

# Sorrow Turned Into Joy

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Well, good evening. It's a privilege to be back with you all, to see you all. I read a quote this week by Stephen Charnock. He said, "A mite (m-i-t-e), a mite of Spirit is worth more than a mountain of flesh." And I believe that's true. And so before we do anything, even the reading of the Word, I just want to pray and ask for God's Spirit to come and be with us and to help us.

Father, it is in the name of Jesus Christ that we come. Father, we can't even offer up prayers to You without grace. So how am I going to preach without Your grace? How are we going to hear without Your grace? And how are we going to behold the glory of Jesus Christ without Your grace? We need Your Spirit. Father, we thank You for Your Son. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your Spirit in us - the Guide, the Helper, the Teacher. We thank You for His work glorifying the Son. And that's my prayer, Father, that tonight Jesus would be glorified; that Jesus would be lifted on high; that He would be magnified and seen, Lord, maybe for the first time as some are awakened to Your glory and others to a greater revelation. And Father we pray not just to be a work of the mind, although You will work in our minds, but You would go to the heart and You would stir our affections and our hope in Jesus Christ as You show Him to us again and again. As we pray Father, as we sang, do show us Christ. In His name we pray, Amen.

## Hours Before the Crucifixion

If you'll open your Bibles to the Gospel of John 16. It's a context I'm sure that everyone in here is familiar with. In chapter 16, we are just a few hours before Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus is alone with His disciples. Judas has already left them to go and betray Jesus. They began in the upper room in chapter 13 where they shared the Passover meal together, and Jesus began to teach them there. At this point in chapter 16, they're making their way down to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus has been teaching His disciples. He's been preparing them for His soon-coming departure. He's already told them that He's going away. And He's told them that where He is going they cannot come, but He will come back and bring them to Himself. And although the disciples are hearing everything that Jesus is teaching, they're really struggling to understand. They're really struggling to grasp it all. Knowing their blessed Savior and Lord is leaving them has caused their hearts to be troubled and understandably so. But Jesus is comforting with them.

But He's also preparing them. He's preparing them for how they will carry on His ministry after He departs. In verses 16-24, which is our text for this evening, Jesus is telling the disciples, they're going to soon face something that they will find very difficult; something that will bring them much sorrow and circumstantially will leave them with no hope or joy. But at the end of verse 20, the main thing Jesus wants to teach them and us - if you can go ahead and look at the end of v. 20 with me - this is what Jesus is driving home and what I want us to see tonight. He says this to the disciples: "You will be sorrowful, but... your sorrow will turn into joy." The disciples are about to be thrust into something that will bring all of their hope crashing down. It will at the surface level seem like everything is ending and it's all over, and it will fill them with

great sorrow. But Jesus says here: "... but your sorrow will be turned into joy." This truth that Jesus is teaching will help the disciples in their immediate context about what they're getting ready to face, but we need to understand this - the truth that Jesus is teaching is true for every believer in all of life. And I want to understand it in the disciple's immediate context, and I want to apply this glorious truth to all of our life.

Let me give you just a brief overview of verses 16-24. Then we'll read the text. In v. 16, Jesus is going to teach them something that they're really not going to grasp. In v. 17-19, they're going to talk amongst themselves, explaining how we're not really getting what Jesus is talking about here. And Jesus knows that. So in v. 20, He's going to explain it even further and He's going to drive home that main point that your sorrow will be turned into joy. Even at this point, the disciples won't get it, so Jesus being a good Teacher, in v. 21, He's going to use an illustration. He's going to point to something that they can relate to, that we can relate to, and He'll say it's kind of like that but a little bit different. And then in v. 22-26, Jesus will apply this glorious truth to all of our lives and show us how it can be a reality.

So if you'll follow along as we read through God's holy Word. John 16:16-24. "A little while, and you will see Me no longer. And again a little while, and you will see Me. 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'm going to the Father?' So they were saying, 'What does He mean by a little while? We do not know what He's talking about.' (v. 19) Jesus knew they wanted to ask Him, so He said to them, 'Is this what you're 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? 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. 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 that anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 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. 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. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full.'"

### **The Confusion of the Disciples**

Let's just start walking through these verses. In v. 16, Jesus says, "A little while and you will see Me no longer, and a little while, and you will see Me." The disciples do not understand what Jesus is talking about. And they begin to talk about that amongst themselves. Again, in v. 17, "So some of His disciples said to one another, 'What is this He says? A little while and you will not see Me? And again a little while and you will see Me?' And 'Because I go to the Father?'" That's what He was saying referenced back in v. 10 when He's describing the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the world. So they were saying, "What does He mean by a little while? We don't know what He's talking about." And in v. 19, "Jesus knew they wanted to ask Him." So He said to them, "Is this what you're asking yourselves? What I meant by saying a little while and you will not see Me again, and a little while and you will see Me?"

