

Sorrow Turned to Joy

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[0 : 00] Great to be with you again and to continue our studies in John chapters 15 and 16. Our politicians like to control the narrative, the story that's being told.

We will each have our personal narrative, our personal story. Stories are really important. The stories that we tell make sense of our world, they make sense of our lives.

And the way that we read our own story and the way that we tell our own story tells us a lot about ourselves and the way that we see the world. Stories help us to make sense or sometimes they explain the fact that we can't make sense of our lives and the world around us.

How do you read the story of the world at the moment? It's not a good story, I think. As daily, I don't know about you, but every time I open up the newspaper or turn on the news, it's kind of with a bit of a sense of dread at what might be happening next.

It's not a good story. What about you? How do you read the story of your life? There's a famous quote by Shakespeare talking about some people see their lives as only a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

[1 : 43] That's a pretty bleak kind of story. Sometimes we might feel that we started out in one story and we've ended up in another.

Might have started out well and it's suddenly taken a bad turn. And I think for many, life can actually turn out to be a bit of a tragic story.

It can start well with a promising beginning, but we find there's a fatal flaw in ourselves and the world, which means that everything we touch starts to turn to dust.

It can be a life full of constant hopes dashed, disillusionment, despair, a retreat into whatever it takes to simply get through the day. Feelings of powerlessness before forces beyond our control, looking around for someone to blame and eventually it ends and the rest is silence.

Now, maybe it's not that bad, but that's the trajectory that we feel we're on. A life is a tragedy. And I think the disciples might have felt a little bit like this in our passage today.

[2 : 51] I think when they first met Jesus, when he first called them to himself, they thought they were in a great story. They realized that Jesus was the Messiah. They started to get the dim realization that he was the one to bring in God's kingdom.

And this is a great story. It's a triumphant story. In fact, some of them even started talking about who's going to get the best places in the kingdom when the kingdom comes, who's going to sit at Jesus' right hand and his left hand.

This seems like a good story to be part of, a glorious story, a dream. But in today's passage, we meet the disciples in what may be in the middle of what may be feels to them like a little bit of a nightmare.

That good story has suddenly turned sour. Jesus is talking about going away. And they don't quite understand what he means. It's serious. Things are starting to unravel.

They're starting to fall apart. Jesus is losing support. It looks like he is starting to talk about his impending death. That story that started out so promisingly now seems to be falling to pieces.

[4 : 01] They've heard plenty of promises from Jesus in John 14 to 16, and you've heard those. But it doesn't seem to be getting through. Jesus perceives that they are grieving, that they are sorrowful.

And in this passage, he moves to assure them and to reassure them. And he does this with the words in verse 16. He says, He said something like this on a number of occasions through the last couple of chapters.

I'm going away and then I'll come back in a little while. He's used this phrase and he'll use it a couple more times. Jesus meant to be reassuring when he said this.

But for some of the disciples, it only promotes further confusion and anxiety. Did you notice when that passage was read how much time was spent on this statement? It took up a lot of time. John draws attention to this. It's quite an elaborate statement. It takes two whole verses. Some of his disciples said to the other, What does he mean? And what does he mean? They kept asking, What does he mean? And that little phrase, A little while, A little while, Is repeated through the passage.

[5 : 12] And then even Jesus in verse 19, He sees what they wanted to ask him. And he says, Are you asking one another what I meant? When I said, In a little while you will see me no more. Then after a little while you will see me.

That's a phrase which we're meant to be paying attention to. What does Jesus mean? They don't understand what he means by a little while. They don't understand what he means by his going to the Father.

And perhaps we might be confused after hearing all that as well. There are two possibilities that come up when people think about interpreting what Jesus is referring to.

For many, it's the immediate events of his death and his resurrection. That he's talking about the death and the resurrection and ascension as one event.

And he's talking about that little while he will be killed on the cross. And then after a little while, they'll see him raised again. Other people think that what Jesus is talking about when he talks about the little while of going away and then seeing him again, is the time between his ascension and his second coming.

