

THE JOY OF THE WORLD AND THE JOY OF THE DISCIPLES COMPARED BY OUR LORD

John 16:16-24 - "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." [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. [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."

The number may vary depending on which translation you use, but in the ESV there are *six specific references to "joy" and "rejoicing"* in today's text. Five of these refer to the *disciples*. One of them specifically refers to the world of unbelievers. And the main idea in today's teaching is simple. We are all (disciples *and* the world) identified by what gives us the most joy.

It's not your *creed* or your *words* that most identify you as a passionate follower of Jesus Christ. Those things are easy to read and recite. It's not hard to know the routines of church life and the lingo of the Christian community. We're all pretty much aware by now of what we're supposed to say we believe in.

But the deep, true delights of the heart can't be faked. Your Bible and your creed certainly show what's *important*. But only what gives you *joy* reveals what's important *to you*. Your deepest delights are the great *revealers* of your inner life. It's no wonder Jesus talked so much about *joy* when He talked about the inner life he would give His disciples.

But there's something else important in our text today. In a very rare reference Jesus talked about the nature of the joy of the *unbelieving world* specifically as it related to His own death on the cross.

If fact, this is where I want to begin. I want to start with these rather stark words from Jesus in the middle of our text (**verse 20**) and work *back up* in your Bibles to the *preceding* verses. Then I want to work *down* in your Bibles to the *following* verses. My reason for this is I think Jesus' remarks about the source of the *world's* rejoicing best explain the *disciples' fear* at the prospect of Jesus leaving them in the first four verses of this sixteenth chapter that we studied last week.

And I think Jesus' remarks about the source of the *world's* rejoicing provide the best contrast for the kind of *joy* Jesus wanted for His *disciples* in the following verses. Both the *world's rejoicing* and the *disciple's sorrow* would be reversed by the resurrection of Jesus from the grave.

1) JESUS CLEARLY SAYS THE WORLD EXPERIENCED GREAT JOY IN PUTTING HIM TO DEATH

John 16:20a - "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice...."

I think it's simple to see the reason for those words, "*Truly, truly....*" in Jesus declaration. Jesus is going to tell His disciples that the world *as a whole* - the *entire world generally* ("*kosmos*") - will see His death as a cause for great rejoicing. Then as now, it's hard to hear those words tumble out of Jesus' mouth. At first hearing they make no sense to us.

And it's precisely because He knows His words are likely to be taken as some kind of *overstatement* He opens with "*Truly, truly, I say to you....*" This is not an exaggeration. It may sound unbelievable, but it's actually so. It's *truly* true.

What can Jesus possibly mean here? Do you remember when the World Trade towers were attacked and we saw the images of various crowds dancing and celebrating at the sight of the destruction and death? Is *that* the kind of joy Jesus says the world experiences at His death?

I don't think it is. The world's joy at the removal of Jesus is probably more *subtle* in nature - less processed, perhaps, but also more deeply rooted. Yet the world's joy described in our text, though probably more *internalized*, is no less perverse and no less *revealing*. And it's the *revealing* aspect of the world's joy that I want to study with you.

Consider these words from a very liberal, but brilliant commentator, **Rudolf Bultmann**, as he explains the joy of the world at the death of Jesus in our text: **"The kosmos [world] rejoices at the going of Jesus, because His presence challenges its security, and it hates His own [disciples], because their very existence constantly calls it in question."**

Those are very insightful words. This twisted, self-protecting joy of the world at the death of Jesus is the key to understanding the world's hatred of Jesus' disciples in passages we've studied earlier:

John 15:18-20 - "If the world hates you, **know that it has hated me before it hated you.** [19] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but **because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.** [20] Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' **If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you...."**

The presence of Christ, **Bultmann** says, challenges the world's security. And the presence of Christ's disciples calls the world into question. That's what Jesus meant when He told His disciples to **expect** persecution because they were not **of** the world. The world loves **its own**, but is totally **intolerant** of those who are **not** its own - **John 15:19** - "If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."

Or, consider our text from last Sunday morning: **John 16:1-4** - "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. [2] **They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.** [3] And they will do these things because they have not known the Father, nor me. [4] But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told them to you."

So the take away point is the same whether the world rejoices because Jesus is off the scene (**16:20**), or the world thinks it's doing a noble thing when it persecutes Christ's followers (**16:2**). This world's life system treasures its own **sense of security**. It cannot live without its own **false hopes**. And it hates having that **threatened**. It hates the way the kingdom of Christ presses the point that the world's systems for standing tall on its own two feet, including its moral regulations, its education, and its religions, can never eternally succeed. Jesus is emphatic. This world will never let that kind of message go unchallenged.

2) **WHILE THE WORLD EXPERIENCES RELIEF AT CHRIST'S ABSENCE, THE DISCIPLES EXPERIENCE SORROW - BUT SORROW TURNING INTO JOY**

John 16:16-20 - "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." [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.**"

The **world's** rejoicing isn't mentioned again for the simple reason it mistakenly viewed Jesus' absence a permanent accomplishment. The **disciple's sorrow** is mentioned as a temporary condition because Jesus would return to them, risen from the grave, replacing their sorrow with joy once again. This becomes the main theme of John's text.

Clearly, the disciples don't understand Jesus' words. They sense they **should** grasp more than they do and feel so ashamed they don't actually ask **Jesus** what's He's talking about. All their questions are directed to **each other**.

Particularly hard to grasp was this idea of **seeing** Jesus, then **not seeing** Jesus, and then **seeing Him again**. And all of this was wrapped up in the strange idea of **"going to the Father"** - **John 16:17** - "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'?**"

This was hard for the disciples to figure out. Jesus rarely talked about His impending death as an **isolated** event - as **just** dying. He talked about His coming death, to be sure. But He usually linked it up with words of **mission** and **obedience** and **departure**.