Now before we get to what Jesus means by this, I want us just to stop for a second and take note of something here. Do you notice how tender and loving and patient Jesus is with the disciples? Beloved, we are a few hours from Jesus being nailed to the cross at this time where He will endure the wrath of God for His people's sin. And who is He mindful of? Who is He thinking about? Who is He concerned about being ready for that moment? Who does He want to prepare for what's about to come? The disciples. He is concerned about how this will affect them and He wants to make sure that they're ready. Just behold the self-sacrificing love of our Savior Jesus Christ. It is an amazing love.

What does Jesus mean when He says "a little while and you will not see Me again"? In v. 20 He explains it. Look at it. "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." By what Jesus says in the first half of this verse, we can understand what He's alluding to that in a little while will bring them sorrow. Something is happening soon circumstantially. The disciples will be tempted with hopelessness and despair. Weeping and lamenting. Because we have the full revelation of God's Word here, we know what He's talking about. He's talking about His death on the cross. This is confirmed when Jesus tells us the contrast to His death, that the world will have compared to what His disciples will have. At Jesus' death, the disciples seeing the Lord suffer and die, will be brought to weeping and lamenting.

We have to remember something about the disciples at this time, where they're at in their thinking. They're not understanding all of this. They're still believing that when Messiah comes - and they believe Jesus is Messiah - but they're believing that when Messiah comes, He's going to instantly establish the full reality of His Kingdom. That's why earlier on in the Gospel, they're vying for position. Who gets to sit next to You in Your Kingdom? They believe it's coming here and now. They believe He's going to overthrow the Romans. He's going to overthrow the hypocritical Jewish leaders. He's going to establish Himself as King here and now. And then in a little bit here coming He's going to die. I mean, no doubt that they're going to weep not only in seeing Him die, but the confusion that all of this is going to bring to them. The world on the other hand, Jesus said will rejoice.

Why would the world rejoice at the death of Jesus Christ? You've read the Gospel of John. You know what Jesus says about the world in John 3. Listen to it. He says, "People love darkness rather than light, for their works are evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works be exposed." Saints, know this. Rejection of Jesus Christ is not an intellectual issue. It's a moral issue. It's a heart, affection, love issue. We need to know something about what Jesus has said here about the world and their hatred and their rejoicing when He's going to die. There are only two responses to Jesus Christ in the world. It's either hatred or it is love. There is no neutrality. There is no: you know what? He's a good teacher. I can deal with Jesus. No. There are two responses in the world. You either bow to Him as Lord and Savior and embrace Him in fullness of faith and love, or you reject Him in hatred and in love for your sin. And I would be wrong if I didn't stop and ask you this: Do you love Jesus? Do you love Him? You can't be indifferent towards Him. There's no middle ground. If you say I don't know if I really love Jesus, then the other alternative that the Scriptures lay out is you hate Him. And Paul reminds us in his letter to the Corinthians if you don't love Jesus

Christ, you're accursed. Jesus says to the disciples, "You will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice."

### **Sorrow Will Be Turned Into Joy**

And then the second part of v. 20, He gets to the main truth of what's being taught here. He says, "You will be sorrowful" to the disciples, "But your sorrow will turn into joy." Think about that for a moment. Sorrow turning into joy. If you and I can grasp what this means and what it does not mean - how sorrow turns into joy - then we're going to be able to experience what Jesus desires for us to experience, and that's found at the end of v. 26. This is where all this is leading. Look at the end of v. 26. What does Jesus desire for all of us? "That your joy may be full." That's His end desire, His end aim, is that His disciples and all of us, that our joy would be full. There is an immediate application for the disciples that when they see Him crucified and dead, that they will have joy at His resurrection. But this truth that Jesus is teaching can be applied to all of life. The disciples are still not grasping what Jesus is teaching - that their sorrow will be turned to joy.

So He uses an illustration in v. 21 to help the disciples understand how. How is it that sorrow is turned into joy? Look at it in v. 21. "When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come." That hour is the hour of delivery or we could say hours sometimes of delivery. And it brings genuine real pain and because of that, sorrow. "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."