[6 : 17] So he will leave in the ascension and he will come back in the second coming. And that will be the little while. My money is actually on the first. I think the narrative, in the narrative, the death and the resurrection are the two events coming up.

That's what's been in view. In a little while, Jesus will be crucified. And then a little while after that, on the third day, they will see him come again.

Yes, Jesus will return at what is called the second coming. But that's not really in John's purview much through the gospel at all. Everything that Jesus says will apply to us as we wait for that.

We're in another little while period. But the first sense makes sense in this story. That Jesus is going away. He's going to disappear. He's going to die on the cross. And then he is going to come again.

What Jesus is saying, though, refers to more than their relief at simply seeing him alive again.

When he talks about their sorrow turning to joy, it won't only be because Jesus is alive, but it's also going to be because of all of that means.

[7 : 33] So let's see what he says. Jesus' basic point, as I just said, is that their sorrow will turn to joy because they will see Jesus again.

After all those little whiles, Jesus gets to the point in verse 20. Very truly, he says, amen, amen, in some older versions, I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices.

You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. Whenever we see that phrase very truly or amen, amen, it's a signal to us to pay special attention to this particular statement.

We always pay attention to Jesus' words, but this phrase puts extra emphasis on what is being said. Jesus acknowledges their current emotional state.

You will weep and mourn. In fact, they're already doing that. And he contrasts this with the rejoicing of the world. While they weep and mourn, the world is going to rejoice. And here, I think he is clearly referring to his upcoming death.

[8 : 40] In this gospel, the word weeping is only used in relationship to death. And we only see that phrase, that word used in the death of Lazarus back in chapter 11.

He's clearly referring to his death. The world will rejoice, of course, because it sees it's won a great victory in seeing Jesus killed.

The Jews will be happy to see a blasphemer executed. The Romans will be happy to see a potential rival king, also crucified and humiliated.

They will rejoice. But the disciples, of course, will mourn and will weep. But the great promise of that verse, of verse 20, is a great reversal.

God is the Lord of great reversals. He overturns things. He brings grief. Sorry, he will turn their disciples' grief into joy.

[9 : 37] He will reverse that. And then Jesus gives them, in order to help them to understand that, the very simple, the very clear illustration of a woman giving birth.

A period of intense pain, followed by the joy of a new life being born. Now, many here will actually experience this. Many of us may have just simply observed it from afar, but we get the truth of what is being said here.

So joyful is the result of a birth that the pain is forgotten. Though perhaps women here will tell us a little bit different. I don't know. You know what Jesus is saying, though.

This is an event where intense pain, intense suffering is followed by great joy, so much that the joy can take away the memory of the suffering.

This is an interesting illustration, not also just because it's easy to relate to, but Jesus uses a number of significant words to help us see the weight of this illustration.

[10 : 41] Jesus talks about the word that's translated time, because the woman gives birth, and because her time has come. That little word is the word for hour that is used through the gospel.

And the word hour is an important word through the gospel, because Jesus uses it as a timetable for his own action. He talks about the hour is coming, the hour is coming, and then in chapter 12, he says the hour has come for the Son of Man to be crucified.

It's an hour with expectation built into it, and he uses it here as well. This looks like a deliberate echo of that language. The image of a woman giving birth is also familiar from the Old Testament. In Isaiah chapter 26 and Isaiah 66, the birth of a child or the image of childbirth is used in connection with the coming of the kingdom of God, with the kingdom promises.

So it's more than just an illustration from life. This is an illustration from God's word from the prophets talking about the coming of the kingdom. And that phrase, a little while, that phrase very soon, is also used by Isaiah and Jeremiah to refer to God's future plans and how they will come in a little while, how they will come very soon.

[12 : 00] So this simple illustration is weighted. All these clues and phrases point to the significance of this simple illustration that Jesus is now talking about the implications of what his death is going to bring.

It is going to be bringing in the kingdom of God. It is going to be bringing in the fulfillment of God's promises. It is going to be bringing in all the weight of the Old Testament promises of God coming down to this very moment.

Jesus' point is simple. You may be feeling intense pain at the moment, but it is not worth comparing with the joy of the outcome, the joy of salvation that is to come.

