

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Sorrow Will Turn Into Joy

11.13.2022



THE JOURNEY
CHURCH

SCRIPTURE:

John 16:16-22

SERMON:

My childhood was really good. My parents loved each other. My brother and I got along. Financially, we always had what we needed and then some. My dad owned his business (still does), and my mom stayed home. I got decent grades in school, played sports, and had friends. Life was pretty good.

That was until the summer of 2002 when my mom told me she had been diagnosed with stage 4 brain, lung, and lymph node cancer and that she had only 3-6 months to live. As a 16-year-old kid, I wasn't sure how to process news like that. But what was even worse was I wasn't a Christian. And as non-Christian, when you get devastating news, you usually do a couple things...at least this is what I did. First, I questioned God. Why would God let this happen? Doesn't He care about us? Secondly, I distracted and even numbed myself from the pain. I couldn't handle the fact that my mother was going to die; so, the only recourse I had was to take my mind off reality, and I did that through alcohol and drugs.

Fast forward 6 years. It's now May 2008. I am sober. I am a Christian and I am totally embracing the fact that my mom is just moments from dying. We're now in the early morning hours of May 14th, and my mom takes her last breath and dies. My family is weeping and hugging one another as we stand around her now dead body. I walk out into my father's garage to be alone where I hit my knees, lift my arms, and say, "God thank you! Thank you for my mother's life. Her faith, and I thank you even for her death."

Here's my question. How is it possible to go from being a 16-year-old kid who was hopeless, afraid, and questioning God to a 22-year-old young man who praised God for the death of his mother? The easy answer is conversion. Christ saved me and changed my life. That's true. But a more specific answer is this. God blessed me with a supernatural infusion of joy through believing His promises of future joy. In other words, I had joy and peace, even in her death, because I believed she was with the Lord and that I will be with her one day.

That brings me to my point for this message.

Christ's promise to the believer is not deliverance from earthly suffering, but that joy will overcome our pain in this life and the next.

Suffering is unavoidable in this life. We live in a Genesis 3, fallen world. And despite what some "preachers" want to tell you, God doesn't promise that your suffering will end in this life. But what He does promise is to sustain you with joy as you trust His promises, awaiting the day for perfect joy.

The words of Jesus in the Upper Room discourse (John 13-17) are designed to comfort and prepare His disciples for His departure. They have been with Him every day for three years, but now He's leaving, and they are going to do ministry without Him.

He knows they're sad and afraid. So, He's giving them promises and words of encouragement. Such as the Spirit will be with you. I won't leave you as orphans, but I will be present with you everywhere through my Spirit. He's going to teach you and guide you. You won't be alone.

In our passage, Jesus is specifically talking about His impending departure and the fact that it will sadden His disciples. But His promise is that He will see them again and that their sorrow will turn to joy.

VS16: *"A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me."*

Jesus' words are somewhat cryptic here and many debate their meaning. What does He mean when He says, "in a little while you won't see me. But then a little after that you will see me"? The immediate meaning is His death and resurrection. Remember, this is the night before Jesus died. Soon, He will be crucified and buried in a tomb, and His disciples won't see Him anymore. But then He will be raised from the dead and they will see Him. Verse 20 seems to support that interpretation. "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament (when I die), but the world will rejoice (at my death). You will be sorrowful (when I am crucified), but your sorrow will turn into joy (when I am resurrected).

So, verse 16 is another prediction of Jesus' death and resurrection. But John could have had another meaning in mind, too. Not only could this refer to Jesus' death and

resurrection. It could also refer to Jesus' ascension and return. It's also true that when He goes back to Heaven, they won't see Him. But when He returns in power from Heaven, every eye will see the Lord.

Either way, Jesus' point is to encourage His disciples. They're upset that He's leaving, and He is trying to help them set their eyes on the promises of His resurrection and return to joyfully endure hardship.

But...the disciples don't get it.

VS17-18: *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."*

The disciples don't know what Jesus means in verse 16. We're often quick to slam the disciples for their ignorance, but I think we can give them a little break here, because even scholars today debate what Jesus means.

