Pet 1:6-9 (NLT)

I. Intro

Good morning! Do you have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in your heart this morning? As we have been walking through the upper room discourse in John, we have been spending a lot of time talking about the Holy Spirit, the one whom Jesus calls the paraclete. And, now, as Jesus brings his discourse to an end, he spends considerable time sharing about two great gifts the Holy Spirit gives: joy and peace. This week we'll explore joy. If you remember, Jesus has already shared a bit about joy. He said that if we abide in the vine as a branch, we will have a fullness of joy. Are you joyful right now? If your answer is yes, we'll have a time of body life after the sermon and you can share. Body life is a great tradition of PBCC, but we haven't done it in awhile due to COVID. Today, we're going to try it again. And the question will simply be – where has the Spirit brought joy into your life, maybe even in surprising ways?

I invite you into our text today, John 16, beginning in verse 16.

II. Total Confusion (16:16-18)

*16 "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me."
17 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'?"
18 So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about." (ESV)*

A. "A little while"

This has to be the most amusing text in the Gospel. The disciples are completely confused about Jesus' phrase "*a little while.*" How will Jesus be gone for "*a little while,*" but then reappear in "*a little while?*" And, it seems they whisper the question amongst themselves without asking Jesus, then throw their hands up in total confusion saying, "We don't know anything!"

B. Encouragement For Us?

I found myself this week asking why John even recorded this interaction? And, I came to the conclusion he recorded it to show us the reality of life sometimes along the Jesus way. Following Jesus can sometimes lead us into spaces of confusion and disorientation. I know I've been there. I've thrown my hands up in discouragement over difficult truths or painful circumstances or my own brokenness. The truth is that the Christian life *is* a journey, and God is constantly working on us, molding us, teaching us and transforming us. But, it's a slow process. Almost nothing in the spiritual life happens quickly.

So it's ok if you are confused like these disciples! God's way is the patient, slow way of transformation. The truth is he will never give up on us no matter how confused we are. So, we trust God, our loving vinedresser. And we can never forget that the great vinedresser is never closer to the branch as when he is pruning it. *"He who began a good work in us will bring it to completion"* (Phil 1:6). That's a promise.

Verse 19. These next verses are where we will spend the bulk of our time this morning.

III. Joy From Sorrow (16:19-22)

19 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'?" 20 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. 21 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. 22 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.

A. Intro

"No one will take your joy from you." What wonderful words from Jesus!

Jesus addresses their confusion over his leaving for a little while. He says he will be leaving, which will cause them to weep and lament, but, at the same time, the world will rejoice. What is he talking about? He is talking about his crucifixion.

I think The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe movie gets this text right in the death of Aslan. Remember that scene? The creatures who follow the white witch rejoice and celebrate Aslan's death. That scene has always struck me in that way.

In just a few hours from now, the world will rejoice over Jesus' crucifixion, while the disciples will weep and mourn, words often used in the Old Testament for mourning over the dead (ie. Jer 22:10).

B. Significance for the First Disciples

But then, Jesus shifts emphatically. The disciple's sorrow will not last long. It will be turned into joy. And what will cause this turn? The resurrection. In only *"a little while,"* the disciple's despair will be transformed into joyous jubilation when they see each other again.

And Jesus illustrates this paradox through the example of a woman giving birth, which means I'm probably not the one that should be teaching these verses. Childbearing, the very thing that brings pain and anguish to a woman, also brings joy. When the woman's hour has come, the pain and anguish is real and intense, but once the child arrives, the pain transforms into joy.

C. Joy

It's not to say that the woman or these disciples will never have sorrow again.

It's simply to understand the nature of true joy. The joy Jesus gives through the Holy Spirit is untouchable by the happenings of life. It is an indestructible joy. It's a permanent joy because the presence of Jesus is permanent through the Holy Spirit. The joy Jesus gives transcends our circumstances as we abide in him and obey him. And deep joy, as many of you know, typically comes through pain, sorrow and suffering, from sorrow to joy.