And Jesus says this in verse 22. I will see you again and you will rejoice. And it's going to be a joy that no one can take away.

And as he's been explaining this, what he's saying is he will be restored to them beyond the grave. They will see him physically risen and resurrected. But this is only the beginning of everything he has been talking about and promising.

[13 : 12] We've heard Jesus promise a lot. Last week we heard him promise life with God, with the Father and the Son in the power of the Spirit. This will be a moment after Jesus has risen, when they receive that Spirit, when they will come to the Father, when the Father and the Son will come and make their home with the disciples, when the final stage of God's plan will come into being, all of this and more.

This is a great moment. That's why their sorrow can turn to joy. You will see me, Jesus says, but he's saying more than that. He will say, you will really see me when I come again.

You will understand me in a way that you have not been able to understand before. You will understand that seeing me means so much more than just simply having a friend back.

They will see Jesus physically, but after a little while, Jesus says, they will truly see Jesus as who he is and all that that means.

They will see that he is the divine Son of God. They will see that on the cross, it wasn't a moment of humiliation or it was a moment of humiliation, but at the same time, it was a moment of glory that he has lifted up, that he has risen, that he is giving the Spirit and that he has enabled a relationship with God where we can know that God is our Father and we can know in truth that we are his children.

[14 : 44] All of this and more. Jesus goes on to outline the consequences of this moment. And the first consequence we've already mentioned and that is joy.

I will see you again, you will rejoice and no one will take away your joy. Because of this moment, Jesus says, his disciples, his followers, us, can experience a joy that cannot be taken away.

Now, the New Testament and the Bible generally has a very unique take on joy. It is more than happiness, which kind of comes and goes in response to the events around us.

The Bible talks about a joy that is permanently ours. And it's not dependent on our suffering being taken away entirely. But what it means is that our suffering and the trials of this life are placed into the larger context of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

We see them in their place and we see a resolution coming because of the work of Jesus, because of the little while. And we have the joy of knowing that our suffering will be only for a little while with an eternity of time lying beyond that of joy and life with the Lord.

[16:01] Now, that doesn't mean that Christians walk around with a smile on their face and happy all the time. The world is simply not like that. But there is a joy and an assurance which undergirds that life, which cannot be taken away.

Perhaps summed up in the word hope. There is always hope for the believer. Joy in the meantime, also knowing that Jesus is with us in the midst of our suffering and that he has prepared a future for us beyond that suffering.

First consequence, joy. Second consequence, verse 23, their relationship with the father will change. And Jesus now starts to talk about the possibilities of communication with God, of access to God.

In that day, Jesus says, you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly, I tell you, my father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now, you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive. And there's that word again, your joy will be complete. The general point is that as a result of what Jesus has done, the disciples, the followers of Jesus, and that's us again, will have access to the father.

[17:15] This reflects one of the benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection. Before Jesus' death and resurrection, Jesus seems to be saying we had to go through a kind of a mediator to get to the father.

Jesus was the mediator between God and us. After that, we will have direct access to the father. I like to think it's a little bit like maybe the boss at work.

Sometimes, often, to get to the boss, you have to get through a fairly fierce secretary. And the secretary kind of holds the line there. But who is the person that can go straight into the boss's room?

Well, it's if the child of the boss turns up. They can just walk straight past the secretary and go in because the child is welcome, because they're the child of the father or the mother who is the boss at that particular time.

Because of what Jesus has done, we are the children of the boss. No need to go through the secretary. We can go straight in, into the office. We can go straight into the boss.

[18:18] We can go straight in and communicate and talk with our father. The specific application Jesus gives is asking. Jesus says they will no longer ask him anything, but they will be able to directly ask the father.

Now, Jesus has made a couple of promises like this back in chapter 14 that sound like this already. And they relate to prayer, to prayer in Jesus' name. And they're quite extravagant promises.

Do you remember them? Whatever you ask in my name, I will give you. And no doubt you thought a little bit about those. But here, Jesus is talking about two kinds of asking.

