
JOHN: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

FROM SORROW TO JOY

A message presented by Pastor Marc Minter
to First Baptist Church of Diana, TX on August 19, 2018

INTRODUCTION

The Bible shows us a picture of awful sorrow, and it gives us hope for lasting joy in the midst of troubling times. In fact, Jesus speaks directly to the plight of His disciples, dealing with real sorrow and speaking of never-ending joy. In this we may learn that joy is found, not in avoiding sorrow, but by pressing into God through Christ, eagerly awaiting the fullness of His promises in the gospel.

MESSAGE MADE SIMPLE

“You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you... Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you... Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (Jn. 16:22-24).

What do you do with your sorrow? Such a question presupposes that you have at some point experienced sorrow. Can a person be so bold as to make this assumption? It seems inevitable in this world, doesn't it, that everyone will enter unhappy times? So, what do you do with your sorrow?

Some people embrace their sorrow, even losing themselves in it, so much that they identify themselves with the feeling of grief. Other people heartily brush off their sorrow, refusing to lose themselves, simply continuing on with their lives. Still others deny their sorrow, rejecting the idea that a happy person such as themselves could ever experience soul-gripping distress.

The Bible shows us a picture of awful sorrow, and it gives us hope for lasting joy in the midst of troubling times. In fact, Jesus speaks directly to the plight of His disciples, dealing with real sorrow and speaking of never-ending joy. In this we may learn that joy is found, not in avoiding sorrow, but by pressing into God through Christ, eagerly awaiting the fullness of His promises in the gospel.

JOHN 16:16-24 (ESV)

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’?”

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.

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.

THE POINT I’M AIMING AT TODAY

Jesus stares into the face of sorrow and imparts joy to His followers in fellowship with Him through prayer.

MESSAGE OUTLINE

(1) ACTUAL AND AWFUL SORROW

(2) THE REASON FOR JOY

(3) PRAYER FOR JOY, UNTIL HE COMES OR UNTIL I GO

(4) SOME APPLICATION QUESTIONS

(1) ACTUAL AND AWFUL SORROW

- **What did Jesus mean by “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me” (v16)?¹**
 - Let’s first concentrate on the initial phrase: “A little while, and you will see me no longer...”
- **Jesus is about to (1) die and (2) leave His disciples behind.**
 1. Jesus is about to die
 - “Truly, truly, I say to you, **you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice**” (v20)
 - “**You**” and “**the world**”
 - **The world:**
 - Does “**not know the Father, or Christ**” (v3)
 - They “**hate both Christ and the Father**” (v24)
 - They “**love [their] own,**” worldly people (v19)
 - They “**hate**” Christ's followers (v18)
 - **You:**
 - Are chosen by Christ “**out of the world**” (v19)
 - Are Christ’s followers, “**not of the world**” (v19)
 - “**You will weep and lament [at my death], but the world will rejoice**” (v20)

¹ There is a textual variant here among a small number of manuscripts. The King James Version (KJV) includes the phrase, “*because I go to the Father*” at the end of v16, while other translations do not. The manuscript evidence does not support the inclusion of this phrase (i.e. it is not original), and this is why the later translations do not include it. Furthermore, one can easily see why a scribe might have included it by accident or because of a well-meaning but fool-hearted intent to harmonize. One explanation is that a scribe may have mistakenly copied the verse endings. v17 repeats v16, and does in fact include the additional phrase, “*because I am going to the Father*” as part of the question the disciples asked. As he was copying the text, a scribe might have simply mistaken the ending of v17 as the ending of v16 as well, and thus included the phrase in both verses. Another reasonable explanation for the variant is that a scribe may have imagined some incompatibility between verses 16 and 17 without the additional phrase in verse 16. In an effort to harmonize these two verses, a scribe may well have added the phrase he perceived to be missing from v16. In either case, the addition is to be attributed to scribal error and not to the original author. Because God is the ultimate author of all true Scripture (i.e. the original autographs), I unashamedly reject scribal additions.

