

### 33. The Disciples' Grief Will Turn to Joy John 16:16-33

Warm-up Question: Share a time in your life when you experienced great joy.

It was the last night before the Crucifixion of Christ. The disciples and Jesus had already spent the earlier part of the evening reclining around a table, enjoying their last supper before Jesus would give His life as the ransom payment for their sin. Judas had already left some time before to bring the soldiers and the personal guards of the High Priest and Sanhedrin. As we read the words below, it is likely that at the same time Jesus was sharing the words we are studying today, those soldiers were lighting their lamps before leaving for the Garden of Gethsemane. Chapters fifteen and sixteen of the Book of John, the last instructions to the eleven before the drama of the night, was spoken on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, just to the east of the Temple Mount on the Mount of Olives. We know that they were no longer in the Upper Room, because John, writing his gospel more than 35 years later, tells us that they left the Upper Room after the events he has written about in chapter fourteen (John 14:31).

When the Lord tells the eleven disciples that He will be leaving them, they are very sad and full of grief at his words (John 16:5-7). To comfort them, Jesus seeks to buttress their faith by telling them of the coming of the Holy Spirit and that after a little while they will see Him again.

<sup>16</sup>Jesus went on to say, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me." <sup>17</sup>At this, some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" <sup>18</sup>They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying." <sup>19</sup>Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'?" <sup>20</sup>Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. <sup>21</sup>A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. <sup>22</sup>So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. <sup>23</sup>In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. <sup>24</sup>Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. <sup>25</sup>"Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father." <sup>26</sup>In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. <sup>27</sup>No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. <sup>28</sup>I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father." <sup>29</sup>Then Jesus' disciples said, "Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech.

<sup>30</sup>Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.” <sup>31</sup>“Do you now believe?” Jesus replied. <sup>32</sup>“A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me. <sup>33</sup>“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” (John 16:16-33).

### **A Little While and You Will See Me (Verses 16-22)**

Jesus had told the disciples that His mission was to give His life as a ransom payment for the sin of the world (John 6:33). But what He was telling them now, that they would see Him in a little while, was a new concept for them. They knew of Enoch and Elijah being taken up to heaven without seeing death, and they had been there to witness the raising of Lazarus, but Lazarus would still die someday. It is easier for us at this point in time to understand as we look back at what happened, but for the disciples that night, how could it be possible for anyone to come back after death?

The following is a true story from the pages of the Manchester Evening Times in England:

Last Wednesday a passenger in a taxi heading for Salford station leaned over to ask the driver a question and gently tapped him on the shoulder to get his attention. The driver screamed, lost control of the cab, nearly hit a bus, drove up over the curb, and stopped just inches from a large plate window. For a few minutes everything was silent in the cab. Then the shaking driver said, "Are you OK? I'm so sorry, but you scared the daylights out of me." The badly shaken passenger apologized to the driver and said, "I didn't realize that a mere tap on the shoulder would startle someone so badly." The driver replied, "No, no, I'm the one who is sorry, it's entirely my fault. Today is my very first day driving a cab. I've been driving a hearse for 25 years."

Like the driver of that taxi, a dead person coming back to life was beyond the scope of their understanding. When you stop to think of it, it is a frightening thought. The disciples must have been puzzled by His words.

This passage in the Greek construction is what is known as a “double entendre”, a word or phrase that is open to two interpretations. Throughout scripture there are a number of such phrases that have a literal as well as a spiritual meaning. For instance, Paul in writing to the church at Ephesus about the marriage of a man and woman talks on two levels: <sup>31</sup>“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” <sup>32</sup>This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32). We see a similar example in the prophecy by Ezekiel directed to the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 28:12-18. At one level the prophet is speaking to an earthly king, but at the same time, it becomes obvious that the Lord is also talking to the person of Satan. In our passage in the Book of John, Jesus is

telling them in a double entendre that in a little while, after three days, he will see them again. But the double entendre meaning is that He will also see all believers when He comes again, and what a day that will be! The second letter of Peter tells us that with the Lord a thousand years is as a day (2 Peter 3:8), and the prophecy of Hosea tells us that, “after two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence” (Hosea 6:2). We will see Him again and rejoice at His coming.