The first kind of asking, and he uses two different Greek words underlying it, very hard to bring out in the English. The first asking relates to the asking of questions rather than asking in prayer.

And what Jesus seems to be saying is that there's a kind of asking and there's a request, there's a question kind of asking and a request kind of asking. And both of them are now going to be possible directly to God.

[19:26] The disciples have asked Jesus many questions, full of questions, and will continue to do so. But Jesus points to a time in a little while where they will no longer ask him anything.

And this is the question kind of asking. They will have direct communication, direct access to God in the spirit. They will have many questions, but they will no longer need to be asked in the sense that they have seen Jesus die and rise.

They will be indwelt by the spirit. Jesus will be gone. They won't be able to ask Jesus, but they will be able to ask God through his word in the power of the spirit in the way that he has given his spirit to all his people.

All God's people have the spirit. We can teach one another now about the Lord. And so there is no need to ask Jesus at that point. We have God's word. We have God's spirit.

We can talk with God through his word and ask those questions, exploring the spirit, exploring the scriptures together, and the spirit works within us as we thought last week to illuminate them to us.

[20 : 38] So that's the first kind of asking. A new relationship with the father beyond which we are automatically born into because we are born into the era of the spirit. But then he says at the end of verse 24, and this is the second kind of asking, it's a repeat of those earlier ones, the father will give them whatever they ask in his name.

And this is the prayer kind of asking and links back to chapter 14 where he said the same thing. Perhaps we need just to simply remind ourselves what's going on here because sometimes this is misunderstood in the Christian faith.

Is God writing a blank check here where you can ask whatever you like and as long as you put the magic words in Jesus' name at the end of it, you can get it? Sounds too good to be true.

The key is that we are praying in the name of God and in the name of the father. When we pray in Jesus' name, when we pray in the name of the father, we are seeking to pray lovingly and obediently according to God's will and purposes for his glory and not our own will, not our own purposes, not our own glory, we are trying to ask in the name of God, that is, in all that he stands for.

We are trying to align our will with his. We pray this in the Lord's prayer. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. We want God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, not our will, and we pray not my will Lord, but yours be done.

[22 : 11] That is the essence of Christian prayer. I don't know if you thought about this, but I'm not sure that I would want every prayer I pray to be answered yes. If you knew that every prayer you prayed was going to be answered by God, what would that do to your prayer life?

I suspect it would kill it stone dead because who is wise enough to pray prayers that God would say yes to, every time. I don't know if you've seen the film Bruce Almighty.

It was a film where the central character was given the role of God for a week or so, and he had a computer, and all the prayers of the people came to him in terms of notes, and they just piled up and piled up and piled up, and he didn't know what to do, so he just pressed yes to every prayer that had been prayed.

And then the next scene in the movie was absolute chaos. As the selfish kind of desires and prayers of people came and they contradicted, the whole thing went to pieces because he said yes to everything.

There's a little scene in C.S. Lewis's book, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, where a number of people, there's a boat heading towards the end of the earth, and they suddenly realise they're on their way to the island where dreams come true.

[23 : 29] and so they think this is going to be wonderful, so they start rowing as fast as they can towards the island where dreams come true. And as they get closer, they start hearing people screaming in kind of pain and torment, and what they realise, of course, is that nightmares are also dreams.

The island where dreams come true may not be all that it's cracked up to be. And so it's the same with our prayers. I don't want every prayer I pray to be answered yes, because I'm just not that wise.

I want to learn how to pray in Jesus name, how to pray according to God's will, and then I'll be confident that our prayers can be answered.

Prayer is a learning thing as we learn the will of God. Anyway, I hope that's just a helpful reminder as we pray. When we pray in Jesus name, we're praying with the understanding that we are praying in the way that he provides under his authority.

To pray in the spirit elsewhere in the Bible means that the spirit facilitates and empowers our prayers and even speaks on our behalf, Romans chapter 8.

[24 : 37] And if we know all of this, what a wonderful privilege prayer is. What a wonderful privilege. Why wouldn't we continue to learn and be schooled in prayer? Both types of asking, the question asking and the request asking, are they speak of intimacy with God.