The best they can do is link what Jesus said in verse 16 with His previous comments that He's going back to God soon. In other words, they don't understand that Jesus is referring to His death when He says, "a little while and you will no longer see me." As D.A. Carson said, *"The disciples still have no category to allow them to make sense of a Messiah who would die."* They can't fathom the idea that Jesus would be killed.

Some people who call themselves Christians are still like that today. They're embarrassed by the cross. Christianity is too bloody for them. It's too barbaric and primitive. They want a religion of compassion, justice, mercy, and love for their neighbor. Christianity is all those things, but not without a bloody cross. Lose the bloody cross and you lose Christianity. When the disciples received the Spirit, they not only understood why Jesus died, they began to glorify the cross. They rejoiced and celebrated the cross. Paul would go as far to say that HE boasts in the cross of Christ. But for now, they don't understand. At this point, they can't imagine a murdered Savior.

Thankfully, Jesus knows what is on their minds.

VS19: *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’?”*

Jesus knows what’s on their minds. He knows what they want to ask Him. They want to know what He meant in verse 16. But they’re too afraid to ask. They don’t want to look foolish and ignorant.

When it says, Jesus knew their minds, there is no reason to believe that Jesus is reading their minds (though He could certainly do that). The reason Jesus knows what they’re thinking is because He knows His disciples personally. They have a relationship, and He can read their body language.

This verse makes sense to me when I think about my daughter. We’ll read the Bible together, and I will explain things to her, and I can see when things are puzzling her. Her eyes squint and forehead wrinkles up. She’s thinking. She has questions.

The same thing is happening here with Jesus’ disciples. He can see by the look on their faces that they are confused. And what does He do? He teaches them. My Christian friends, look at the patience and compassion of our Lord. Has He not been just as patient and kind with you? We’re no better than the disciples. We need His lovingkindness just as much as they did.

We also need our Lord’s encouragement. Verse 20.

VS20: *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.*

Jesus is referring once again to His death and resurrection. When He dies, the disciples will weep and lament. After Jesus’ death, they locked themselves in a room because they were sad and afraid. They were in shock and utter disbelief that their Savior was murdered. It devastated them.

And to compound their pain, the ones who rejected Jesus were happy He died. Jesus said the world will rejoice, and indeed, they did. The religious leaders were thrilled to rid themselves of this thorn in their side and threat to their power. The Roman government was happy to do anything that was politically expedient, even if it meant murdering an

innocent man. Skeptical Jews were satisfied because they thought He was a false Messiah. The world was happy when Jesus died.

The world still loves when the church suffers, by the way. When they see dying churches struggling to stay alive or the latest scandal involving church leaders, the world loves when the church suffers. When Christianity looks bad, the world rejoices, because it serves to validate their unbelief.

The disciple's sorrow, however, will turn to joy when they see the Lord raised from the dead. All weekend they will grieve their Savior's death, but when they see Him alive again, they will have joy.

This is so applicable for today. Right now, the church is becoming increasingly marginalized in the world. Christianity is being downgraded and sidelined in our culture, and it's only going to get worse. When we look around, it can be depressing. But like the disciples, our sorrow will soon turn to joy when we see the Lord return. What a day that will be! When all things are made right. When justice is satisfied and righteousness reigns.

And all the former pain will be forgotten. Just like when a woman gives birth.

VS21: *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.*

Our daughter was born 7 years ago, and I remember that day like it was yesterday. My wife started having labor pains early Saturday morning. The doctors finally said we could come in, and when we got there, they gave her an epidural which relieved the pain for a while. But that pain soon returned when it was time to deliver the baby. Now, I don't think Jesus means, at least from my experience, that as soon as that baby comes out the woman forgets immediately about the excruciating experience she just went through. I know, for my wife, she was in shock for a moment after our child was born. But it is true that after a while, the woman doesn't focus on the pain anymore, because she has her baby to care for.

That's Jesus' point to His disciples. You're about to go through a hard time. When I die, you will experience a tremendous amount of grief and pain. But when I'm resurrected,

your pain will turn to joy. And you won't even remember the pain. Joy will overcome your pain.

And this joy is irrevocable.

VS22: *“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.”*

The disciples will be sorrowful when Jesus dies, but they're also sorrowful right now. He says, “you have sorrow now.” They're sad because they know He's leaving soon. But their sorrow will turn to joy when they see Him again and that joy will never be taken from them.