### Why Would the World Rejoice at the Death of Christ? (John 16:20)

The world that Jesus is speaking about is this world’s evil system that is opposed to God. The spirit of this world seeks to rub out the name of God from all remnants of society, if we as the church will allow him through our inaction. Yes, I do believe that there was a scream of delight, and maybe even a party among the demonic hierarchy when the Lord Jesus gave up His Spirit on the cross. The unseen spirits that dominate and control the planet rejoiced as the Lord Jesus was brutalized and tortured before them. How their smiles and happiness changed as the Lord descended into the underworld of Sheol (Hebrew) or Hades, as it is known in the Greek language. They would have been enraged, as the impact of God’s perfect plan would begin to unfold before them. Jesus said:

... for, as Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so shall the Son of Man be in **the heart of the earth** three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40).

We are not told much about what happened while Jesus was in the underworld, but I would have loved to see the faces of Satan and his evil angels and demons as the Lord Jesus wrested the keys of death and Hades from our enemy the devil (Revelation 1:18). Maybe we will be able to see a replay of that event when we get home! There will be a turnaround to the way things are when our Lord and Savior returns. Three days later the disciples of Jesus experienced great joy when Jesus rose again from dead. In this same way, the pain and sorrow that we experience in this world will change to complete joy at the appearance of our Lord and Savior. The Lord refers to it as similar to the labors of a woman in childbirth (John 16:21). The pain and distress at going through the tribulation of this world will be forgotten at the joy of seeing the Lord and the complete transformation of our mortal bodies into our immortal bodies (1 Corinthians 15:51-53). You’ll be looking good that day if you are one of His!

### The New Day of Prayer (Verses 23-24)

In verse twenty-three, Jesus tells them what that new day of grace would usher in—access to the Father in prayer. While Jesus had been with the disciples for the three and a half years, they had sought to pray as He did (Luke 11:1). It seems likely that they felt ineffective in prayer until the coming of the Spirit. Perhaps they had even asked Him for specific prayers for family situations. Now, Jesus tells them that they will no longer ask Him for anything, for all disciples will have direct access through prayer to the Father,

He said, <sup>23</sup>In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name (John 16:23).

### What does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus?

Verse 23 is the last of four places in the farewell talk of Jesus, chapters 14-16, where the Lord talked about the new day of prayer (John 14:13-14; 15:7, 16; 16:23-26) in the Church age. Obviously, His mention of that day is not speaking of a literal day. The eleven disciples and we ourselves as believers are given wonderful promises concerning prayer. When Jesus died on the cross, at that very moment, inside the temple itself, while the priests were ministering, the curtain that separated man from God was torn from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:51). The curtain symbolized the separation between the Holy God and sinful humanity. When Christ died on the cross, God showed His people that a new way was now open between God and man through Christ's payment of His death in place of all those who will believe and trust Him. **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21)**. We can confidently come into the presence of God with a clean conscience because of our standing in Christ. The only condition is given in John 15:7, where Jesus said, **"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given to you."** To pray in His name is to pray for things for His sake, or in line with His purposes. Anything we ask for that agrees with the will of God (in my name) will be granted. Commentator Colin G. Kruse has this to say about prayer in the name of Jesus:

To ask in His name might mean to ask in a way that is in accordance with His character (in biblical times people's names reflected their characters). However, a more straightforward interpretation is that 'in Jesus name' means for Jesus' sake, *i.e.* in line with his desire and purpose to bring glory to his Father.<sup>1</sup>

In the Jewish mind at the time, and to many people today, God the Father is seen as angry because of sinful man. Jesus came to reveal the Father's heart for people. He said, **"He who has seen me has seen the Father"** (John 14:9). Jesus came to open the way for man to enjoy relationship with the Father, and for us to freely approach Him in prayer because of the finished work of Christ on the cross. It is as if we are asking the Father in Christ's stead, with His authority.

Isaiah the prophet had spoken in the past about this new time or day of prayer for the people of God. He said that there would come a time, when God would answer prayer even before they ask.

...they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. <sup>24</sup>**Before they call I will answer**; while they are still speaking I will hear (Isaiah 65:23-24).

What does the prophet mean by saying that God will answer prayer before it is asked?  
What do you think hinders prayer from being answered?

This is a story written by a doctor who worked in Africa:

“One night I had worked hard to help a mother in the labor ward; but in spite of all we could do, she died, leaving us with a tiny, premature baby and a crying two-year-old daughter. We would have difficulty keeping the baby alive, as we had no incubator (we had no electricity to run an incubator). We also had no special feeding facilities.