The relationship of a child to the father. The disciples will be able to hear God with understanding and that's our position, not complete understanding. We're all on a path to greater understanding, no question.

But we will be able to hear God with understanding and we can pray to God in accord with his purposes. The promise of Jesus going in a little while and then coming back is that our communications are heard and heeded by our heavenly father.

And so we should continue to listen to him. The third implication that Jesus gives is there in verse 25. And what he's saying is there is a time that is coming in a little while where he will speak plainly. Jesus says up until this point I've been speaking figuratively. I've been using images, I've been using illustrations and he seems to suggest this has been necessary but also not entirely clear. [25 : 59] Sometimes, and we see this regularly through the Bible, people misunderstand Jesus' illustrations because he is speaking from above and heavenly things and his audience is from below and understands from an earthly perspective.

There's sometimes a mismatch as Jesus tries to communicate. But Jesus says a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but I will tell you plainly about my father the implication that they will be able to receive it.

And again it seems that the death and resurrection of Jesus and the giving of the spirit makes all the difference. Last week Jesus talked about the spirit guiding the disciples into the truth of God and I think that's what he's talking about here.

So it's a promise again of access and clear communication and that's repeated in verse 26. The new thought though in verse 26 in verse 27 sorry I will ask the father on your behalf end of verse 26.

No the father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. The little extra thought Jesus here gives us is the reminder that all of this is happening all of these benefits joy communication plain speaking all of this is coming about because of the father's love for his disciples.

[27 : 22] The father's love for his children. The father's love for his followers. In John 3 16 we heard that God loves the world but here the disciples hear that God loves you and we can hear the same thing.

God loves the world yes but God also loves you and you and you. He loves each one of us. He loves us. The words each of us can hear today.

The father loves his followers. The father loves his children. He loves us because we love the son and believe in him. Though elsewhere we also hear that we love the son because of the prior love of the father and the son.

It's kind of an eternal feedback loop of love. We love because he loved. He loves because we love. It keeps feeding back and back and back on itself. The wonderful truth here is that what we have access to God through our love and our trust and belief in the son.

And this is the overall message of course of John's gospel. It's an incredible thought to know that we are loved by God. I don't think we can fully grasp it. I don't think we will ever fully grasp it until we see the Lord face to face.

[28 : 38] But in the meantime we pray as Paul prays in Ephesians 3 that we may know the love of God better and better and grasp that incredible truth. Verses 29 to 30 are a little bit, they're interesting aren't they?

After all of this the disciples say we finally get it. We say now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that you know all things.

You do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God. And it's interesting the disciples say this because Jesus has just been saying to them in a little while you will know this.

So once again we see the disciples not quite get it. All this is going to be a little while they're saying no no we've got it now. We've got it now. And so this is a bit of a bit of a head scratcher.

I'm sure they were sincere but what it does it shows the difficulty of understanding Jesus words before the coming of the spirit. So Jesus reply I think reads as a rebuke in verse 31.

[29 : 44] Do you now believe Jesus replied and what he says is what he means is you still haven't quite got it. I think that's what he's getting at. Do you really believe maybe they've gotten half of what Jesus said they believe he came to the father but they haven't really got the second half when he says now I'm leaving the world and going back to the father and all that means that that is that's

that's more to come.

Perhaps we can't really blame them but there it is. Jesus predicts the time when these this not getting it will be shown by the fact that they are going to be scattered.

Hour is coming. There's that word again. The time or the hour is coming when you will be scattered each to your own home. You will abandon me.

You just said you believe all these wonderful things about me but you are going to run away at the next sign of trouble and that's of course this happens. They abandon Jesus on the cross.

In their grief, in their fear and their hopelessness they will abandon Jesus and leave him all alone. A nightmare story. But Jesus said he will not abandon them in chapter 14 but he knows that they will abandon him.

[31 : 00] And Jesus says that however I will not be alone. You will leave me alone yet I am not alone for my father is with me. Jesus knows his father is always with him even through the events of the cross.

