

John 16:16-33 – Turning Sorrow to Joy

Last week, we looked at the work of the Holy Spirit and learned two things about what He will do:

1. How He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment
2. How He guides believers into all truth

Today, Jesus continues preparing His disciples for His departure. Instead of promising to remove all their problems, Jesus offers them something deeper: His peace and joy in the midst of trouble. This passage is very relevant for us, because like the disciples, we often face confusion, sorrow, and difficulty in life.

- **Why do you think Jesus sometimes allows us to be confused for a while instead of giving immediate answers?**
- **Is it possible to have real joy even while going through sorrow? What would that look like?**
- **What does it mean to “pray in Jesus’ name”?**
- **How can knowing that Jesus has overcome the world give us peace when we face trouble?**

Jesus does not promise a trouble-free life. Instead, He promises that our sorrow will turn into lasting joy, that we have direct access to the Father through prayer, and that we can have peace because He has already overcome the world.

Section 1: The Disciples’ Confusion

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.” **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’?”

Μικρόν (mikron) – “a little while.”

This word is used multiple times in this passage. It shows that the time of separation would be short, even though it may feel long to the disciples.

In this section, the disciples struggle to understand Jesus’ statement about “a little while.”

Jesus tells the disciples that in a little while they will no longer see Him, but then after another short time they will see Him again. The disciples are bewildered, and Jesus doesn't rebuke them for it. Their confusion is honest, and He knows it. The 'little while' points first to the brief,

devastating interval between the crucifixion and the resurrection. But Jesus' words carry a longer horizon too: the fuller joy awaits His return at the end of the age.

There is great comfort here: confusion about God's timing is not the same as lack of faith. The disciples believed in Jesus; they simply couldn't yet see the shape of what was coming. The same is often true for us. We are in a 'little while' too, between Christ's resurrection and His return, and the uncertainty we feel is not a sign that God is absent.

In the first century, most Jews expected a political Messiah who would deliver them from Roman rule and establish an earthly kingdom. The idea of a suffering and dying Messiah did not fit their expectations. This is why Jesus' words were so difficult for them to understand.

Jesus often taught in ways that required later reflection. He was preparing them for truths they could only fully grasp after His resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Section 2: Sorrow Will Turn into Joy

***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.*

In verses 20-22, we see the disciples' sorrow will be temporary and will be replaced by lasting joy.

Jesus explains that the disciples will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. Jesus chooses one of the most powerful images available to Him, a woman in labor, to describe what the disciples are about to experience.

This image was deeply rooted in the Old Testament. The prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah all used the imagery of labor pangs to describe the suffering that precedes God's new age breaking into the world (Isaiah 26:17-18; 66:7-9).

Notice what Jesus does NOT say. He does not say their sorrow will be replaced by joy, as if the pain were a mistake to be erased. He says it will be turned INTO joy, transformed by it. The cross, the very event causing their grief, becomes the source of the greatest news humanity has ever heard. The pain was not a detour; it was the birth canal.

And the joy He promises is indisputable: 'No one will take your joy from you.' This is not a happiness dependent on circumstances. The pain is real but leads to something far greater.

How is the joy Jesus promises different from the happiness the world offers?

Section 3: A New Relationship with the Father Through Prayer

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.*

This is the fifth and final invitation to pray in the Upper Room Discourse, and it is the fullest one. Jesus tells them something new, that they will have direct, personal access to the Father, in His name.

We've already learned that praying 'in Jesus' name' is not a formula tacked onto the end of a prayer. It means approaching God as His representative, on the basis of Christ's completed work, with His authority behind us. Before the cross, no such direct access existed. The resurrection changes everything. Now every believer can walk into the throne room of God, not on the merit of their own spiritual track record, but solely on the merit of Jesus.

Verse 27 is breathtaking: 'The Father himself loves you.' He loves you because you have loved His Son. Jesus promises that in the coming day the disciples will ask the Father directly in His name and will receive what they ask. This new privilege will result in the fullness of their joy.

What did Jesus tell the disciples a chapter before about their relationship with Him? And how does that connect with what He is saying here in verse 23-24?

What brings greater joy, having access to ask God or actually receiving what you ask for? Why?

Section 4: From Figurative to Plain Speech

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."*

Jesus says He has been using figures of speech, but the time is coming when He will speak plainly about the Father. He reveals that the Father Himself loves the disciples because they have loved Jesus and believed in Him. Jesus summarizes His mission: He came from the Father and is now returning to Him.

"In that day" refers to the time after the resurrection when the Holy Spirit would help the disciples understand Jesus more clearly. Verse 27 stands out as one of the strongest affirmations in John's Gospel of the Father's personal love for believers. Jesus is preparing the disciples for life after His

physical departure. The key is not just clearer teaching, but a living relationship with the Father through the Son.

Why is it significant that the Father Himself loves the disciples?

Section 5: Realistic Warning and Ultimate Encouragement

29 His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! 30 Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” 31 Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? 32 Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. 33 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.”

Θλίψις (*thlipsis*) – tribulation, pressure, or intense hardship

Νενίκηκα (*nenikēka*) – to conquer. In the perfect tense denotes an abiding victory.

The disciples suddenly claim they understand and believe. However, Jesus responds with both a sobering prediction and a powerful word of encouragement.

He tells them that they will soon be scattered and abandon Him. This fulfills the prophecy in Zechariah 13:7. In the ancient world, it was common for followers to desert their leader when trouble came. Jesus knew this would happen, yet He still loved them.

This is one of the most clarifying verses in all of Scripture. Jesus makes two promises in one breath and neither one cancels out the other. 'You will have tribulation.' Suffering is part of the believer's road.

AND 'I have overcome the world.' Jesus is not saying 'I will overcome' or 'I am in the process of overcoming.' He is saying the victory is already won.

Peace, then, is not the absence of trouble. It is the presence of the One who has already defeated it. It is not something we manufacture through positive thinking or spiritual discipline. It is found 'in Me', in Christ Himself. Jesus does not promise the absence of trouble, but He promises peace in the midst of trouble because He has already secured the victory.

If we truly understand that Jesus has already secured victory over the world, how should this change how we view our difficulties?