

The Path to Joy

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[0 : 0 0] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Hear now the word of the living God, John 16, beginning at verse 16.

Jesus speaking. A little while and you will see me no longer. And again, a little while and you will see me. 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? So they were saying, what does he mean by a little while?

We do not know what he's talking about. 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?

[2 : 0 6] And again, a little while and you will see me? Truly, truly or amen, amen. 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 given birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come. But when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish for the joy that a human being has been born to 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 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. That is the glorious word of the Lord of hosts. Please be seated.

[3 : 1 7] Before I launch into my message for a few minutes. Sister Margaret Huffine, is she around? Is there a Margaret Huffine here?

Margaret Huffine. Oh, oh, oh. Happy birthday? Happy birthday, amen. She is one of the mothers in Zion in our church, one of the...

Just come here and tell me what you're saying. I don't read lips. I really don't. Reminded me, too.

Got an elder, had her birthday, too. Mike, Mike Tolliver. Is Mike here? Where's Mike? Oh, he's not even here. He's celebrating his birthday. Okay. Shame on him for not being in church on his birthday.

We were in church this Sunday after our wedding. Were we? Yeah, we were. We were. Amen. See, y'all messing me up.

[4 : 3 0] I don't have much time this morning. Y'all just... All right. Here we go. You know, it's Black History Month, so we're talking a lot about the historic African American church.

And when you study that church, you see there was a paradox within this worship, a paradox within that church. It was a paradox of joy and sorrow. Even sometimes, many times, joy in the midst of sorrow.

You see, this is a kingdom reality that the world can't comprehend. Some of the most powerful gospel music comes in the midst of great anguish and affliction.

Negro spirituals are some most well-known. The people would go into a culture that did not welcome them and even afflicted them because they were black.

Even the American church was complicit in this evil. Yet, on Sunday morning, the African American church would explode with singing, praise, and joy, even through tears of heartache, loss, and pain.

[5 : 48] Some historians refer to this joy as spiritual resilience. It emerged as a response to historical oppression.

It served as a source of strength and hope. In musical expression, like I said, gospel music, with its uplifting rhythms and lyrics, it played a crucial role in expressing joy and faith.

It echoed the hush harbors where enslaved Africans carved out spaces of spiritual refuge, insisting that God's faith in the world.

That God's future was still possible. Joy, in this respect, is a holy act of sacred defiance.

But here's the thing. It's not just the heritage of the black church. It is the birthright of Christ's kingdom disciples.

[6 : 50] Because Christ's kingdom breaks forth into our time and space in this path to joy in Jesus.

But sorrow is the path to joy in the kingdom of God. It is the path our Lord, the king, walked. It is the path to spiritual growth.

So let me ask a couple questions. Are you embracing the path? Will you, for Christ's sake and holiness, embrace his path to joy?

Joy. Now we've been studying the work of the Spirit. Jesus, our Lord, spent so much time talking about the Holy Spirit. And now he kind of shifts gears a little bit. Joy or rejoice is mentioned five times in the section I just read.

Four times referring to the disciples' joy. One could make the case, based on the context and of a scripture, that the Spirit is the giver of joy in the physical absence of Jesus.

[7 : 59] Paul made that connection in Galatians 5. Yet seven times in this same passage of joy, seven times sorrow and lament are mentioned as well.

One thing is certain. Our Lord is still continuing with the main subject of these chapters, his departure and his impact on disciples. Sorrow, then joy.

Anyway, so point one, and I think that's all we're going to do today, but point one, Jesus' path to joy isn't always clear.

Verses 16 to 19, you have it in front of you. I hope you have your Bible's open. Look at it. I won't read it again, but keep that in front of you. Here's the truth. We do not always understand what the Lord is doing or what he's actually saying.

Certainly his timing is not according to our watches. You know, Lord, nah. Our Lord used the phrase a little while, seven times in four verses.

[9 : 15] The little while, obviously, probably, I think we all get it, is the time between his crucifixion and his resurrection. The going to the father part has to mean his ascension to the right hand of the father.

But the disciples didn't get it. This wasn't clear to them. They didn't understand that Jesus was going to die and definitely had no idea of the resurrection.

I love the fact. Don't you see it? Do you read it and feel it? The disciples seem to be whispering among themselves. What do you think he meant? Were they afraid to ask him?

I remember being in college classes and several of us didn't have a clue what the professor meant. Rather than to ask him or her, we started pooling our ignorance among ourselves.

