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#89

“Grief Turned to Joy” John 16:16-22

Introduction

Imagine what it would be like to have something you were absolutely dreading turn out to be the greatest source of good news you could imagine. Your boss sets up an appointment with you and you are sure you are about to be fired. Instead you get a promotion. Your doctor is about to deliver ominous news about your physical demise, but instead you find out you are healthy and cured. The bill you expect will do you in financially turns out to be an insurance settlement that resolves your financial turmoil. The friend that you think is about to rebuke you and strike out angrily at you instead confesses sin and seeks your forgiveness.

Those are the kind of surprises that turn our grief into joy. In life, we know that we must suffer. But the great hope of the gospel is that Jesus Christ turns our darkness into light, death into life, and grief into joy.

Today we are going to see that at the cross this very paradigm for life is firmly established as the foundation of our union with Christ. Through the pain of Christ's death comes our greatest joy.

[John 16:16-22]

The story of redemption is the story of God undoing the affects of the curse. In Christ we get a foothold on the restoration of paradise - in Him we

have the promise and hope of heaven. But there is always the 'not yet' part of that.

Last week we saw how Christ forewarns us of the trouble the world will dish out to us. But through the coming of the Holy Spirit the world will be overcome.

This week we are foretold of the joy that is ours through the grief of the cross so that we will have hope, perseverance and faith when we are overwhelmed with the fall.

One of the great things about learning to live in Christ is that we can, here and now, begin to experience the realities of our redemption in the middle of our troubles.

Just think about some of the ways that happens. When you experience forgiveness in face of your sin you have tasted redemption.

- courage in fear
- healing in sickness
- intimacy in loneliness
- victory over temptation
- joy in grief.

And of course so many of our favorite stories are pictures of this redemption that points to Jesus.

- Job overcomes suffering
- Joseph overcomes injustice
- Joshua overcomes fear
- Ruth her depression
- Esther her enemies
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego – trials/world

Each of these faced insurmountable odds – great pain and suffering and grief. For each their grief was turned to joy. Each gives us a foretaste of resurrection – of life springing forth from death. These stories are not designed to highlight the

strength of men and their ability to cope, but rather to shine the light upon Christ who is our Deliver, our Savior, and our redeemer. He is the One who takes defeat and brings from its ashes victory.

With those thoughts then we are ready to consider the Words of Christ in our text today. *A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.* That statement was met with confusion from His disciples. *What is He talking about? What do these words mean?* They hesitated to ask. But Jesus knew their question so He said to them in verse 20 *Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy.*

If we are really going to understand the meaning of Jesus' words we have to understand this basic idea; the grief of the disciples was not simply to be overshadowed by some future joy. Jesus was not promising that He would do something so great that they would forget their grief. He was promising to take the very thing that caused their grief and make it the source of their joy.

If you've ever watched a mother and her young child, you have no doubt noticed that when a child is distressed over something, it is often very easy to distract them from their sorrow by getting them thinking about a new thing. (Bring out a new toy, make a funny face, give them Cheerio, etc)

Adults try and forget their troubles by distracting themselves with something pleasant so that, as we say, *we can forget our troubles for awhile.*

Jesus' disciples were grieved as the death and departure of Christ approached. Complicating their distress was the news Jesus had just given them about the approaching hatred of the world. But here Jesus is assuring them that their grief would

soon be turned to joy. But the analogy he puts in their mind is that of a mother giving birth. It doesn't take much for a mother to forget her pain once the baby is born. But it is also clear to every mother that the pathway to the arrival of their baby is the pain of childbirth. So the very thing that causes them anguish also the means of their joy.

That's the thing Jesus is teaching us here. The way of the cross is the means of our joy. So as Jesus prepared them for His death, He was assuring them that it would become the source of their life.

There are actually three ways that the death of Christ would bring them (and us) great joy.

1. Jesus' death would lead to His resurrection.

In a very literal sense, Jesus would die and be buried in a tomb, and the disciples would not see Him. This was the event that had the disciples so filled with grief and sorrow. It was also the event that would fill the world with joy. When Jesus died on the cross the world rejoiced. Finally they were done with Him. But while the world would rejoice, the disciples would weep and lament.