Although we lived on the equator, nights were often chilly with treacherous drafts. One student midwife went for the box we had for such babies and the cotton wool that the baby would be wrapped in. Another went to stoke up the fire and fill a hot water bottle. She came back shortly in distress to tell me that in filling the bottle, it had burst (rubber perishes easily in tropical climates). 'And it is our last hot water bottle!' she exclaimed. As in the West, it is no good crying over spilled milk, so in Central Africa it might be considered no good crying over burst water bottles, they do not grow on trees, and there are no drugstores down forest pathways. 'All right,' I said, 'put the baby as near the fire as you safely can, and sleep between the baby and the door to keep it free from drafts. Your job is to keep the baby warm.'

The following noon, as I did most days, I went to have prayers with any of the orphanage children who chose to gather with me. I gave the youngsters various suggestions of things to pray about and told them about the tiny baby. I explained our problem about keeping the baby warm enough, mentioning the hot water bottle, and that the baby could so easily die if it got chills. I also told them of the two-year-old sister, crying because her mother had died. During prayer time, one ten-year-old girl, Ruth, prayed with the usual blunt conciseness of our African children. 'Please, God' she prayed, 'Send us a hot water bottle today. It'll be no good tomorrow, God, as the baby will be dead, so please send it this afternoon.' While I gasped inwardly at the audacity of the prayer, she added, 'And while You are about it, would You please send a dolly for the little girl so she'll know You really love her?' As often with children's prayers, I was put on the spot. Could I honestly say 'Amen?' I just did not believe that God could do this. Oh, yes, I know that He can do everything; the Bible says so. But there are limits, aren't there? The only way God could answer this particular prayer would be by sending me a parcel from the homeland.

I had been in Africa for almost four years at that time, and I had never, ever, received a parcel from home. Anyway, if anyone did send me a parcel, who would put in a hot water bottle? I lived on the equator! Halfway through the afternoon, while I was teaching in the nurses' training school, a message was sent that there was a car at my front door. By the time I reached home, the car had gone, but there on the verandah was a large 22-pound parcel. I felt tears pricking my eyes. I could not open the parcel alone, so I sent for the orphanage children.

Together we pulled off the string, carefully undoing each knot. We folded the paper, taking care not to tear it unduly. Excitement was mounting. Some thirty or forty pairs of eyes were focused on the large cardboard box. From the top, I lifted out brightly colored, knitted jerseys. Eyes sparkled as I gave them out. Then there were the knitted bandages for the leprosy patients, and the children looked a little bored. Then came a box of mixed raisins and sultanas - that would make a batch of buns for the weekend. Then, as I put my hand in again, I felt the...could it really be? I grasped it and pulled it out. Yes, a brand new, rubber hot water bottle. I cried. I had not asked God to send it; I had not truly believed that He could.

Ruth was in the front row of the children. She rushed forward, crying out, 'If God has sent the bottle, He must have sent the dolly, too!' Rummaging down to the bottom of the box, she pulled out the small, beautifully dressed dolly. Her eyes shone! She had never doubted! Looking up at me, she asked, 'Can I go over with you and give this dolly to that little girl, so that she'll know that Jesus really loves her?' 'Of course,' I replied! That parcel had been on the way for five whole months, packed up by my former Sunday school class, whose leader had heard and obeyed God's prompting to send a hot water bottle, even to the equator. And one of the girls had put in a dolly for an African child - five months before, in answer to the believing prayer of a ten-year-old to bring it 'that afternoon.' 'Before they call, I will answer' (Isaiah 65:24).

What a wonderful answer to a very specific prayer. The joy that a child of God feels when a specific answer to prayer is received goes far beyond just the answer itself. It is also a reminder that God keeps His promises, that He is mindful of us, and that we will see Him again. Jesus comforts the hearts of the eleven disciples by saying that the Spirit, when He comes, will usher in this new day of prayer to the Father.

