

SUNDAY MORNING 8 AUGUST 2021

Your sorrow will turn into joy

John 16:16-24

Time is really short now. He tells them that they will see Him for a while and then not for a while and then after a while they will see Him again. I think He is talking about His resurrection, but I think He is also talking about a greater presence. In the words He spoke just before, He repeatedly told them that He would not leave them as orphans, but that He would send the Holy Spirit, His Spirit, to be with them and us forever.

We know that the disciples saw Jesus for a short time after Jesus' resurrection, but after His ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit it was different. Then they could "see" Him spiritually, "they could see the working of Jesus' Spirit in them. It's like the wind, you do not see the wind, but only the effect of the wind. This is how the disciples and we who follow Jesus can see Jesus.

We see Him in His working in our lives, and in those of others and in those of His church and in the world. People are still repenting. People change their evil ways. Relationships are restored.

Jesus showed them his heart. He does not want them to fall away. He gives the Spirit of Truth. Not the Spirit of half-truths or lies. It is God's heart that we should hear and learn the truth and live in it.

What I like about Jesus is that He is God, who walks the path with us through His Holy Spirit, in a life that He understands and experiences for himself. If God remained in heaven, He would never have fully understood what it is to be tempted and what it is to feel hopeless and God forsaken.

But because Jesus as a human being, He experienced all that we have experienced and been tempted and was forsaken by God on the cross. He is the perfect person to help us in times of hardship, and sorrow and pain. He is there when you and I ask questions like, "*why is He doing this?*" Or "*why does He allow it?*"

And this is the miracle of God and of Jesus and of the Bible. God knows that because of sin in paradise, the earth has become hard. That life on earth will be hard and difficult. And that people sometimes get deeply hurt and struggle to understand and process grief and emotional pain. And He knows that people struggle to truly experience joy as children of God.

John 16:20

If Jesus, the Son of God, says to you, "*I assure you,*" you can know that the assurance will be so. It's not a maybe, we-will-see. It's true and firm. And what is true and firm? I believe none of us wish sadness and trauma for ourselves. "*Lord, it has been going well for a long time now, it's time again for me to suffer, so that I can cry and mourn.*" Is this what you like to pray for yourself?

I do not have to pray for it, it just comes. I think all of us would like to lead a life in which there will never be death, and pain and sorrow and tears and unhappiness. But there is. And Jesus knows this, and He helps us in such situations and through such situations.

We as humans are quite inclined to hang the "heavy weight" stuff of life on the thinnest threads. We attach our happiness and our joy and our peace, to things that can easily break. Our happiness depends on our health, our children or our family or our work or our possessions. It's all wonderful things to have, but none of those things bring lasting happiness

and joy, because if we lose some of these things, and we can be sure we'll lose some of them, then our happiness is gone. The things of this world hang on a thin thread of transience.

And many then question people God and even become angry with God, so much so that some of them completely turn their backs on God and the Christian faith.

Why is this happening?

- It sometimes happens that we, as human beings, have a wrong understanding of God. Many people think if I have chosen the Lord, and if I believe in the Lord, and I am now His child and I read my Bible every day and pray and work hard for His Kingdom, then nothing bad will ever happen to me. That's just not true.
- People sometimes say you just have to have faith. If we just believe and pray hard enough, then the bad things will pass. "So, the fault lies with your faith." You just have to believe harder, then the bad things would not have happened.

Now Jesus wants to teach us that the risen Lord Jesus will turn our sorrows into lasting joy as we look to Him in faith and prayer. Not taking it away, but turning it into joy and peace.

The Holy Spirit wants to teach us that:

- **We will have sorrows in this world**

Jesus himself experienced pain, sorrow and desolation that is indescribable. Jesus tells His disciples that they are also going to experience sorrow, it is not their fault. They will experience how He will be arrested, found not guilty. Will get 39 blows on His back, which will tear His back apart and then be nailed to a rugged cross, which was full of splinters. Perhaps the smell of blood, from the previous person crucified on that cross, still hangs in the air.

Over the past year, we have experienced how quickly joy turns into indescribable pain. Many of us lost loved ones to death. Such a death brings great and indescribable pain and sorrow and questions. And what the Holy Spirit wants to teach us is that our deep sorrow and mourning are not unspiritual. Even though we know our loved ones are with the Lord and even though we put our trust in God, the pain is still with us. And He wants to teach us to experience joy out of sorrow and within sorrow.

I read of a pastor who, when he was in his thirties, lost his daughter to death. They prayed for her healing and yet she died. 40 years later he said in a sermon that the sorrow and grief are still shallow and part of his life, but that he finds daily his joy and peace in the Lord.