2. Jesus is about to leave His disciples behind

- “When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow **because her hour has come... So also you have sorrow now**” (v21-22)
 - Like a mother entering the impending grief of childbirth, these disciples know something of what is coming, and they do not want it...
 - Carson: “The disciples still have no category to allow them to make sense of a Messiah who would die, rise from the dead, and abandon his people in favour of ‘another Counsellor’ (14:16).”²
- Don’t we notice here the **biblical pattern or theme** of “**sorrow before joy**” or (better yet) “**from sorrow to joy**”?
 - The **only time I can remember** when **joy preceded sorrow** in the Bible is **Genesis 1-3!**
 - Speaking from his own experience, the Psalmist proclaimed, “**Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning**” (Psalm 30:4–5).
 - During a time when Israel was about to face an extended period of judgment, Isaiah spoke the words of God to them, saying, “**In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,**’ says the LORD, your Redeemer.... ‘For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but **my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,**’ says the LORD, who has compassion on you” (Isaiah 54:8–10).
 - Don’t we see the Bible presenting us a God who is NOT intent on **preserving His people by keeping them from grief and sorrow?**

² Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 543). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

- Instead, don't we see **God meeting His people** in the midst of their sorrow?!
- Don't we find God **drawing His people** near to Himself... where they find unspeakable joy... by **leading them through dreadful paths**?!
 - Isn't this the idea the Apostle Paul was referring to when he said, "**I pleaded with the Lord** about this [difficulty], that it should **leave me**. But he said to me, '**My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.**' ...For the sake of Christ, then, **I am content** [*eudokō*: I delight in, I am well pleased] **with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong**" (2 Cor. 12:8–10).
- Friends, the disciples are sorrowful here... they were sorrowful at Jesus' death... and their sorrow is not to be discounted or diminished!
 - Have you bought into the silly American Evangelical idea that sorrow should not be part of the Christian experience?
 - Have you assumed that God does not want you to be sorrowful?
 - Let this sink in for a moment... Jesus told His disciples that weeping, lament, and sorrow was coming for them... and Jesus said that such things were going to lead them into joy afterward.
- Oh, friends, don't pretend that there are no songs of lament in Scripture!
 - Don't think that you have to avoid sorrow or pretend that you don't feel grief in order to be a good Christian.

Summary: **Jesus** told His disciples, "A little while and you will see me no longer..." and **this was the cause of actual and awful sorrow...**

Segue: **So, what reason does Jesus give them to expect joy afterward?**

(2) THE REASON FOR JOY

- **What did Jesus mean by “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me” (v16)?**
 - Let’s hear Jesus’ own explanation in v20-23: “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. 23 **In that day you will ask nothing of me...**”
 - OK... so, Jesus told them that sorrow would turn to joy, but why... when... how?
 - If their sorrow is caused by Jesus’ death and departure, then what reason will they have to be joyful later?
 - In my preparation this week, I read about and considered at least three ways we could interpret what Jesus is saying in this passage.
 1. Jesus’ resurrection
 2. Jesus’ ascension and coming of the Holy Spirit
 3. The final resurrection of all believers

1. The Reason for Joy? **Maybe Jesus’ Resurrection...**

- If you are thinking about Jesus’ resurrection, you’re in good company.
 - Ian Hamilton and D.A. Carson argue that Jesus is referring to His resurrection.
- There are certainly **good reasons to think** about Jesus’ **resurrection** as the occasion for **moving from sorrow to joy**.
 - Jesus’ “**hour has come**,” just **like a woman in labor** (v21), and this was **His hour of death**... but not just physical death... He was about to **endure the full wrath of God** against sinners.

- Considering the analogy, **what is the joyful consequence** of Jesus' death?
 - This is the way the prophet **Isaiah** speaks on the subject: **"It was the will of the LORD to crush him** [the suffering servant / the Messiah]; **he** [the LORD] **has put him** [the Messiah] **to grief; when his** [the Messiah] **soul makes an offering for guilt, he** [the LORD] **shall see his** [the Messiah] **offspring; he** [the LORD] **shall prolong his** [the Messiah] **days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his** [the Messiah] **hand. Out of the anguish of his** [the Messiah] **soul he** [the LORD] **shall see and be satisfied; by his** [the LORD] **knowledge** [or wisdom] **shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he** [the Messiah] **shall bear their iniquities"** (Isaiah 53:10–11).
 - In other words, **the Messiah will suffer, bearing the iniquities or sins of the many, but out of His anguish, the LORD's justice will be satisfied, and the many will be counted righteous.**
- Simply put, Jesus' **resurrection** was the **vindication** of Jesus' person and work... It was the **Father's ultimate endorsement** of all that Jesus says and does.
 - And did the disciples **"rejoice"** at this (v22)?
 - You bet, they did!
 - When **Jesus appeared to the disciples**, John explicitly tells us that they (ἐχάρησαν) **"rejoiced"** (20:20).

2. Reason for Joy? **Maybe Christ's ascension and arrival of the Spirit...**

- Could it be that Jesus is telling them that their **movement from sorrow to joy** will be at **His ascension** to the Father and **the coming of His Spirit** on the day of Pentecost?
 - John MacArthur says, yes.