### **The Disciples Will Be Scattered**

Before they continue on their journey to the Garden of Gethsemane, He warns them again of what will happen in the hours ahead, that they will be scattered and leave Him all alone. Jesus, the Son of the Living God, knew exactly what would happen ahead of time. He wanted them to know that His love was not dependent on their faithfulness to stand with Him at His hour of trial. He knew that the enemy would be quick to step in with guilt and to point the finger of accusation at their failure to walk with Him. Zechariah the prophet, more than five hundred years beforehand, had spoken of the time when the shepherd would be struck and the sheep scattered:

***<sup>7</sup>“Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!” declares the Lord Almighty. “Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered (Zechariah 13:7).***

This strategy of the enemy at our failures is not unknown to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He is not called the accuser of the brothers for nothing (Revelation 12:10). The enemy would like us to believe that there is no going forward after any time we have failed to overcome sin in our lives. His voice is one of condemnation and finality to us. He whispers in our ears, “you’ve done it now, you have committed the unpardonable sin, you

have failed to be obedient to Jesus.” “You may as well completely abandon your faith now, because God does not love you.” What a lie out of the pit of hell! The Lord knew that when the going got tough, the disciple’s faith would collapse, but things would be different once the Spirit had come and fortified their hearts. Jesus saw beyond their falling away to the time when they would be conquerors over the world system, even in the midst of the persecution that they would go through. We are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37).

He went on to say, “**You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me (John 16:32).** Some would say that this is a contradictory statement by Jesus. They would remind us that while He was on the cross, He had cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me? (Matthew 27:46). Habakkuk the prophet had spoken of God in this way, “**Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong” (Habakkuk 1:13).** Paul the apostle wrote that the Lord Jesus, while He was on the cross, carried in His body your sin and mine. **God made Him (Christ) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).** It is entirely possible that as the sin bearing Lamb of God, the Father could not look upon His Son as He carried your sin and mine, but His presence, I believe, was still with His Son. Earlier on in His ministry, Jesus had said, “**when you have lifted up the Son of Man on the cross, then you will understand that I AM he...And the one who sent me is with me—He has not deserted me” (John 8:28-29).**

### **Trouble and Peace in this World (Verse 33)**

<sup>33</sup>“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” (John 16:33).

Every now and then I come across those who say that as believers we will not have tribulation. They see tribulation as punishment and we know that God has not ordained us to His wrath. But this is not a scriptural statement at all. Nowhere in the Bible does God ever call the time of tribulation that I believe to be ahead for the Church, the wrath and punishment of God. The Greek word that is used in this passage describes what the disciples will endure in the days ahead. It is the word, *thlipsis* (translated as ‘trouble’ in the New International Version (NIV)). This same Greek word is used to describe the time before the second coming of the Lord Jesus when He will send forth His angels to gather His elect from the four quarters of the earth. The King James Version translates it as Tribulation, whereas the New International Version uses the word distress:

<sup>29</sup>“Immediately after the **distress** of those days “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” <sup>30</sup>“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. And then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup>And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and **they will gather his elect** from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other” (Matthew 24:29-31).

In my opinion, we should not be expecting to depart from this world before the time of trouble that will come on the world. Instead, we are called to overcome. Isn't that what Jesus did? His last words of instruction before going to the cross is that He has overcome the world, and with the coming of the Spirit, we also can overcome in the same way He did. We are called to overcome the time of trouble (thlipsis) just as our Master and the early disciples did.

**<sup>11</sup>They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death (Revelation 12:11).**

Whatever we have to go through, Jesus said that in the midst of it, we will know His peace. The disciples, when that night would be over, would feel the accusations of the enemy but Jesus had told them ahead of time so that in Him they would have peace.

Can you imagine, not only the pain that Jesus chose to endure for us, but also the mental anguish as He knew that He was approaching His time of suffering for mankind? He had to endure not only the physical pain, but also the pain of being rejected for a time as He hung on the cross, being made sin for you and for me.

Have you even been accused of something you did not do? Did you ever receive an unjust punishment for something that was not your fault? If you are able, briefly share your experience.

Jesus knew no sin, yet He carried the blame and punishment for the sin of all mankind. It is hard to imagine such a thing, but remember, that God Himself is not bound and limited by time. As Jesus hung between heaven and earth, lifted up on that cross, He was bearing the full weight of punishment for all time, for all the sin of humanity. It was for the joy that was set before Jesus, that He was able to endure, for He knew that life would come out of His death, that the sorrow would be swallowed up in joy. In the same way, we need to look forward to the joy that is set before us, so that we can have peace in this world, no matter what we have to go through in this life.

Do you have a situation today in which you need to experience God's peace? Let's take time to pray for one another or anyone you know who needs to experience God's peace right now.

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for your peace in the midst of any trouble that we may go through as believers. We so look forward to that day when we will see you! Amen!

Keith Thomas

Email: [keiththomas7@gmail.com](mailto:keiththomas7@gmail.com)

Website: [www.groupbiblestudy.com](http://www.groupbiblestudy.com)