What's the answer? What do you think he's trying to say? Why not just ask? I mean, ask yourself that question. Why not just ask? You know what I think?

[10 : 22] I could be them, but I know it's us. No one wants to look dumb or at the least ignorant. Ignorance in front of others is seen as embarrassing, right?

Is that what is happening with the disciples? I don't know for sure, but it could be. Don't you love how Jesus responds to them? I guess they were off to the side somewhere, right?

And Jesus, our Lord, just goes, mm-hmm. He knows exactly what's going on in their hearts. And knowing what's on their minds, he voices their question for them.

Isn't that beautiful? Never be ashamed, family, to admit you don't understand. If you're in a Bible study and you're not sure what it's meant, don't go home ignorant. If you lack wisdom about which way to go, which decision you are to make, ask.

First of all, ask God. But I love it when people email me or just speak to me for further understanding. I get notes on occasion. It doesn't happen enough, though. I get emails sometimes.

[11 : 33] People will stop me and say, Pastor Kevin, you said this. I love those moments because a good teacher or a preacher will even try to anticipate questions and answer them.

Jesus is the great preacher. He's the great teacher. And he always anticipates our questions. He knows. He knows. He, Jesus, is the source of his disciples' joy.

Seeing him, being with him, is their great joy. That's why not seeing him will cause so much confusion and sadness.

Doesn't that happen to us? When we experience pain, but where is Jesus? When you have sorrow, when you're going through a difficult time, if you don't see Jesus, it really bothers you.

If you can't hear his voice, if you can't see his glory, if you're just going through the motions, you're going to worship, you're going to Bible, whatever you're doing, you're just going through the motions.

[12 : 43] But because you're in so much anguish, you don't see him. Where is Jesus? Where is Jesus? That's why it's so important that we come to the word like a hungry athlete after a good workout.

It's essential to our spiritual well-being because as we open the word, the hungry disciple coming to the Bible, where is Jesus?

That disciple will be fed because in the word, Jesus is revealed to us. We see him in his love, his kindness, his grace, and his power in the spirit whom you have as a gift from God who will never leave you.

You have his spirit in you, and he is present with you, and he will open your eyes and your hearts. But here's the thing.

Their lack of understanding was not because they were not intelligent men. Saint-Cain Ferguson is helpful here in his book, Lessons from the Upper Room.

[14 : 02] He says it was spiritual. The disciples did not have the insight, the spiritual understanding, or the discernment to grasp what Jesus was saying about the kingdom of God.

They needed illumination. Only then would the truth dawn. Only then would they be able to say, now I see. Sometimes confusion comes to us before understanding.

Just don't throw up your hands and give up. That's what the enemy wants you to do. Throw up your hands. I don't get it.

I can't see it. Don't. Don't. You might be at the moment of illumination. Don't give up. To be honest with you, you weren't supposed to understand everything.

Unless you want to be God. We're human. We don't even, even when God speaks to us, sometimes we still don't get it.

[15 : 10] It's the nature of our humanity. Don't give up. You make even a bigger mess when you give up.

You see, you ever notice that in order to clean a room, my wife will sometimes want me to clean. I don't like cleaning.

But I notice that when I try to clean, I make a bigger mess. Before it comes together. Now, she can organize chaos.

She's amazing like that. She walks into a room, and she walks out, and you're like, what the? But you have to mess it up sometimes before it becomes clear.

You might not understand what God is doing in your life, but you can be sure that his plan is solid. He sees the order he's going to create in your mess.

[16 : 19] You can rest and fight against worry with the truth that Jesus sees and knows.

More, this is where we grab hold of Romans 8, 28. In the midst of chaos, in the midst of confusion, in the midst of heartache, pain, and suffering, when we don't know what's going on, this is where we have to go to the word and grab hold of a promise from God, like Romans 8, 28, and 29, which you all know.

And he says this, and Paul says, and we know. Notice the first few words. Don't miss them. And we know.

Because we know God. And we know. What do we know, Paul? Let's ask a question.

Have you experienced the love of God in Christ so much so that you love God? You want to love him with all your heart. I know.

[17 : 40] You want him to be everything. But let's just start. Do you love him? Jesus said, if you love me, do what I say. So your expression of love from God has an emotional component, but it's revealed in your desire and your willingness to obey him.

So I ask you, do you love him? Have you been touched by his amazing love and grace? Have you seen the Holy One on the cross for you?

And has your soul then been rent asunder with conviction and love and faith and repentance? Do you love him?