He had talked just moments ago along these very lines to these same disciples - **John 16:5** - "**But now I am going to him who sent me and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'**" "**Going to him who sent me....**" *That's* how Jesus talked about His coming death. He was **sent into** this world from the Father and was **returning to** the Father. And between that **arrival** and **departure** was an accomplished **obedience** to the Father.

The take-home-from-church lesson here is Jesus can't be properly identified or understood apart from His unique **relationship to the Father** and His accomplished **redemptive work in obedience** to the Father. Jesus can't be reduced to another in a long line of religious prophets and teachers. Trendy churches can't whittle Him down to a red letter New Testament humanitarian. God the Son can only be understood on His own terms.

These disciples are fearful and broken-hearted. And they're confused. They don't have the full picture yet. But Jesus tells them pretty soon they will. They will have enough theology about their Master to keep them joyful forever. And that leads into our third point:

3) LASTING JOY CAN'T BE POSSESSED WITHOUT THE SORROW OF JESUS' DEATH ON THE CROSS

This seems to be the central point of Jesus' labor and birth illustration:

John 16:20-22 - "**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.**"

Especially in that culture, the joy of **birth** was an absolute impossibility without the pain of **labor**. That's why Jesus didn't tell His disciples their sorrow would be **replaced** by joy, but would be **turned into** joy - "**....but your sorrow will turn into joy**"(20).

The joy of Christ's resurrection appearance and life **grew out of** the accomplishment of His suffering and death. The joy was an **impossibility** without the sorrow. The sorrow itself **becomes** the root of the deepest joy.

This is what the disciples couldn't see. They didn't **want** Jesus to leave them. Whatever misapprehensions were forming when Jesus talked about them seeing Him and not seeing Him and seeing Him again, they didn't want to be without Him in any way. They couldn't see that if Jesus just stayed with them, told them parables, multiplied bread and fish, and set up an earthly Jewish Messianic kingdom into old age they would never drink as deeply as He wanted of eternal hope and joy. As they grew old and died one by one of old age, they would have no hope whatsoever of sins forgiven or eternal life as they faced their own fast approaching death.

No. There was a hard, painful, dark cross approaching for Jesus. He would be taken from them deep into death itself. And that would be the root of the greatest joy they couldn't even imagine at this point. When Jesus emerged before them after His resurrection from the grave a whole new state of affairs will become the permanent reality.

This is what Jesus meant when He said, "**....no one will take your joy from you**"(22). He didn't mean they would never experience hatred and persecution or pain or sorrow. But after their hearts were grounded in a death-conquering Redeemer, their joy couldn't be removed or cancelled.

4) JESUS' DIFFICULT WORDS ABOUT ASKING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERED PRAYER

John 16:23-24 - "**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.**"

Verse 23 is the tricky verse. The **NASB** does perhaps the clearest job of distinguishing the two meanings of **asking** in this text. There are actually two **different verbs** used in the Greek to show this. The **NASB** reads "**In that day you will not question me about anything.**" The **NIV** reads, "**In that day you will no longer ask me anything.**"

The idea here isn't **praying**, but rather **questioning**. As John records our text today they certainly had plenty of questions. They were weighed down with the sheer weight of all the things they didn't understand right now.

And that's where **verse 23** comes in - "***In that day***" - ***the day of Christ's resurrection and appearance to His disciples - everything will make more sense***. They will appreciate the words of Jesus in ***hindsight*** better than they do in our text. And they will know the depth of joy Jesus was promising to them. "***In that day***" the questions will be replaced by eternal confidence and hope.

But then Jesus ***does*** introduce the subject of ***prayer*** - ***John 16:23b-24*** - "...***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.***"

There are two precious realities these disciples will see when they "***see Jesus again***" in a little while (19). The first was gloriously obvious. They would ***see*** the physical resurrected body of their Lord. But there was another wonderful fruit of Christ's redemption that ***wasn't*** visible to their naked eyes.

Prayer was forever changed when Jesus accomplished dying for their sins and rising to go to the Father. This is what Jesus was saying when He very specifically said they could now "***ask of the Father in my name***"(23). These disciples, for the very first time, would have a sympathetic high priest carrying their frail prayers to the ear of God - ***wrapping their sinful cries in His sinless righteousness***.

For the first time ***ever*** this was an ***accomplished*** reality. That's what Jesus meant when He said those incredibly profound words, "***Until now you have asked nothing in my name***"(24). True, Jesus had taught them ***how*** to pray, and say "***Our Father in heaven***." But the ***event that enabled that kind of intimacy*** was still in the future.

True, God had answered prayer miraculously in the Old Testament. Elijah prayed and raised the dead. His prayers changed weather patterns. The Apostle James describes this in detail.

But remember, This was God raising up ***specific individuals*** to work on behalf of His people. But ***those*** people - the masses - had no such access to God. When they wanted to approach God - when they needed His grace and mercy - they never got anywhere ***near*** God. They went to a priest. They watched from the outside as the priest slit that lamb's throat. As sinners, that was their contact with a holy God. Then they went home.

This is the change Jesus describes is coming in prayer through His finished redemptive work. Now they could ask with ***joy*** rather than ***guilt and fear***. The same joy that was birthed by being united to a Redeemer who had died for their sins was made permanent by a Lord who had conquered death itself. And that same joy was ***nourished and sustained*** by a pathway into intimate prayer with a holy God in spite of their own unworthiness. They could approach in Jesus' Name.