Only Christians can experience true joy. Anyone can experience happiness, but happiness isn't the same as joy. Happiness is based on your circumstances, but your happiness can be taken from you in an instant. You might be happy that you got a promotion and raise at work, but what are you going to do when the company goes under? Happiness can also fade over time. Getting a new car will make you happy, but eventually that car won't do it for you anymore. Same with shopping. Sure, spending a bunch of money at the mall or on Amazon might fill your heart for a moment, but how long is that going to last? We were made to be happy. That's why we keep going after those fleeting things that don't satisfy. What we need is genuine unshakable joy in the Lord.

That's the promise of the Christian life. Joy will overcome suffering. Pain will give way to joy.

APPLICATION:

#1-The hope of future joy will sustain you in present suffering

The reason Jesus is telling His disciples these things is to reassure them that their pain will turn to joy. Joy is coming. But it's hope in the promise of future joy that sustains the disciples in the moment. So, believing the promise of future joy will bring you present joy.

Paul put it like this in Romans 8:18, *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”* Paul had joy, even in suffering, in as much he contemplated the future glory that he would share with Christ.

And look what He says, it doesn't even compare. The pain we experience now doesn't even compare to the glory and joy we will share with Christ.

Imagine a POW holds on through starvation and torture. How? Because he knows rescue is coming. He doesn't focus exclusively on the pain. He also focuses on the joy to come. And that joy to come gets him through the pain.

So, here's how this works practically. You're watching television or scrolling social media, and you're discouraged with all the suffering and injustice you see in the world. Lift your eyes to the world to come, the New Heavens and New Earth where pain and injustice are gone. You have cancer or your loved one is dying. Set your mind on the day when sickness will be no more, and Christ returns to give us our new bodies. Are you tired of crooked politics? Look upon the day when Christ rules upon His throne as the perfect King. Set your mind on future joy to sustain you in the present.

#2-Present suffering is preparing you future joy

The disciples have no idea what Jesus is talking about when He says they won't see Him any longer. They don't understand that He's going to die. Now, imagine if He didn't die, but He just left for a weekend getaway. When He got back, they'd be happy to see Him, but it wouldn't be a shock. No, it's only His dying and their sorrow in His death that prepares them for the joy of His resurrection appearance. They're overjoyed when they see Jesus on Sunday because the last time they saw Him, He was dead. And so, God used their suffering to prepare them future joy.

Some people ask why God allows pain and suffering at all. Why let sin come into the world? Why let death, disease and suffering abound? Why not just create everything perfect and keep it that way?

The answer is simple. Without sin, suffering, and death, God will not achieve His maximum glory and you will never receive your highest joy. Think about it. Sin enters the world, and death and suffering follow sin. The Son of God comes to this fallen broken world, takes on flesh and willingly lays down His life through crucifixion (the most horrifying, painful death imaginable at the time). And it's through this sacrificial, God honoring death, God is magnified in all His attributes, and we receive what we need the most—our salvation.

Now, God could have created us to live in the Garden of Eden to live forever and it would have been glorious. But what's even more glorious and joyful is living in a new heavens and new earth having been saved by His grace (even though we deserved His wrath) where we worship God not only as our Creator but also as our Redeemer.

And so, you see, without sin and suffering and pain, you would not be prepared to receive the fullness of joy God has in store for you.

Paul put it this way. 2nd Corinthians 4:17 - *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison*

#3-God is at work in you through the pain

Some of you might be thinking, that's great but what about now. I know that our current suffering is preparing for future joy, but what about today? How is my pain helping right now? It's a good question.

I'll give you three answers.

1. **God is teaching you dependence.** 2nd Corinthians 1:8-9 - 8 *"For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead."* Your suffering is weakening you so you will depend on God and not yourself.
2. **God is training you to comfort others.** 2nd Corinthians 1:3-4 - 3 *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."* Our sufferings enable us to minister to and comfort others.
3. **God is making you more like Christ.** Romans 5:3-4 - 3 *"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope."* And James 1:2-4 - 2 *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."*

Christian, your pain is not meaningless in Christ. God is using it for His glory and your good.