- He argues that the disciples **experienced the fullness of joy** (your hearts will rejoice [v22])... the **permanence of joy**... (no one will take your joy from you [v22])... and the **fullest understanding of the reason for joy** (In that day you will ask nothing of me [v23]) when they were **filled with the Spirit of Christ** (the Holy Spirit).
 - Furthermore, the **emphasis** we place on the **resurrection of Christ** is right and good, but there is even more that **we often forget to emphasize** when it comes to **the arrival of God's Spirit**.
 - **As Barry talked about last week**, the coming of God's Spirit upon all God's people (as happened at Pentecost) was a really big deal!
 - Peter said, "This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, **and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit**, he has poured out this that **you yourselves are seeing and hearing**... Let all the house of Israel **therefore know for certain** that God has made him both **Lord and Christ**, this **Jesus whom you crucified**" (Acts 2:32–36).
- Simply put, because Jesus has **not only been raised** from the dead (Acts 2:32), but He is **right now seated** on the universal **throne** of power (Acts 2:33)...

because Jesus is **right now at work** in the world, by the power of His Holy Spirit (Acts 2:47; cf 2:36)...

and because Christ is **right now with His people** wherever they go (Matt. 28:18-20),

...there is **real and lasting joy** in every disciple of Christ!

3. Reason for Joy? **Maybe the final resurrection...**

- There is such joy to be found in **both of these explanations so far**, and we **can** and **should ponder** these stabilizing truths, which will no doubt **produce joy in all who believe** and **follow Christ**.
 - What Christian doesn't find **solace** in the fact that **Christ has conquered death**?
 - **Must I fear my own death?** NO! Christ has suffered and triumphed over death already, and He has promised me life in the face of death.
 - **Must I fear God's justice?** NO! Christ has been counted guilty and shameful under God's law, so that I (though I am a repugnant sinner) am now counted righteous and clean in Christ my Savior.
 - And what Christian doesn't **experience great joy** in the fact that Christ's **Spirit personally indwells** all His people?
 - **Must I fear lonely obscurity?** NO! I am a child of the King, indwelt by His very presence.
 - **Must I fear helpless vulnerability in the world?** NO! Christ rules and reigns over all things, and He is wisely building His Kingdom as He sees fit.
- Ah, but don't **both of these point** to something **greater** still... that is **yet to come**?
 - Isn't Christ's **resurrection** a **foretaste** of the **resurrection** that is to come for **all those in Christ** (1 Cor. 15:20-22)?
 - Isn't the **coming of the Holy Spirit** a **foretaste** of that **glorious reunion** when **all Christians** will assemble in the presence of Ancient of Days?
 - Don't we look forward to that day when **a voice** will ring out from the **timeless throne**, saying, "**Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man**" (Rev. 21:3)?

- And, isn't there **still regular occasion** for **sorrow** and **lament** in **this world**?
 - Aren't there still **many occasions** for us to join our voices with the psalmist when he said:
 - “**How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile [scorn or abuse] your name forever?**” (Ps. 74:10)
 - “**O LORD, how long shall the wicked... how long shall the wicked [triumph]?**” (Ps. 94:3)
 - “**How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?**” (Ps. 13:1)
 - “**Return, O LORD! How long [how much longer]? Have pity on your servants!**” (Ps. 90:13)

- **And, what do we do** with 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**” (v22)
 - **Has Christ's promise failed!?**
 - I don't think so... I think the ultimate reason for joy is the fulfillment of all that Christ is doing and saying here.
 - I think the **ultimate reason** for joy is the **final resurrection... glorification... what theologians used to call “the beatific vision.”**

 - Friends, we will frequently bump up against an “**already, not yet**” concept in the promises of the gospel.
 - And doesn't the “not yet” part of this joy-filled passage make us **long for the day** when Christ's **resurrection becomes ours**?
 - Doesn't the “not yet” reality of sorrow in this world **provoke a longing** in us to **see Christ** face-to-face?

- Friends, **if your expectation to avoid** sorrow and **grief is high** today, then remember that **we have not yet arrived** at our **final destination**.
- If your **sorrow** and **grief seem overwhelming** today, then remember that **Christ** has **already conquered death** and He **already dwells intimately** with **His people**.

Summary: **Jesus** promised **joy in the midst of sorrow** for all those who look for **joy in Him**.