See, the delivering of the baby is something the disciples can relate to. It's something that many of you can relate to. There are many children in here. God has blessed many of us with many children. Some of you by firsthand experience - the women here - or by secondhand as a father, you've witnessed this. You've seen a mother go into delivery. And often they're brought to tears in pain, in anguish. But once that baby is born, those tears of pain and anguish turn. And they turn into tears of joy. And that's glorious here. But I want to ask one really important question to help us tonight. Why does the mother have joy? Is it because the sorrow and anguish was gone? No. She doesn't have joy because the sorrow and the anguish are gone. It's still there. What's happened? The sorrow and anguish has been swallowed up in the joy of the baby. See, this is really important. She doesn't have joy because all of a sudden the pain was gone. The pain is still there. It's there at that moment. But she is instantly filled with joy. Her sorrow turned into joy and it wasn't because the sorrow left her, it's because the sorrow was swallowed up in the joy of the baby. That's an important truth. And I'm going to try to carry that as we work through the rest of the text here.

In v. 22, Jesus applies the illustration. He says, "So also, you disciples (us here - just like the mother giving birth) you have sorrow now..." Speaking of when He's going to die. "But I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice." Again, the disciples will have sorrow when Jesus dies, but when He rises from the dead and they see Him again, their hearts are going to rejoice. Yes, because He was gone and now He lives, but they're going to rejoice beyond that moment in that reality, and here's why: Because they're going to be growing from then on until they enter into eternity of what that resurrection meant. Yes, they're going to miss Him. They're going to weep that He's died. He's in the tomb. And they'll rejoice when they see Him again, but when

they begin to grasp more and more and more as life goes on by the revelation of the Spirit what that resurrection meant, the joy of that resurrection will be able to be applied to their entire life. It's not a one time thing. Oh, we saw Him and we're happy. Move on. What's tied up in that reality is joy for the rest of life.

This joy Jesus is talking about is like what the mother experienced, but it's better. You know why? Because of what He says at the end of v. 22. "No one can take it from you." No one can take this joy from you. You see, the joy the mother has in the moment, swallows up the pain of the delivery. But that joy can fade. Babies die. Children die. Relationships are broken. The joy Jesus is speaking about to the disciples and to us, it's an eternal joy. Real joy. This isn't just joy for when the disciples are sorrowful over the death of Jesus. This is joy that's with them forever through all of life's sorrows. This is a sorrow-conquering joy that is for every believer and that never leaves us. Real joy and fullness therein is available to every one of us despite our circumstances - even the most bleak of circumstances. And when I say that to you, it gets a little bit personal. Because I want to ask you this: Do you really believe that? Honestly? That fullness of joy is available to every believer despite how bleak the circumstances seem?

I know when I ask a question like that, that we're dealing with real pain and real sorrow. I know we're dealing with things like being offended by others. I know we're dealing with things like cancer. I know we're dealing with things like living in continual pain day after day because of physical struggles. I know we're dealing with broken relationships and broken marriages. I know we're dealing with injustice. I know we're dealing with spiritual warfare. I know we're dealing with death. Those are real pains and real sorrows. And I have a question for us all. If Jesus is speaking of a joy that no one can take from us, why aren't we experiencing it all the time? I think everyone in here wants joy. I think the answer is because in our practical, street-level Christian living of our everyday lives, where we experience suffering and pain, we really struggle to see how joy can be truly experienced in the midst of sorrow, pain, and anguish. And we have begun at times to believe that if we're really going to experience true joy, it must be at the removal of sorrow, pain, and anguish.

### **What Is the Source of Joy?**

In v. 23 and 24, Jesus is going to teach the disciples a really important theological shift that's going to take place in light of the resurrection. It will help us see how we can approach the Father regarding these things. And we need to understand that. But because the aim of v. 24 is that our joy would be full, but it's also going to teach us another thing and that is this: what's the source of joy. What's the source of joy? We need to know how we need to approach the Father if we're going to have this joy that's set before us. But we need to understand importantly too what's the source of joy. And to help us think about that, I'm going to go back to the illustration again and just drive the point home one more time for you.

In the illustration Jesus gave, the woman was in the midst of sorrow - true physical pain - and then her sorrow turned into joy. And it wasn't because the sorrow was removed. It was swallowed up in the joy of the baby. And Jesus teaching us how to come to the Father after the resurrection, He's going to be teaching us the source of joy. And let me tell you this, the source of joy is not the removal of pain, sorrow, and anguish. In this life, you're guaranteed constant pain, sorrow, and anguish. Yet, here Jesus holds out before us eternal joy and fullness thereof. I