#4-God gives joy by faith

I realize that as I talk about joy, there are some people here right now that might be saying: “that’s not my experience. I rarely experience joy.” To which I would say, I understand that. I have to fight for joy every day. But that’s the crux of the issue. Joy is something you must pursue. It’s something you must go after. Joy doesn’t usually come apart from your pursuit of it.

Let me show you what I mean. Romans 15:13, *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”* Paul’s prayer is that God would fill the believer with peace and joy. But there is something required on your end. **Believing.** *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.”* Joy comes through believing. This is not the initial act of faith for salvation. This is ongoing trust in the promises of God. You must choose to believe His promises if you want to experience hope.

Two years ago, when I was praying about leaving my pastorate to come on staff here at TJC, it was a major decision. I had been at my church as their pastor for 8 years. It came to a point in the hiring process where I was fairly confident I would get the job, but it still wasn’t final. The last thing you want to do in any job, but especially as a pastor, is put in your resignation before you have another job locked down. I told Erik, “Hey man, my church is getting ready to make some major decisions for the coming year, and if I resign it could really affect those decisions. I want to tell them I won’t be there but I am afraid to do so before I know I have this job at TJC.” Pastor Erik said, “Go ahead and tell your church you’re leaving. I am certain you will have a job here.” I believed him and without a contract signed at TJC, I resigned my position. All my anxiety lifted when I trusted his word. But I had to choose to believe him. If I continued unsure, I wouldn’t have had that peace and joy.

The same is true with God. If you’re going to have peace and joy each day, you must choose to believe His promises. Joy follows faith. Not the other way around. You have to believe, and the joy will come.

#5-God promises joy, but He doesn’t guarantee deliverance from suffering in this life

Christians have the greatest hope in the world. Our future reward in Christ is indescribable. There is coming a day when we will be reunited with loved ones in a new world with restored bodies. No more pain or suffering. Only eternal joy.

But until that day, we must wait. And oftentimes, that means we wait in pain. We endure through suffering as we wait for that great and awesome day.

Pastor Erik recently talked about John the Baptist and how Jesus left him in the jail cell; only to be beheaded. Jesus called John the greatest man to ever live. His reward in heaven must have been spectacular. Nevertheless, God did not deliver John from his earthly suffering.

The apostle Paul was the same way. No one did more for the cause of Christ than Paul. And no one suffered more either. This was a man who was beaten, stoned, imprisoned, and hunted down nearly every day of his life. In the end, he was thrown in prison and faced the guillotine.

Yet, even in his sufferings Paul was a man full of joy. While imprisoned, he wrote to the Philippians.

“Rejoice in the Lord always.” (4:4)

In every circumstance, rejoice in the Lord. Whether you’re experiencing good times or bad, rejoice in the Lord.

Set your minds on His promises of future joy. Believe His word and you will have joy to endure. No matter what trial you face, the Lord may not deliver, there is no guarantee of that, but He does promise that He will sustain you in it. Not so you can push through begrudgingly, but so you can do so with joy.

REVIEW:

1. What did Jesus mean in verse 16 when he said, “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.”?
2. Why didn’t the disciples understand what Jesus was saying?
3. Why did the world rejoice at the death of Jesus?
4. What does Jesus mean in verse 22 that, “no one will take your joy from you.”?

REFLECT:

1. How is Christian joy different from worldly joy? (Psalm 30:5)
2. How does the hope of future joy sustain us in present suffering? (Philippians 3:13-14, Romans 12:12, Acts 16:25, Colossians 1:17, Romans 13:1, Colossians 1:16).
3. Discuss the three ways Pastor Brandon told us that God is at work in us through pain.

RESPOND:

1. Will you trust that God will deliver the joy He's promised even if you suffer in this life?
2. What are some ways that we seek the joy of the Lord?

MEDITATE:

- John 16:21 - *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.*

MEMORIZE:

- John 16:20 - *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.*

PRAYER FOCUS:

- TJC Technical Director: **John Hogan**
- NAMB Church Planter: **Joe Newton** - San Jose, CA - *New Valley Church of San Jose*
- Unreached People Group (UPG): **Mongaltese Arab** in South Sudan
 - Population: 213,000
 - Christian: 2.00%
 - Evangelical: 0.2%
 - Primary Religion: Islam
 - Primary Language: Juba Arabic
 - Status: **Unreached**