

"The Triumph of Joy"

Everybody longs for joy. Even if you are struggling and don't appreciate someone telling you to cheer up in a superficial way, deep down inside, you do wish for joy, true joy. Christian faith offers you a source of joy the world doesn't know. But part of the appeal of Christian faith is that it is honest about the struggle to find joy and be joyful. We need the honesty that tells us we can have Christ in our hearts, and we still have our share of struggles. We also need the authentic hope that Christ can give us strength and even joy in and through those sorrows. That's the message in the passage we are looking at this morning.

As I have told you in this series on *The Triumph of Goodness in the Last Days of Jesus*. John devotes 5 whole chapters (13-17) to this one night, the night before Jesus was crucified. The greater part of these five chapters consists of Jesus' final, concentrated teaching given to prepare his disciples for what is coming. He gives them the new commandment to love one another. He gives them the metaphor of the vine and the branches to call them to stay intimately connected to him. He promises the Holy Spirit as the means by which he will remain with them. One of the final things Jesus does before he breaks into prayer and then leads the disciples to the garden of Gethsemane is to also give them a promise about joy. He promises that even though they will go through much sorrow, they will come through that sorrow into great joy. That's something that he tells them, not just for their sakes but for ours. ***Jesus wants us to understand that we can be strong through Him and trust in Him, for He is able to bring lasting joy out of deep sorrow.*** I want to build this message on two phrases lifted directly from the Scripture, spoken to the disciples but applicable to all Christians. The first one comes at the end of **verse 21**.

I. YOU WILL BE SORROWFUL BUT YOUR SORROW WILL TURN TO JOY.

To confine these words to the eleven disciples who were present and to the immediate death and resurrection of Jesus is unhelpfully narrow. The rest of the New Testament teaches us that the death and resurrection of Jesus is, at the same time, historical reality and a picture, a sort of preview, of the trajectory of all of history and the

whole of the Christian life. At the heart of it all is this truth. In Christ, through Christ and because of Christ, sorrows will turn into joy.

Notice three things 1.) Our misunderstandings are predictable 2.) Our sorrows are significant. 3.) Our joy is ultimate.

A. First, Our misunderstandings are predictable.

Look at how the story starts out. **Verse 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?’” Notice that phrase, the question in **verse 17**, “What is this that he says to us?”

It is worth noting that even his disciples didn’t understand some things that Jesus said. We shouldn’t be surprised if it’s the same way with us. When we read the drama that unfolds in the crucifixion of Jesus, we should remember that sometimes in our lives and in history, we will not know what God is doing. We will not always see clearly how it is all going to turn out for good. We need to be able to trust God when we do not clearly see things. Because faith is not sight. It is trust. What Jesus was about to go through, which God was not only allowing but planning would seem crazy to the disciples. Because God's ways are often mysterious, our misunderstandings are very predictable.

B. Second, Our sorrows are significant.

Look at **verses 20-21** and notice the words relating to sorrow. *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.*

Jesus is preparing these particular disciples for the earth-shattering emotionally painful anguish and confusion they are going to face as they see him arrested, beaten, tortured, and murdered in a few hours. But all of that is, at the same time, a picture of the common experience Christians have to face in this world. The word translated “*anguish*” in **verse 21** shows up a second time in this same chapter. In **John 16:33**, Jesus says, *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*” So the pain and suffering and even confusion of the disciples between the crucifixion and the resurrection is just a

preview of what all disciples of Jesus will face between this present time and the second coming when Jesus makes all things new. The word translated *anguish* in **verse 21** and *tribulation* in **verse 33**, comes from a word that means "to crush." It is used for both inward and outward difficulties and sufferings. It describes everything from the minor annoyances that we go through every day to the major disasters that fall on us unexpectedly. It can be used for every sorrow the human body and or spirit can experience. Jesus, who knows that joy is coming for the disciples eventually, doesn't trivialize the impact of the suffering he knows they will have to pass through and experience on the way. It is so important to see that.

If you take his words to heart, you will find your difficulties less difficult to face. You will be prepared for it. Suddenly the Biblical imagery of the Christian life takes on a new clarity and a new relevance. We shake our minds free from the false picture of the Christian life that is being presented by so many popular preachers today that the church and the Christian life is a sort of country club where the entitled people come together to enjoy special privileges. We begin to realize that the church is a kind of army barracks where men and women are trained for battles in which they will often be bruised but in which they will have to learn, as **2 Timothy 2:3** says, to "*share in suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*" I prefer the NIV here. *Endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*

So our sufferings are significant, but...

C. Third, Our Joy is Ultimate.

In **verse 20**, *You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.* Even though he is the one facing terrible suffering, he wants to prepare his friends, his followers for suffering by giving them hope that their joy will emerge and their joy will last. The word "joy" describes a deep inner happiness. This isn't the first time Jesus mentioned joy that night! In **John 15:11**, Jesus says, "*These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy, might be full.*" Jesus wants us to have a deep joy even in our sorrows and also the hope of an even greater joy that one day will overshadow all our sorrows.