think most of us are getting this wrong and I'll help you to diagnose if you're like me often. Regarding your pain, sorrow, and anguish, how do you pray about that? If you're like me, most of my prayers regarding my pain, sorrow, and anguish are: God, I want to have joy, so I need You to remove the pain, the sorrow, the anguish, or the source of it. I spend a lot of my prayer time there. I want to be careful here. I'm not implying it's wrong to pray for healing or for God to remove those things. I'm not implying that at all. But I think it's really important that we see as we look through the lens of Scripture the normative means through which God brings joy to us is not the removal of pain, sorrow, and anguish - it's by giving us joy in the midst of pain, sorrow, and anguish by giving us Jesus. Saints, there's something more - better - than the removal of pain. It's Jesus in the midst of pain. And when we really struggle to see that, to believe that because the pain is real, but I want you to know this: Jesus is more real. God gets glory by removing pain and sorrow. He gets glory by healing, but I want you to know this, God gets even more glory when He swallows up pain with joy. I mean tell me what looks better from a world's perspective: to see someone who circumstantially has no basis for joy? And is in full pain? Yet they're unexplainably rejoicing? That gives God glory. You know what else it forces the world to do? It forces the world to come to you and say, hey, what is the source of the hope that is within you? Because they can't see the circumstance - in fact, they see a circumstance that should lead to grumbling and complaining and whining, yet they're seeing joy. And when they ask you that, you get to stand up and you get to say this: Jesus Christ is the source of my joy in the midst of my sorrow and pain. Saints, God looks good in that scenario. I just want to say it again to be pastoral. I am not saying it's wrong to pray for healing. "Father, if this cup could pass from Me." It's not wrong to pray that these things would pass. But I do want us to think about praying: Give me Jesus. Give me that which is better than physical healing - Jesus in the midst of healing - that You might look good.

### **How Are We to Approach the Father?**

How are we to approach the Father? V. 23, "In that day..." that's after the resurrection, "You will ask nothing of Me," Jesus says to the disciples. Let me ask you this: Why will the disciples ask nothing of Jesus? He's leaving. He's not going to be there physically. That's one reason, but it's deeper than that. This is a theological shift. It's more than just Jesus ascending into heaven. There's a theological shift occurring here. Jesus is going to go to the Father and up until this time the disciples have been able to turn to Jesus and say, Jesus, what should we do here? Jesus, give us this - and He's been able to answer that for them. But now what Jesus is doing is He's teaching them a theological shift. Look at v. 23. "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in My name..." That's the shift. They have prayed to the Father before. Now, Jesus said to them 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." What doctrine is Jesus teaching here? The doctrine of mediation. The doctrine that through His death, burial, and resurrection He has reconciled once and for all a holy God to sinful man, and He is the means through which this reconciliation took place. And He wants them to acknowledge that, that when they come to the Father, they come to Him in Jesus' name, acknowledging all that Jesus has accomplished.

If we're going to pray this prayer right, and in the end have fullness of joy in the midst of our pain and sorrow, we need to know what does it mean to pray in Jesus' name. I'm going to tell you at least three things it means. It means probably more, but at least three. The first thing it means is this: you're not coming in your name. Praying in Jesus' name means you're not coming in your name. It means this: I'm not coming and saying Father, I know You'll be pleased with me. I read my Bible seven days this week. And I increased my prayer time by 30 minutes. Did You see that? And I did witness to that person, so here I am. I know You're going to give me favor. That's coming in my name. That's not coming in Jesus' name. And Jesus' name does mean that when we come, we say, Father, I recognize that it's through Jesus' shed blood that I am cleansed. It is through His righteousness that I am declared righteous, received by faith, and I come in His name.

But it means at least one more thing, that if we're going to come in the name of Jesus, that we're going to come with all that Jesus is and that means that align our will to His will. And all throughout the Gospel of John - if you've read it before, you know this - what is the will of Jesus Christ? It is to do the will of the Father. So if we're coming in Jesus' name to the Father as Jesus tells us here, it's not in my name, not in my accomplishments, not in my own righteousness. It's in His name, it's in His shed blood. It is in His righteousness. And it's in align with His will which means now I'm in line with the Father's will. And did you take note here of what Jesus said after that? "Whatever we ask of the Father..." in Jesus' name, He will give it to you. He will give it to you. This is a verse that the health, wealth, and prosperity heretics lay hold of. They say, see, Jesus wants you to have fullness of joy. And they say, see, if you come to Him in Jesus' name, He'll give it to you. And they see at the beginning of the text here that they were in sorrow and God's bringing them to fullness of joy and all they need to do is come here in the middle and say "in Jesus' name" and He'll do whatever they ask. So they look at this verse and they say "in the name of Jesus... take away all my sorrow, all my sickness, all my suffering; in the name of Jesus give me prosperity, give me things, and in that, I will have fullness of joy." Is that what the verse means? No, it's not what the verse means. Joy's not tied to circumstances. And joy's not found in the removal of sorrow, pain, and suffering. Joy is not found in the things that God can give you. Joy is found in the giving of Jesus Christ. Joy is found in interpreting all of life through the resurrected Savior. Joy is seeing my sorrow in light of what Jesus has accomplished and what His work is in me now. What God answers in this prayer is He does give us fullness of joy, but He doesn't do it by removing our sorrow most of the time. He does it by giving you Jesus in the midst of your sorrow which will bring you to fullness of joy and will crowd out and force you to forget about the anguish that you're experiencing because Jesus is greater. Saints, when we rightly approach the Father in Jesus' name we're asking what we sang a few moments ago. Show us Christ. Help me to see Jesus. Help me to see who I am in light of that death, burial, and resurrection. Help me to see who I am in union to Him. See, this truth will help the disciples, but it's true for all of our lives.