Jesus is going to ask Peter that later in the Gospel of John. After Jesus is raised from the dead and Peter had denied of Jesus in John 21. He's going to meet Peter and say to him, do you love me?

That's the question that Jesus asked all of us. Do you love me? He didn't say, do you love me perfectly? But do you love me?

[18 : 53] And Paul is writing here that those who love God can expect something. That he will work out the crazy in your life.

That he, in the midst of the confusion and the sorrow, and I don't understand moments, and those moments of pain, he hasn't just left you out there for chaos to grab hold of you, but in the midst of that, he's doing something.

Don't ask you to explain that. I got my own crazy. Don't ask you to explain it, but here we go. And we know. Why do we know?

Because he said it. You know, back in the day, you should say, and you can take that to the bank. When somebody said something, what's that Beretta?

Remember Beretta? Okay, I'm going back in the day. If you're not over 50, you might not know who I'm talking about. Beretta was this cop on TV, you know, played by Robert Blake. And he would say something like that.

[20 : 04] And you can take that to the bank. Damn. That means my word is good, and you know it. You can spend. My word is so good, it's like money.

You can spend it, baby. God is like that. God's word is like money. You can spend it. You can depend on it. You can take it to the bank of heaven.

Do you recognize? Verse 29, what's the goal? And you know that in all things, God was together for good to them who love him, who are called according to his purpose.

What is the purpose? It's verse 29. Verse 29, that we might be, that we might be conformed to the image of his son.

Those he foreknew and predestined to be conformed to that image. That's the purpose. God is at work, states, in the crazy, in the confusion, in the pain of our lives, God is at work to make all things work together for good.

[21 : 18] In the end, maybe not at this moment, but in the end, it's going to work together for good, and what is that good? That you're going to look more like Jesus. You know what I'm saying?

Don't pray for patience. Because they use the King James word, tribulation worketh patience. But that's okay.

Because it tells me that what I'm going through has a purpose. That I'm not suffering in vain. I don't understand. Remember I said, the path isn't always clear.

But the end is. The destination is clear. If we read the scriptures. That whatever I'm going through, whether it be, God help us, whether it be cancer, whether it be marital problems, whether it be, you know, you got, your grades are just plummeting, and you're not sure what's going to happen with school, whether you're losing your job, whatever it is.

If it's, whether you're taking a stand for Jesus, and you got the left foot of fellowship. Because you belong to him, because you, because he loves you, and your heart now loves him back.

[22 : 45] He's promised you. Sorrow first. But joy is coming. You've been called by God.

His spirit made you spiritually alive, not by luck, not by chance, but he foreknew, he foreloved you, and predestined you. He marked out your end from the, before it began.

God is there. God is there. There's no accident that you belong to Christ, and there's no accident you're going through what you're going through. God is there.

When 9-11 took place, you know, my wife and I, we were church planting in D.C. area, and I remember the big question that everybody was asking who went to church, that is, the big question, where was God?

You remember that? Where was God? And I remember I had to preach that Sunday, and I remember saying something like this, where was God?

[24 : 01] The same place he was when his son was on the cross gasping for his breath. Where was God? The same place he was when Jesus was being scourged, crown of thorns, and pierced in his side.

Crucifixion was the most horrible way to put a man or a woman to death in that generation. Where was God? Where was the Father? He was right there, working all things for good in the life of his only son.

I know it's a hard word because pain is pain, okay? No one signs up for that. But pain has its place if he belonged to Jesus.

God is at work. His eternal decree cannot be changed. He's working it out for your good to be like Jesus more and more.

Hold on to that clarity. You can experience joy in Jesus because your suffering has a goal. And God will make it productive as you trust in him.

[25 : 24] James, the Lord's half-brother saw this. James 1, 2, and 4. Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet various kinds of trials, various trials of various kinds.

For you know that the testing of your faith, that's what that is, the trials of testing, the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. Let steadfastness have its full effect that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The path may not be clear, but certainly, don't you see the destination? spiritual growth, spiritual depth, imaging, imaging Jesus.

After Paul had been stoned in one city, he got up. They thought he was dead and they dragged him out of the city and left him outside the city like so much rubbish, threw him outside the gates.

Then he got up. And I don't know if he was dead. The Bible doesn't say, was he dead and God raised him? We don't know, but he was certainly comatose. He gets up, goes back into the city and then leaves to go off to other cities to continue preaching the message.