Segue: **But, how does Jesus call His disciples to find joy while they remain in the “not yet”?**

(3) PRAYER FOR JOY, UNTIL HE COMES OR UNTIL I GO

- ***Jesus commands His disciples to pray***
 - “Truly, truly, I say to you, **whatever you ask of the Father** in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. **Ask**, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (v23-24)
 - For the **4th time** in this “*farewell discourse*,” Jesus calls His disciples to pray.
 - “**13 Whatever you ask in my name**, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. **14 If you ask me anything** in my name, I will do it” (John 14:13–14).
 - “**7 If you abide in me**, and my words abide in you, **ask whatever you wish**, and it will be done for you. **8 By this my Father is glorified**, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (John 15:7–8).
 - “**16 You did not choose me**, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that **whatever you ask the Father in my name**, he may give it to you” (John 15:16).

- And, note closely the command in our passage today:
- “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**” (John 16:23–24).

▪ **5 things we learn about prayer from these verses:**

1. Prayer should be “in the name of Jesus Christ” (14:13, 14, 15:16, 16:23, 24).
2. Prayer should include “asking for anything... whatever” (14:13, 14, 15:7, 16, 16:23).
3. God (both Father and Son) wants to “give... whatever you ask for” in prayer (14:13, 14, 15:7, 16, 16:23, 24).
 - “Truly, truly, I say to you, **whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you**” (v23).
4. God (both Father and Son) is “glorified in/by doing/giving what you ask for” in prayer (14:13, 15:8).
 - “**Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son**” (14:13).
5. Prayer is for “the filling up of your joy” (v24).

• **Why don't we pray (like this)?**

- Maybe because we don't understand the gospel.
 - Let us pray “in the name of Jesus Christ”
- Maybe because we don't realize God is attentive to everything about us.
 - Let us pray, “asking for anything... whatever”
- Maybe because we don't think God actually want us to have good things.
 - Let us pray as though God wants to “give... whatever [we] ask for”
- Maybe because aren't seeking God's glory in prayer.
 - Let us pray so that God is “glorified in doing/giving what [we] ask”

- Maybe because we don't think God is the only one who can bring us joy.
 - We suffer from “love this comfortable world” syndrome.
 - We awake to our personally selected sounds from our own electronic device, which rests upon our cluttered night-stand. We arise from our comfortable beds, and (after a quick stop by the bathroom) we make our way to the kitchen, where refrigerators and pantries and cabinets are ready to yield a bounty of food for our enjoyment. We pour our fresh coffee from an automated coffeemaker, and some people even ruin it by adding sugar and creamer to their heart's content.
 - All of this is an example of the luxuries we enjoy during the first 15 minutes of our day...
 - Joy? I have all the joy a person could want! Right?
 - Well, maybe if I don't have all the joy I want, I at least know how to get it... more of these things that bring me the joy I have now.
 - Oh, but when tragedy strikes... then we realize just how insufficient “this comfortable world” is to give us joy.
 - John Calvin said, “It is therefore necessary that we should be subject, from first to last, to the scourges [or afflictions or torments] of God, in order that we may from the heart call on him; for our hearts are enfeebled by prosperity, so that we cannot make the effort to pray.”
 - Let us pray, “**that [our] joy [real joy... in Christ] may be full**”

Main point:

Jesus stares into the face of sorrow and imparts joy to His followers in fellowship with Him through prayer.

(4) SOME APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Are you sorrowful today?

- a. Are you sorrowful because you are looking for hope only in this life?
- b. Are you sorrowful because you are going through a time of real pain, loss, or trouble?
 - i. What are you doing with your sorrow?
 - ii. What is Christ calling you to do with it today?
- c. Are you sorrowful because you have unrealistic / unbiblical expectations about life in this world?
 - i. Is your eye so much on the here and now... your own wants... that you have adopted unmeetable expectations?

2. Will you pray?

- a. Will you pray in the name of Christ?
- b. Will you pray about everything?
- c. Will you pray as though God wants to give you every good thing?
- d. Will you pray so that God will be glorified in giving you what you ask?
- e. Will you pray so that your joy will be full in Christ?

3. Will you pray with an eye on His coming and your going?

- a. Will you pray... pressing into your good heavenly Father and your gracious Savior... remembering that there is coming a day when you shall see Him face-to-face?
- b. Will you live in this life as though there is another yet to come?

Main point:

Jesus stares into the face of sorrow and imparts joy to His followers in fellowship with Him through prayer.

SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Sorrow Turning Into Joy by Steven Cole

<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-86-sorrow-turned-joy-john-1616-24>

From Sorrow to Joy by John MacArthur

<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/43-91>

No One Will Take Your Joy From You by John Piper

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/no-one-will-take-your-joy-from-you>

Put in the Fire for the Sake of Prayer by John Piper

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/put-in-the-fire-for-the-sake-of-prayer>