So, what is joy? It is a settled state of contentment, thanksgiving and hope knowing God is in control. When we keep the perspective that Jesus is on the throne of the universe, we can be joyful even in the midst of sorrow and suffering. This is hard stuff I know.

This is why Karl Barth defined joy as a "defiant nevertheless."

- Nevertheless there is a God, a living God.
- Nevertheless this God is good. loving and faithful.
- Nevertheless this God is involved and nudging us toward the good in all things.
- Nevertheless this God in Jesus will never leave us or forsake us.
- Nevertheless Jesus has risen from the grave and now sits on the throne of the universe.
- I am confused on so many issues nowadays, nevertheless Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.
- My person may not win the election this week, nevertheless Jesus is still on the throne.
- My friend passed recently, nevertheless I know that Jesus has the last word.

Joy is a defiant nevertheless, and a wonderful gift from the Holy Spirit.

D. Significance for Us?

Now for those first disciples, Jesus was heading to the cross causing them great pain and sorrow, but in three days, they will have a joyous reunion with the risen Jesus. That will be the world's most significant reunion ever!

But, what about us? What does this text hold for us who live 2000 years later, on the other side of the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost? Well, I think John, through the Spirit, also wants us to see the things "*that are to come*" (John 16:13). Remember those words from last week? So, I think there is a hint of Jesus' second coming here. Jesus goes away physically in the ascension, but he will "*see us again*" and that's also a promise to us! And our hearts will rejoice and no one "*will ever take that joy away*" from us, because that will be the joy of the new creation. That will be true and perfect joy.

Meanwhile though, in this in between time, this true joy has already begun. How? Through the Holy Spirit enlightening our hearts to the meaning of the cross, combined with the confirmation of the resurrection.

E. "Good" Friday

For when the Spirit enlightens our hearts, we then call the crucifixion “Good,” don’t we, as in Good Friday. If we had been there that day, we would never have called that Friday “Good”! As Jesus hung on that cross in excruciating pain, we would never have used the word “good,” would we? It seems like a great contradiction doesn’t it? Gordon Fee was famous for saying, “A Messiah crucified is a contradiction in terms, of the same category as fired ice” (Johnson, 86).

To the Jewish mind, Christ crucified is a stumbling block. A Messiah is to overwhelm the world with dramatic displays of strength and power. That is why the Jews simply cannot come to terms with a powerless, weak man on a cross as the Messiah. It’s a great contradiction.

To the Gentile mind, Christ crucified is utter foolishness, even to the point of evoking rejoicing. Tacitus, a Roman historian captured the Gentile view perfectly saying, Christ crucified is a “perverse, extravagant superstition.” (ibid, 86). Especially in the first century (but also today), Christians were (and are) viewed as helplessly anti-intellectual for following a common criminal who died by the lowest form of execution. It is utter ridiculousness to a Gentile!

But, when the Spirit “convinces” us of the truth of the cross, we find the great reversal (John 16:8)! This is the deeper magic from before the dawn of time, according to CS Lewis. What looks like the defeat of goodness by evil is actually the defeat of evil by goodness. In being overcome, Christ is in fact overcoming. (We’ll meet that word next week.) Christ crucified *is* the power of God and the wisdom of God! “For in the foolishness and weakness of the cross, God has done what human wisdom and power could never do” (ibid, 93). God has come to us in weakness. God has come to us not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. God washes our feet. It’s the great reversal from a human perspective.

On the cross that Friday, the foolishness of God accomplished what the wisdom of humanity never could. On the cross that Friday, the weakness of God accomplished what the power of humanity never could. At the cross, the Lamb of God really was “*taking away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). Sin, evil and death are defeated at the cross! The cross is no longer a symbol of weeping, sorrow and death. It’s a symbol of eternal life! That’s what the Spirit “convinces” us of! This is why we wear crosses around our necks 2000 years later. And, that is why Good Friday is not bad Friday. It’s Good Friday!

