

The Gospel of John (99): Sorrow turned to Joy

Introduction:

We have been in a section of John's Gospel in which he recorded the farewell discourse of Jesus to His disciples (13:31-16:33). Before us we have the sixth declaration of our Lord Jesus of this final discourse (16:16-24) along with His epilogue, or concluding words to His disciples (16:25-33). It may be distilled into this promise of our Lord Jesus to His disciples, "I will turn your sorrow into joy." In the first three of six declarations, our Lord had spoken of His relationship with His disciples and their future existence with Him. In the last three of the six declarations Jesus explained the relationship that His disciples have with the fallen world and of their future life as His disciples in the world. In the episode before us, the final discourse of our Lord to His disciples prior to His arrest, He tells His disciples how He will turn their short-term sorrow into joy and that the Father would provide for all of their future needs in the name of His Son.

After our Lord had promised His disciples more clearly and fully the gift of the Holy Spirit that He would bestow upon them upon His return to His Father, He spoke to them regarding what would soon come upon them. He would leave them and be absent from them for a short time, which would bring them great sorrow, even while it brought great joy to the fallen world. But then He would soon after return to them. Their joy would be renewed and would then continue undiminished and uninterrupted. And when that time came, whole new avenues of blessing would be secured to them. They would have more full access to the Father through Him. They would then begin to enjoy the privilege of receiving answers to their prayers when they prayed to the Father through His name. And our Lord promised them that if they took these things to heart, they would enjoy unbroken peace, even as they lived in the fallen world that would be a source of tribulation to them. The reason for their perpetual joy and peace, which no one could take from them, was because Jesus Christ had overcome the world through His cross, even His glorification. Here is **John 16:16-33**.

¹⁶"A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father."

¹⁷Then some of His disciples said among themselves, "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 go to the Father'?"
¹⁸They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying."

¹⁹Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'?"
²⁰Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.
²¹A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.
²²Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.

²³"And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.
²⁴Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

²⁵"These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father.
²⁶In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you;
²⁷for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.
²⁸I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father."

²⁹His disciples said to Him, “See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech!
³⁰Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.”

³¹Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³²Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. ³³These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Here is an outline to help us digest what is recorded for us:

- I. Jesus would turn His disciples’ sorrow into joy (16:16-24)
 - A. The disciples’ confusion regarding seeing Jesus (16:16-18)
 - B. The coming transition of their sorrow to joy (16:19-24)
- II. Epilogue: Jesus spoke plainly of His departure and of peace (16:25-33)
 - A. The Christian faith and the coming “hour” (16:25-28)
 - B. The acknowledgement of the disciples’ understanding (16:29-30)
 - C. A final exhortation: Jesus declared, “I have overcome the world” (16:31-33)

Last Lord’s Day we read that Jesus told His disciples of the trial that they would encounter, which would take place after He departed from them (16:1-6). But He assured them that He would send unto them the Holy Spirit who would give them guidance and power in their witness to the world (16:7-15). These verses reveal to us that the work of advancing the kingdom of Jesus Christ involves resisting and overcoming the hostility of the world of evil people ruled by Satan. And so, although the work would be very difficult and challenging, the Lord would give the Holy Spirit to His people to enable them to accomplish their mission. But very shortly, the greatest of trials would be upon them. Jesus was about to be taken from them. He would be tried and crucified. This would cause His disciples great grief, great sorrow. But before us in 16:16 through 24 we read that

I. Jesus would turn His disciples’ sorrow into joy (16:16-24)

This instruction of Jesus to His disciples is set forth by...

A. The disciples’ confusion regarding seeing Jesus (16:16-18)

The pericope (episode) begins with confusion on the part of His disciples to understand His words to them regarding His suffering and death. Here again are verses 16-18. Jesus said,

¹⁶“A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.”

¹⁷Then some of His disciples said among themselves, “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 go to the Father?’”

¹⁸They said therefore, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is saying.”

Our Lord’s words are nearly identical with what He had said to His disciples on an earlier occasion. In John 14:19 we read His words, “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me.” But earlier our Lord was speaking to the need of His disciples of their ongoing relationship one with the other (cf. 14:19-24). But here He is speaking of the grief His disciples would soon experience due to His death and their needs that would arise due to this great calamity.

Jesus said to them in **verse 16**, “*A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.*” It should be pointed out that the last clause, “because I go to My Father” is not included in the newer English translations. It may not reflect what Jesus had actually said at

this point. He did indeed declare this at the end of verse 17, but His words were probably not original with verse 16. The phrase might have been inserted by a scribe who was copying the text some centuries into the Christian era. He included it in verse 16 because of what is said in verse 17. And so here, the ESV is perhaps the better English translation of verse 16. Jesus said, “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.”

But John records that the disciples did not understand His words. Here are **verses 17 through 19**:

¹⁷Then some of His disciples said among themselves, “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 go to the Father?’” ¹⁸They said therefore, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is saying.”