Even when the whole world thinks that Jesus has been conquered the presence of the father with Jesus declares exactly the opposite. And so it may be a moment when the disciples think that all actually has been lost.

All has gone to dust. A nightmare, a tragedy but Jesus promises this is not so. And his last words emphasize that.

I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble but take heart I have overcome the world.

Jesus promises peace and victory. It may look like a disaster. It may look like everything has fallen apart. But God is going to do that great reversal and he is going to bring peace and victory out of tragedy.

[32 : 12] He is going to bring triumph out of tragedy. And he has said all of this so that the disciples may have peace and eventually they will of course. And he urges them to take heart to be courageous, to be firm, to be resolute even though he knows they won't be.

But to be comforted by the words and we can be comforted by those now. I have overcome the world. The light will overcome the darkness. It will shine in the darkness. The cross will prove to be the victory of Jesus and not his demise.

And it will prove to be the judgment of the world. Not a moment where the world should rejoice. courage can be found in Christ and his promises if what Jesus says here is true.

We find courage not in our own resources. We find courage in Jesus and his promises. So what does all this mean as we reflect on it now some 2,000 years or so later?

Well, with the proper object of faith, understanding what Jesus has done, we can be grounded in a greater and more powerful reality than what we see apparently going on around us.

[33 : 32] Jesus here has promised those disciples that their grief can turn to joy. That promise is also good for us. Nightmares can give way to dreams.

Nightmares can give way to dreams. Grief can turn to joy. There is a better story that we can tell ourselves. There is a better story that we can tell our world.

There is a better story for our lives. And it's promised by the resurrection. We don't sugarcoat the fact that things have gone wrong. In fact, the Bible is brutally honest about that.

On Easter Friday, of course, we remember an event when an innocent man was unjustly tried and executed. Things went horribly wrong. Injustice and all the rest. But we call it Good Friday.

The cross in the goodness of God becomes a symbol of eternal life, not death. And in the light of the cross and the resurrection, all grief and all affliction is to use Paul's words, light and momentary.

[34 : 37] And too true joy to be consummated has begun. The cross gives birth to new life. It gives birth to fellowship with God.

It enables true joy and peace. To become a Christian, a believer, doesn't remove all life's problems, but it does give us an explanation and it offers hope in the face of all life's problems.

The resurrection promises that our lives can be lived as a comedy in the Shakespearean sense and not a tragedy. We don't live in Macbeth or Hamlet.

We live in all's well that ends well. That's the Christian promise. Our lives can be a comedy. Lots of troubles, no doubt, but a good ending.

I don't know if you've seen the film The Shawshank Redemption. It's an interesting film. There's a lot of Shawshank before you get to the redemption. And that's the Christian life. It's a long, hard,

sometimes for people, almost intolerable life.

[35 : 42] But there is a redemption. There is a freedom. There is joy. Grief can turn to joy. I guess maybe I can sum this up in the words that my children used to love to hear.

When they would come home crying from some injustice suffered at school, or they would wake up in the middle of the night and come into our bedroom to tell us about the monsters under the bed.

They only wanted to hear one thing, and they're the words the resurrection whispers to us.

The words that the resurrection shouts to us, the words that Jesus shouts to us, everything's going to be all right. That's what this passage is telling us.

Our grief can turn to joy. Everything is going to be all right. In fact, better than all right, everything is going to be wonderful. Let's pray and thank the Lord.

Father, we thank you for the Lord Jesus and his words to those disciples long ago, which become words to us. We thank you that he promised that their grief would turn to joy, and he made good on that promise through his resurrection from the dead.

[36 : 48] We thank you for all that that resurrection means, for our access to you, for the joy that we have, for the hope of glory, for knowing that in the end everything will be all right.

Father, you know, as we sit here today, the stories of our lives. Some of us are living well, others are living in living nightmares, perhaps.

But help us all to understand that our lives need not be lives of tragedy, ending in disaster, but because of your great goodness, the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the comfort of the Spirit, they can be a comedy.

That all's well, that ends well, that everything will be all right, and we pray that you will give us faith to trust these promises. In Jesus' name, amen.