When Jesus compares the sorrow of the disciples to childbirth, he is saying their pain will be real, but their joy will overshadow it. I remember a posting on the internet in which young fathers told about the births of their first child. One said: "As soon as I started coaching my wife on how to breathe, she said, "Shut-up and get me an

epidural." Well, the truth is there is a lot to be said for breathing and husband's coaching, and natural childbirth and all of that, but childbirth isn't easy. Another new father wrote that he didn't want to do or say anything to make his wife angry during her labor, but he discovered the list of things that provoked a verbal bashing included breathing, moving, making eye contact, and trying to offer encouraging words. All though he was making his point with humor, the point he was making for other husbands was this: "Understand what your wife is going through is hard, it is difficult, be sympathetic and understanding." The pain and difficulty of labor and delivery were well known in his day. Jesus uses this to teach us because in childbirth there is labor and pain but, in **verse 21**, as Jesus says of the mother *when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.* In God's plan, sorrow can be part of a process that leads to a joy so great it overcomes all sorrow.

1.) Sorrow leads to joy in the passion of Jesus. Christ suffered for you on the cross so that you could be born again to a new and eternal life. Christian faith is unique. The gospel tells you salvation and eternal life isn't something you earn. It is a gift you receive. It only comes when you admit that we can not save ourselves, and we repent, turn to Christ as our Lord, and trust in Him as our Savior.

Sorrow leads to joy in the passion of Jesus.

2.) Sorrow leads to joy in the progress of history. In **Mark 13:8**, Jesus says: *For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains.* One day the whole earth and everything in it will be shaken by the labor pains that will culminate in the second coming of Christ and the birth of the kingdom of God.

Sorrow leads to joy in the passion of Jesus and the progress of history.

3.) Sorrow leads to joy as a pattern in our lives. You need to know and believe God can take the very thing that causes you great difficulty and sorrow right now and so use it for his glory and your good in fulfillment of his promises that he transforms it into a cause for joy. God can take the very thing which causes pain and use it to bring great joy. Sometimes it takes a little while. It is a process. But *"Your sorrow will turn into joy."*

*That is the first phase. Let's look, just briefly at the second. It's the phrase that occurs at the end of **verse 22**.*

II. NO ONE WILL TAKE YOUR JOY FROM YOU.

Verse 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.* He is telling them what they did not yet understand. He is talking about the resurrection. ***The resurrection of Jesus is a source of enduring joy.***

A. The resurrection of Jesus is the proof of his payment for our sins.

We all need forgiveness. We not only need forgiveness; we need to know that we have forgiveness. The resurrection of Jesus is God's declaration of the triumph of Jesus and the forgiveness of sins.

B. The resurrection of Jesus is also proof of his presence with us.

Notice in **verse 22** Jesus says, *I will see you again, and no one will take your joy from you.* Of course, later, he would leave them to ascend to heaven, so he is not saying they will have joy only as long as he is physically present. The resurrection is not just a temporary source of joy for those who saw Jesus physically. It is a lasting, permanent, unassailable source of joy for all who believe in Him because the resurrection means He is alive and with us – with you!

C. The resurrection of Jesus is also proof that all his promises are true.

His resurrection assures us we can depend on his promise to give us eternal life in the world renewed and made perfect. When that day comes, no one will have to tell you to rejoice or be glad. No effort will be required. Your joy will be unrestrained, unforced, irrepressible, overwhelming, and eternal. That's what Jesus says, **verse 22**, *your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.* That's what you were and are made for.

C.S. Lewis said baby ducks want to swim and guess what something called water exists! He then said, *If you find in yourself a desire a longing for a joy nothing on earth can satisfy, maybe you were not just built for earth. Maybe you were built for something bigger.* If you haven't come to Christ understand that what he is teaching us is that

we were made for the promise of the resurrection and all of the hope for unforced, unstoppable joy that is promised us when the risen Lord makes all things new. One of reason we are told this now is so that we can find strength and deep joy in this promise – in this hope.

CONCLUSION

When the Bible tells you to be joyful even now, it is not commanding you to just force your feelings. Picture your heart, like a pool of water that lies still until a stone is dropped that sends waves rippling across the surface. What are the stones, the ideas, and thoughts that you are allowing to drop into the pool of your heart? Are you allowing the ideas of an unbelieving culture that is hostile to God, or the lies of the evil one, to drop continually into the pool of your emotions? If so, the emotional ripples that run through your life will be dark and draining.

What is it which can be like a stone dropped into the pool of your emotions to send a ripple of joy through your life? It's the truth about God and the relationship you can have or hopefully do have with Him because of His grace and Jesus Christ. The Christian life -- the life of following Jesus Christ is not just about trying to be strong. It is about doing those things while continually throwing into the pool of your heart great stones of glorious truth about the God as your Loving Father, Jesus Christ, God the Son, as your Lord and Savior, the Holy Spirit as your indwelling guide and companion and the promises of God's loving-kindness and care for you throughout your life! And as we choose, by the way we think and the way we talk to ourselves to keep believably dropping those truths into our hearts and minds, we find that the joy that is so essential to our strength is sustained in our souls.

The gospel at the heart of our faith is not just good news. It is joyful news because it is such good news. Jesus shows us that God cares and loves us even in all of our human flaws and our ugliest sins. *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23.* This amazingly beautiful, holy, glorious God gave his perfect Son and God the Son, Jesus willingly came into our broken world in the power of God the Holy Spirit. And he gave himself for us. He died to pay for our sins and rose again to be our Savior. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16.* He offers you grace, new life, salvation, forgiveness, eternity, and a relationship with him now as your ultimate and perfect Father. It's all grace – you don't and can't earn it – but you can receive it if you trust him. So trust in him. Tell him

you are trusting in him. And find joy in his promise. Trust in him, knowing that, in him, goodness and therefore joy will triumph.

Amen