However our sorrow is different from that of the world because that is what Jesus wants to teach us, we have the Holy Spirit, the Comforter God, walking the path with us and we have a divine hope. We seek our comfort in the Lord, and that He wants us to experience joy through sorrow.

- **Sorrows because we are disappointed**

All of us had been hoping and praying for a cause and then it turned out differently and then we are deeply disappointed, especially in God. The disciples certainly experienced sorrow because they were disappointed. Over the years they walked with Jesus, they realized who Jesus really was. He is the Son of God. The Messiah who was promised in the Old Testament. And now He's talking about going away and dying, that while they still must be under the Roman Empire. Would not the Messiah have come to deliver them from the Roman Empire? And now He's going to die.

- **Sorrows because we do not understand God**

The disciples had Jesus with them and yet they still misunderstood Him. He says He is going away and then after a short while they will see Him again. And then they do not understand it and reason among themselves, instead of talking directly to Jesus. How many times has He not told them that He is going to Jerusalem to suffer and die, yet they misunderstood Him? We still want God to do as we are pleased, instead of seeking His Kingdom and His will.

John 16:20b

- **Out of sorrow joy has been birthed - John 16:21**

Women who naturally had to give birth know that before that baby is born, there are months of hardship, and pain and then the birth process as well. But interestingly, what causes the pain also causes the greatest joy.

Jesus could have told them, "*Man-up, I am omniscient and I know how everything will end.*" But He knows that He Himself must go through the hellish pain of the cross before He will experience the joy of the resurrection. He will never say when we are sad or in pain that we are weak, or we do not believe enough. He understands, because He, himself went through pain and sorrows.

John 16:22

The same action that brings sorrow to the disciples brings them joy. For through the cross, they are saved from sin and death. The resurrection and outpouring of the Holy Spirit changed the disciples from fearful and troubled men, to men who could not stop talking about Jesus, so much so that they were killed for that testimony.

Because Jesus overcame the sting of death through His resurrection, even death, your own death or pain and sorrow and the death and pain and sorrow of your loved ones do not bring an end to your joy.

This is the thick, unbreakable rope on which our happiness and joy hang, nothing that happens and can happen to us or our loved ones should break that rope, because it is anchored in Jesus.

How does Jesus turn our sorrow into joy?

- **The cross**

It must have been terrible for the disciples to see their Master beaten to pieces hanging on a cross. Nothing could have prepared them for it. I do not know if you have watched "*The Passion of the Christ*", but the suffering of Jesus is portrayed quite visually, so much so that one film critic said that it was by far the most violent movie he had ever seen. .

The cross was a disgrace. It was not something you walked around and bragged about: "*Our Lord died on a cross.*"

Hebrews 12:2b

Yet they could not keep quiet about the cross of Jesus. It is the turning point in any person's life, your sin, sickness, suffering and death, are overshadowed by the glory of the cross and the victory that Jesus achieved there.

1 Peter 2:24

I think we understand the concept of sadness and joy as two opposites. Jesus is not saying that He will replace grief and sorrow with joy. Just as a child who is born is the source of pain and joy, so out of sorrow joy has been birthed. Yes, it is painful, and the memories are painful, but those who believe in Jesus know that on the cross there is healing for their emotional and spiritual wounds.

Romans 8:18

- **An Eternal Perspective - Psalm 73:1-3, 13-14 and 21-26**

Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Once He loves us, He will love us forever. We know that those who have gone to the Lord before us are already experiencing the eternal glory of God's presence. Asaph, the author of Psalm 73 is depressed when it seems to him that things are always going well with the wicked.

If the world is your anchor, your happiness and joy will be shattered, but hear what Asaph says. *"Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. "I belong to God forever."* It is a strong anchor rope on which you can hang your joy and happiness.

- **Mercy - John 16:23-24**

From God's grace and mercy joy is born. It is important that your focus always must be on God's glory and the advancement of His Kingdom. I have prayed for many people, and then something else happens. And only then did I realize that I was still wrong in my sincere prayers that my focus was still on me. If things go differently than I ask, I must accept that God's will was different and then I can seek my joy in the fact that He will have mercy on me.

Why sorrow?

James 1:2-4

See all trials and sorrows as growth opportunities. We tend when sorrows hit to spend less time with God. And that's the mistake. It is precisely in these inexplicable times of trials and sorrows that we need to spend more time with Him so that He can comfort and teach us.

And through our suffering He wants to make us strong so that we can teach other people again. All I know is that God will never let anything happen to us just to make us suffer, just because He can. When you experience hardship remember Jesus knows sorrow and from out of sorrow, He brings joy and peace. Joy and peace that neither you nor I can cultivate. You only get it with God, and you get it from God when you sit with God with your discontent and pain.

Your heart might be broken, but if your life is in Jesus, there will always be a song of joy in your heart.