

**Sorrow Turned to Joy**  
**John 16:16-24**  
**Part One**

When we mention the word “joy” what comes to our minds. Isn’t it the positive feeling associated with some kind of good fortune such an unexpected promotion at work, or the birth of a child?

Joy is a wonderful thing? It’s exhilarating but unfortunately joy is more often than not just an infrequent visitor rather than a constant companion. But it does not have to be that way for us as the disciples of Christ. In fact, joy can be and should be with us constantly. But how can this be? This question brings us back to our study in the Gospel of John.

So what has Christ been talking to His disciples about in **John 16:5-15**? Jesus has been talking to them about expectations. And what were those expectations? First of all, Christ told His disciples that after He left them and the Holy Spirit came to them that they could expect the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. We saw this in **John 16:5-11**. And what else had He told His disciples that they could expect? He also told them in **John 16:12-15** that they could expect that after He left them and the Holy Spirit came to them that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all the truth, which was the expectation that we considered last week. But we are still not yet done.

They could also expect something else. And what was this additional expectation? Jesus told His disciples in John 16:16-24 that sorrow would very shortly come to them but the sorrow that would come to them would ultimately become an enduring and abounding source of joy.

Let me read for you **John 16:16-24**. “**‘A little while, and you will no longer behold Me; and again a little while, and you see Me.’ (17) Some of His disciples therefore said to one another, ‘What is this thing He is telling us, ‘A little while, and you will not behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’?’ (18) And so they were saying, ‘What is this that He says “A little while”?’ We do not now what He is talking about.’ (19) Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, ‘Are you deliberating together**

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**about this, that I said, “A little while, and you will not behold Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me”? (20) Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy. (21) Whenever a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she remembers the anguish no more, for joy that a child has been born into the world. (22) Therefore you too now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you. (23) And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name. (24) Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full.”**

So what did Jesus in essence tell His disciples in these verses in terms of an additional expectation? This is what Jesus told His disciples. Jesus told His disciples in **John 16:16-24** that they could expect that sorrow would very shortly come to them, but the sorrow that would very shortly come to them would ultimately become a source of an enduring and abounding joy.

My hope as we examine this passage is not only to understand how the disciples past sorrow was in fact turned into an enduring and abounding joy but how that same joy even today still be our constant companion in the good times and in the bad times totally independent from whatever life might throw at us.

So, in beginning our examination of this passage, I would like us to first of all look at the perplexity (John 16:16-19).

Let us begin by reading **verse 16**. **“A little while, and you will no longer behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.”** Obviously Jesus is speaking to His disciples about a relatively imminent departure and an equally imminent subsequent return, but what departure and what return was He referring to?

Let us first of all consider the relatively imminent departure that He referred to or what He meant when He said, **“A little while, and you will no longer behold Me.”** So what did He mean? It could have meant a couple of things.

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It first of all could have meant that they would no longer see Him after His death, or it could have meant that they would no longer see Him after His ascension since both of these events, His death and His ascension, could be viewed as departures and both were obviously relatively soon. So which departure was He referring to, His death or His ascension?

When Jesus told His disciples that they in a little while would no longer behold Him He was referring to His death. Why would I say this? I would say this because of the type of pain that Jesus told His disciples in **John 16:20** that they would very shortly experience because of His departure. So what kind of pain was this? It was a deep-rooted pain. It could even be described as anguish. Let me read **John 16:20**. **“Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy.”**

So in light of the kind of pain described for us in **verse 20** what imminent departure would best explain this kind of pain? Christ’s death or Christ’s ascension? I don’t believe that this is a very difficult question to answer. The pain described in **verse 20** is best explained by Christ’s death.

But though we now understand what Christ meant when He told His disciples **“a little while, and you will no longer behold Me,”** we still do not know exactly what He meant when He told them **“and again a little while, and you will see Me.”** Did He mean that they would see Him after His resurrection, after the descent of the Spirit, or after Christ returned for His Church?

When Jesus told His disciples that again in a little while they would see Him He was referring to His resurrection. Why would I say this? I would again say this based on what Jesus told His disciples in **John 16:20**.

So let me read this verse for you one more time. **“Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy.”**

So what do we learn from this verse. We learn that the deep sorrow and the incredible pain that the disciples felt at His death would be transformed into what? Joy! So now let me ask you another question. In light of what we know from the Gospel record, what transformed the sorrow the disciples felt

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after Christ's death into joy? Wasn't it Christ's resurrection that transformed the sorrow of the disciples into joy?

Absolutely! And if you have any doubts about this let me read for you **John 20:19-20**. These verses describe the first encounter of the disciples with Christ, as a group, following His resurrection. And what do these verses say? **“When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ (20) And when He said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples therefore rejoiced when they saw the Lord.”** So what was the response of the disciples when they saw their risen Lord? They rejoiced!

Certainly there would be joy associated with the coming of the Spirit and certainly there will be joy associated with the second coming of Christ but neither of these comings can be linked to the transformation of the disciples anguish to a joyful celebration as the resurrection of Christ clearly did.

So what was the departure that Christ was referring to when He told His disciples that they in a little while would not behold Him? He was talking about His death. And what was the arrival that Christ was referring to when He told His disciples again in a little while would behold Him? He was talking about His resurrection.

This interpretation seems rather straightforward and should be rather easy to accept. But obviously this would have been not nearly so easy for Christ's disciples to appreciate or to understand, which will become all so very apparent to us as we continue on examine our text.