[26 : 34] Acts 14, 22, he goes back to the other churches that he had already planted. Listen to his message. He was strengthening the souls of the disciples, Acts 14, 22, encouraging them to continue in the faith and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

That's what his message is. I mean, he actually embodied it. Being stoned and taken up for dead, he gets up and won't stop.

He won't stop. I was talking to someone today, I was saying, you know, Paul's body, if he took his shirt off, you would flinch. His back, his torso must have to have been crisscrossed with so many welts and old cuts.

I mean, he looked like he was, he looked like Frankenstein, you know, just messed up. A motor man had arthritis. I know the guy, he probably lived in pain every day because no body can take the kind of beatings he took and stonings he took.

And here's a guy, by the grace of God, he saw Jesus. He sees the reality of Christ and what does he do? He gets up and he's got to tell him.

[28 : 01] He's got to keep preaching. He's got to keep doing it for Jesus. And he tells us the same thing, that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

He's talking about the kingdom of glory. Here's clarity when sorrow comes. It's for a little while. It may not feel like it, but when you compare this time of suffering to eternity, it's only for a little while.

2 Corinthians 14, I'm sorry, 2 Corinthians 4, 16 through 18. Some of my favorite verses in the Bible. So we do not lose heart, Paul says. Though our outer self is wasting away, and sure it is, our inner self is being renewed day by day for this light, momentary affliction is preparing, preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

As we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen, for the things that are seen are transient, they're temporary, but the things that are unseen, the kingdom, Christ in his glory, held out for you, your eternal inheritance, he says, the things that are unseen are eternal.

well, well, I'm not going to tell you that you should not be sorrowful.

[29 : 36] I'm not going to tell you that it doesn't hurt. I'm not going to tell you that you're not going to have moments where you're asking, where is God? God, because you, all of that is true.

What I want to tell you is that God has promised you, just like the apostles. Sorrow's coming. Lamenting and sorrow, we'll talk more about this next week, but it's coming.

But you know what's also coming? Or should I say who? Jesus is coming. He's going to come in your lifetime, in your moments, we're praying he'll come fully to be seen and glorified.

We love to see that, but here's the thing, he's coming to you. He's not going to leave you alone. He's coming.

And what he's bringing with him is joy. In the midst of it, he's bringing joy. Because you'll begin to realize that it's not for nothing.

[30 : 51] My suffering is not for nothing. You'll begin to realize that your Savior, sometimes it's in those most painful moments that his presence can become oh so real.

I remember having a fever. I remember being one of those few times I'm sick on a Sunday and I couldn't go to preach and my intern was preaching for me and I'm laying in bed and I'm feeling kind of delirious.

I remember my pastor as he was dying, he wrote hymns. And I remember I had the CD of his hymns. I think it was hymns for a reformation, I think he called it.

And I'm sitting there, I'm laying there in the bed and I just put his hymns on. And his hymns are word-based, Bible-based hymns. And saints, I'm not lying to you.

Hearing those words, oh my gosh. I feel like I was lifting up off the bed in the midst of my fever, in the midst of my suffering.

[31 : 50] God's presence came into the room. He didn't leave me. He didn't leave me. And there was joy. As I was thinking about this message this morning, what came to my mind, and it came to my mind twice, actually, I saw it, read it again, this wonderful hymn.

Immortal, invisible, God-only wise, in light and accessible, hid from our eyes, most blessed, most glorious, the ancient of days.

Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise. Great Father of glory, pure Father of light, thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight.

All praise we would render, oh help us to see, tis only the splendor of light at height of thee. Hallelujah.

I hope you got a hallelujah in your spirit wherever you are. Joy comes. Joy is yours.

[33 : 04] It's your birthright in Jesus. But sorrow comes first. Have you embraced the path? Father, thank you for your mercy and grace.

Thank you that our sorrow and our pain, just like the apostles, the sorrow and pain that they experienced was not for nothing. And that means also because your word is so clear that our tribulations, our hardships, those times where we don't see clearly, yet, Lord, we know there's a purpose and we know the end and we know what you're going to do in the midst of it, at the end of it, as we go through it, we know what you're going to do.

You're going to mold and shape us. You're going to make us more like your son. You're going to minister your presence. And you're going to give us joy.

A joy the world can't understand, but a joy that we only know because we are in Christ and your spirit is in us. So help us, Lord.

Help those who are listening. Some, many, a few, I don't know, need to see and hear what your word is saying today.

[34 : 26] Please strengthen them. Strengthen their faith. And may they cry out with Jesus, glorify thy name.

Amen. Amen.