What about in the circumstance of death? Death is real. Death hurts. Whether it's someone close to us or even our own, how can the Father give you joy in the face of death? By helping you realize that Christ has conquered death through His resurrection. By helping you see that death no longer has a sting anymore. It's been swallowed up through Jesus conquering it, and that death is not the end for the believer. Death is the beginning of all things. And we

begin to look through the lens of Jesus Christ in all of life, no matter what the sorrow is, we can have fullness of joy if we're looking through the lens of Jesus Christ. Beloved, the joy of Jesus surpasses the most difficult of circumstances. In John 15, Jesus told the disciples, "the world will hate you because they hated Me." And then He told them this: but you're to be witnesses to them. And then He told them this: The way that they'll demonstrate their hate to you is that they're going to put you out of the synagogue, and they'll even kill you. They'll even kill you. Well, where's the joy of Jesus in that? That's a pretty bleak circumstance. You're going to live in a world of people that hate you and they hate the message that you're going to bring. They're going to put you out of the synagogue and they're going to kill you. Is there joy available in the midst of that circumstance? Have you read Acts 5? When they went out and they preached in the name of Jesus Christ and they were beaten for it. And it says that they left the council what? Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name. Beloved, every area of life, if we commit it to the Father in the name of Jesus, and He grants to us the greater revelation of Jesus, we can have joy in the midst of suffering which is better than even the removal of the pain. This is our Gospel message. This is our life between the now and the not yet. This is what's available to us. Jesus demonstrated this to us, didn't He? I mean, He faced the greatest anguish and suffering any human being will ever face under the wrath of God for His people, and what does the writer of Hebrews tell us? For the what that was set before Him? For the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross. It doesn't mean the cross didn't hurt. It doesn't mean your pain is not real. The Bible never says put on a fake smile and act like Jesus is good. That's not what we're talking about here. The Bible acknowledges pain. It acknowledges suffering. It sets proper expectations, but it says this to you: I can give you joy in the midst of it by giving you more of Jesus - a greater revelation of the sufficiency and the love of Jesus Christ, and in that there's fullness of joy. This is a supernatural joy.

### **The Ministry of the Holy Spirit**

I'm going to close by telling you this: When you come to the Father in Jesus' name, and you ask for Him to grant you fullness of joy in Jesus Christ, He accomplishes that by the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the Word glorifying the Son. I want you to look, before we close, look back at chapter 16:14. This is the verse where Jesus is describing the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the church. Jesus is saying I'm leaving you, but He'll send you another Helper - the Paraclete. He will come and He will be a guide to you. He will guide you in all truth. And then He tells us that the pointed climax of what the Holy Spirit is doing in the life of every believer. What's He doing in chapter 16:14? "He (the Spirit) will glorify Me." This is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Father is working through the Spirit, revealing the Son through the Word. The Spirit is magnifying Jesus Christ. He is lifting Him up and shining upon Him that we may behold Him. So when we pray, "Father, in the name of Jesus, help me have joy," you can't do this. You've got to keep in step with the Spirit. God, help me to see. This is how He works. Through the Spirit magnifying the Son and in the revelation of who Jesus is, what He's accomplished, and who we are in union to Him, you can have joy in the midst of sorrow and suffering. Praise God for His grace. O come to the Father through Jesus the Son, and give Him the glory; great things He has done.



Let's pray. Father, how good You are! This is a room of trophies of grace. That's all we are, God. We're people under grace. You've rescued us in Jesus. You've put Your Spirit within us. You've given us Your Word. And here You give us hope in this life for the most dire of circumstances and real pain by telling us there's something better than the removal of pain and sorrow - Your Son in the midst of it. So God, grant to Your people fullness of joy in Jesus Christ as we behold Him through the Word by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.