And, we can have joy, and no one can take this joy from us! Our sorrow turns into joy, keeping in view the cross and resurrection, keeping in view a God who dies for us to give us life. For the disciples that night, their sorrow turned into joy on resurrection Sunday. For us, we have the Holy Spirit with us and in us, and we have the Spirit-inspired New Testament which teaches us the significance of the cross and resurrection. And, we have the Spirit convincing us of “the things that are to come.” And, we can have joy, knowing Jesus is on the throne of the universe, and is coming back again. We can live a defiant nevertheless, abiding in Jesus. As Dale Bruner says, “Everything decisive has now been answered: death, the meaning of life, the reality of God, the basic puzzles of human existence, the gift of the Spirit for living the authentic

life and everything else intertwined with Jesus' life, death, resurrection, Pentecost and promised return" (Bruner, 947). We most certainly can have joy deep down in our hearts!

Jesus now moves on to explain more reasons for joy, verse 23.

IV. Joy From Realized Prayer (16:23-24)

23 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. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. (ESV)

Jesus again honors the topic of prayer, this time in the context of joy. We've discussed realized prayer already several times, so I will keep this short. While Jesus is with them physically, they can ask him questions directly. But after he ascends to the Father, they will begin praying in his name, in his power and in his authority. So, that's what we do. We pray in Jesus' name, always ending with your will be done, just like Jesus will pray in the Garden shortly. Here Jesus again provides assurance to prayer because he wants his church's joy to overflow. We have assurance, which should be expected for children of a good, good father.

Nevertheless God, our good, good Father, hears and answers prayers.

Next Jesus gives one more reason for joy, verse 25.

V. Joy From Being Loved (16:25-28)

25 "I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. 26 In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf;

27 for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. 28 I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father." (ESV)

A. The Father's Friendship

These verses provide a bit of a transition between Jesus' talk of joy this week and the next text's focus on peace. Jesus wants his disciples to know that we have access to the Father, and that the Father loves us because we love Jesus and believe in him. Sometimes I think we mistakenly think that Jesus loves us more than the Father, that the Father only reluctantly puts up with us. Not true! The Father loves us. The Father even likes us. The Father enjoys us. The word for love here is "phileo," friendship love. "You are my friends," God the Father says, "because you are friends with my Son and believe in him!" I like you. I enjoy you! And, this truth is meant to bring us great joy!

B. Practical Example

Ray Stedman shared a practical way to remember this truth:

There is a three-fold technique in getting up in the morning: First, we stretch. That gets the body going. Then, we smile. That puts the soul in the right attitude, so that we don't start the day grumbling. And then we say, "God loves me" because that sets the spirit right. That's how you start the day right in body, soul and spirit. Stretch, smile, and say, "God loves me" (<https://www.raystedman.org/thematic-studies/upper-room/the-abiding-principles>, accessed November 3, 2022).

You could even say, "God likes me." And, then, live with "joy, joy, joy, joy down in your heart!"

VI. Conclusion

So, three important truths about joy from today's text:

- Jesus, through the Spirit, transforms our confusion and sorrow into joy, and that joy will not be taken from us!
- And, the Spirit gives joy down in our hearts through realized prayer. He is a good, good Father.
- And, the Spirit gives joy down in our hearts through knowing that God loves us, even likes us and enjoys us.

Amen.

VII. Body Life

Benediction

As you leave here and go out into the world,
May the love of God draw you to him,
May the joy of Jesus fill your souls,
May the power of the Holy Spirit strengthen you in his service,
And remind you of the Psalmist words,
"Sorrow may last for the night,
But, joy will come in the morning."
Amen. Go in peace.

Resources

Bruner, Dale, *The Gospel of John*

Burge, Gary, *The Anointed Community*

Carson, Don, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John* (Regent College Course)

Johnson, Darrell, *It Is Finished*

Klink, Edward, *John (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*

Newbigin, Leslie, *The Light Has Come*