But then something remarkable would happen. As Jesus puts it here – *then you will see Me*. In other words, Jesus would be resurrected from the dead. And this is the foundation of the gospel. Without the resurrection we have no faith, no life, no hope, no joy, no reason to believe. So at the resurrection our grief is turned to joy.

In talking about this passage, Boice points out that with the exception of these few passages in the gospels where men are looking ahead to the cross, nowhere else in the whole New Testament is anything negative ever said about the cross. No where do you find the crucifixion spoken of in terms

of grief or sorrow. The cross is always reflected upon with language of victory and joy and hope.

But remember the reason for that. The reason is not because the disciple received back their friend whom they thought they'd lost. The reason is not because their dreams that were shattered were then restored. The joy was not because they could say to their enemies, *I told you so*. The reason for joy when Jesus rose from the dead is because in Christ's death and resurrection our sins were paid for. It's the atonement that turns our grief into joy! The joy of Christ's death is that it was the only means for our salvation. The very reason for our grief (His death), became the very reason for our joy. In that death our sins were paid for. Your guilt is gone. And so, here is the first application for us. Know and be thankful for your pardon and redemption. No matter what happens to you, if you are in Christ, you are forgiven. The foundation for your joy is not your circumstances. It is your freedom from sin.

Once the disciples understood that unfathomable truth, they were no longer sorrowful. *A little while and you will no longer see me; and again a little while, and you will see Me*. Those words were fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ.

But there is a second way in which these words of Christ would be fulfilled.

II. Jesus' death would lead to the giving of the Holy Spirit.

There was a sense in which the disciples could not fully see and understand Christ until He sent them the Holy Spirit. They could see Him physically, but there was still so much they didn't understand. We've spent a few weeks studying the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Turn back to John 14:16-

19 and review what Christ taught us there. *I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. **After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also.***

When the Holy Spirit came, the disciples could again see *Christ*. Through the Spirit, Christ lived in them, just as through the same Spirit Christ lives in us and reveals Himself to us.

And so what does this mean for you? It means that because you have the Holy Spirit in you, you have the power of Christ. That should give you great hope for the present. Victory over temptation is not some pie in the sky dream. It is what you ought to rightfully expect and experience. Because the Spirit lives in you, you can persevere through your trials. When you experience grief and pain and sorrow, you also have the power and the strength and the presence of God with you. Because of that you can *consider it all joy my brethren when you encounter various trials*. Having grief turned to joy is not possible for a non-Christian. The world has no way of understanding how the very source of grief could be anything other than what it seems on the surface – bad, evil and undesirable. But for you, a greater truth is here. The very source of your sorrows is the thing God promises to use to bring great glory to Himself, and to bring good things to you. So we rejoice in our trials.

When Jesus said *you will no longer see Me, and again a little while and you will see Me*, we find those words fulfilled in the coming of the Holy Spirit.

There is one other place we will find these words fulfilled.

III. Jesus' death would lead to His return.

Think back to the words of comfort Jesus spoke at the beginning of chapter 14. *Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.*

On the day of His ascension into heaven we read these words: (Acts 1:9-11) *And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven. A little while and you won't see Me – a little while and you will see Me.*

And finally think about what John wrote in his first letter. I John 3:2, 3: *Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because **we will see Him just as He is.** And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

When you think about having your grief turned to joy, there is no greater, more perfect, more eternal hope for that than the consummation of all things. When we see Jesus again, all of our pain will be removed. All of our tears will be gone. All of

the suffering will come to an end. All of our questions will be answered. All of our grief will be turned to everlasting joy.

And so as we conclude this morning we need to understand that the cross is central to our lives. But so is the resurrection. You will experience suffering. But just as the death of Christ on the cross was the greatest horror of all history, so was that very event the greatest act of love ever committed. Without it you would have no joy. As a Christian you can see Christ. You know He is risen from the dead. And because of it your sins are forgiven. He dwells in you through the Holy Spirit. And because of it, you have power to live for His glory today in your sufferings. And one day you will gaze in His eyes, face to face. Your hope for the future a future with no more sorrow. Because of these things you can now sing with great meaning Psalm 30.

You now have turned my sorrow
To dancing full of joy;
You loosened all my sackcloth
And girded me with joy.
To You sing psalms, my glory,
And never silent be!
O Lord my God, I'll thank You
Through all eternity.