So let us now go to the next verse and see how the disciples responded to what Christ had just told them. Let me read for you **John 16:17**. **“Some of His disciples therefore said to one another, ‘What is this thing He is telling us, ‘A little while, and you will not behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and ‘because I go to the Father’?”** Obviously we can see that Christ's statement about “a little while” this and “a little while” that had confused His disciples (John 16:17).

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Notice that they repeat the words of Christ exactly except for one small but significant addition, which was **“Because I go to the Father.”** Jesus had not said this in **John 16:16**. He said it earlier that evening in **John 14:12, 28** as well as **John 16:10** but He had not said it **John 16:16**. Is this significant? Of course it is! When they wrongly connected what Jesus had just said to them in **John 16:16** with what Jesus had said to them earlier about His return to His Father it made it impossible for them to be anything but confused by the words of Christ in **John 16:16**. And this confusion led them, according to the Apostle John, to talk among themselves according to **John 16:18**.

So let me read this verse for you. **“And so they were saying, ‘What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is talking about.’”** So do you think Christ might be aware of their confusion and aware of the chatter that was taking place among them?

Of course! We see this awareness recorded for us in **John 16:19**. So what does this verse say? **“Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, ‘Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, ‘A little while, and you will not behold Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me’?”** This acknowledgment by Christ that His disciples were confused marks a transition in our passage. We will now go from the perplexity of Christ’s disciples in **John 16:16-19** to the promise (John 16:20-21).

So let me read for you **John 16:20**. **“Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy.”**

Jesus began this verse with the words, **“truly, truly.”** When Jesus spoke in this way He was calling His listeners to take what He was about to say very seriously. And what did He say?

**“Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament.”** The word “weep” (KLAIO) used here in John 16:20 can also be found in John 11:31, 33; 20:11, 13, 15 and is always used in connection with tears shed in response to a death.

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And the word “lament” (THRENEO) is used typically to capture the various expressions of grief including words that might be spoken or sung at a funeral service.

So how does Jesus respond to His disciples confusion about His earlier statement in **John 16:16**? He explains to them the effect of the departure upon them. And what was that? Jesus told them that the effect of that departure would be weeping and lamenting. And why would this be? Their response would be weeping and lamenting because the departure He had spoken of in **John 16:16** was in fact referring to His death.

So Christ was telling His disciples that His departure or His death would cause them a great deal of anguish. But that would not be the only response to His departure or His death.

So let us continue to read the verse. **“Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.”** Bummer!

This rejoicing by the world over His departure or His death would certainly serve to magnify the disciples’ grief. While the disciples would be weeping and lamenting their loss, brought on by His death, Jesus is telling His disciples that the world in fact would be celebrating His death. They would celebrate His death because they would see it as a great victory over their enemy.

But He is still not done. Yes, Jesus predicted that they would weep and lament while the world rejoiced over His departure but this is not all that He promised. Let us go back and once again read the verse. **“You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy.”**

Jesus not only promised His disciples that they would suffer sorrow after His departure but that the sorrow they would suffer would be turned into joy (John 16:20).

The disciples’ sorrow would be turned into joy when they of course saw their risen Lord just as I had already shared with you. But it was more than just the fact that they were able to see their risen Lord and know that He was alive. Their joy went beyond that. What do I mean by that?

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When the disciples saw Jesus alive it made it possible for them to look at His death not as a defeat but rather as a victory (Galatians 6:14). In other words, as a victory over sin and death which was confirmed for them by Christ's resurrection.

In other words, the resurrection of Christ demonstrated for His disciples and for us that His death on the cross of Calvary was sufficient to atone not only for our sins but for the sins of the entire world and to open a door to heaven through which any person desiring to be set free from sin could be saved by faith.

Yes, the death of Christ would in a little while cause the disciples to experience anguish but that very same death would later be the source of an enduring and abounding joy. Then Christ goes in **John 16:21** to give His disciples an illustration of this kind of amazing transformation when something that we initially see as a source of our pain is later seen as a source of our joy.

Let me read John 16:21 for you. **“Whenever a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she remembers the anguish no more, for joy that a child has been born into the world.”** Is this a true statement? Of course it is. No one looks forward to the pain of childbirth but people do look forward to the joy of childbirth. And so it was with the death of Christ. It would bring about an incredible amount of pain but it would eventually give way to an enduring and abounding joy that led the disciples to boast in it.

Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul in **Galatians 6:14**. **“But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”** The cross is not something to be ashamed of. It is something to be boasted in and what? REJOICE IN!

And then what does Jesus tell His disciples in **John 16:22**? **“Therefore you too now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you.”** Notice what Christ said to His disciples about this joy that would come to them. He told them that the joy that would come to them could not be taken from them. And nothing has changed for us.

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The joy that we have as a result of Christ's work on the cross will be enduring and everlasting (John 16:22). Our lives might fall apart, we might lose the joy that comes from our circumstances, but no man can ever undo the work of grace that God did in our lives through the cross. The work of the cross is irreversible and therefore the joy of the cross endures in our lives even up to this day.

So how are you feeling today? Are you dragging? Are you emotionally spent? Do you need a lift? And you would love to feel the exhilaration that comes when you feel that you are the recipient of some amazing good fortune? If this describes you and you are in fact a child of God, then I would encourage you to do a very simple thing. I would you encourage to look at the cross of Christ and think of how His death on your behalf has made it possible for you to be a child of God.

May God give us the grace to look on the cross in such a way that it would produce in us an enduring and abounding joy.