It does not say that they did not understand and therefore they asked Jesus directly for clarification. They spoke to one another, not to Jesus; they “said among themselves.” They were confused. Their traditional Jewish expectation of the coming Messiah did not involve a suffering and dying Messiah. As one wrote,

The disciples still have no category to allow them to make sense of a Messiah who would die, rise from the dead, and abandon His people in favor of ‘another Counselor’ (14:16). Their perplexity provides the justification to the assessment Jesus has just rendered: they cannot yet bear all that Jesus wants to say to them (v. 12).¹

To what does our Lord refer when He said that His disciples will “see Me”? Some argue He is speaking of His departure to the Father at His ascension and that when He will be seen of them again refers to the second coming of Christ.² Others say that it is best to understand our Lord telling His disciples that the “little while” would be the period in which He was arrested, tried, crucified and buried, and that His statement that they “will see” Him is a reference to His disciples seeing Him in His post-resurrection appearances. Here are the words of **Leon Morris** (1914-2006) addressing the various opinions regarding understanding our Lord’s words in this verse:

It is not surprising that these words of Jesus proved a difficulty to the men in the upper room. They have puzzled Christians ever since. The main problem concerns the meaning of the coming again of which Jesus speaks. Does He mean that he will come again in the person and work of the Holy Spirit? Or is He referring to the post-resurrection appearances? Or even to the ascension and the parousia (second coming). Great names can be urged in support of each of these views... But it seems to me that the language accords better with a reference to Jesus’ death and then to the post-resurrection appearances than to anything else (though this is not to deny that, as often, there may also be a secondary meaning as well).³

Donald Carson (b. 1947), whom we also greatly respect took this position. He wrote:

¹ Ibid, p. 543.

² This was the view of F. F. Bruce, who wrote: “We should not imagine too quickly that we understand what was so unintelligible to the disciples. It is easy to suppose that Jesus meant, ‘In a little while you will not see Me, because I am about to die; but in a little while after that you will see Me again, because I am going to rise on the third day and appear to you once more.’ Certainly He was going to be taken from them in a ‘little while’ --in a few hours’ time—but ‘you see Me no more’ (cf. verse 10) seems to indicate a longer interval than that between Jesus’ arrest and the resurrection appearances. Perhaps, then it is that ‘coming again’ promised in John 14:3 that is in view in the words: ‘again a little while and you will see Me.’ But in saying this we must recall what was said in the comments on John 14:3, 18 about the ‘vanishing distinction’ in the upper room discourse between Jesus’ coming in the resurrection appearances, in the Spirit’s abiding presence, and at His final advent.” F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 321f.

³ Leon Morris, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 702.

But which departure and return are in view? Does the first ‘little while’ mark the time until Jesus’ death, or until His ascension? Does the ‘you will see Me’ after the second ‘little while’ refer to Jesus’ resurrection, the descent of the Spirit (cf. 14:23), or the parousia (14:1-4)? Or should we join the many commentators who think John is cleverly deploying his language to include double or treble references?

Despite the popularity of this latter view, the notes on the following verses argue that each bit of evidence makes most sense if this verse refers to Jesus’ departure in death and His return after His resurrection.⁴

But I find myself disagreeing with this position that our Lord was speaking of the time of His death until His resurrection and that the time when they would “see” Him speaks of His post-resurrection appearances. It seems to be speaking of much more. Besides, if it were only to be understood this way then these words would have little relevance for anyone but those relatively few disciples who saw Him in His post resurrection appearances. Rather, because of the manner that John records the repetition of our Lord’s words by the disciples in verse 17, and because of the nature of the confusion which seems to betray something beyond what Jesus had previously instructed them, it seems that our Lord was speaking of their ongoing awareness and sense of His presence with them through the Holy Spirit whom He would send to them upon returning to His Father. In other words, when Jesus told His disciples, “*and again a little while, and you will see Me*”, He was speaking of the spiritual “sight” of Jesus through the Holy Spirit that became the experience of all Christians due to the fact that He had gone to be with His Father and that He then imparted the gift of the Holy Spirit to His people.

This is the position of **Edward Klink**:

The connection to the Paraclete (Holy Spirit) may also be expressed by the use of two different words for “will see” (θεωρεῖτέ, ὄψεσθε), something that did not occur in 14:19. While the Fourth Gospel frequently uses related words synonymously across the narrative (e.g. 13:10; 21:15-17), when they are used in close proximity (especially in the same verse) there is usually a carefully nuanced distinction or comparison intended between them. In this case the distinction might be made through the use of the second verb “will see” (ὄψεσθε), which can be used to refer to “inward vision or true apprehension.” In this sense, then, the sight that the disciples are to have of Jesus “a little while” after His departure is not in reference to His resurrection or to the second coming of Christ, as some have suggested, but to the “sight” obtained by the coming of the Spirit. This sight is the cosmological sight or the vision of God made possible through the Son, as declared in the prologue (1:18). Christ does not address their loss of Him for three days only to depart from them again after His resurrection, nor is He acting as if “a little while” appropriately describes what turned into the rest of their lives (and the last two millennia). Rather, He connects again their participation in Him by the Spirit with His departure. Seeing God according to the Gospel is seeing the Father through the Son and in the Spirit.⁵

And so, if I may put the matter in other words, it is as if Jesus was telling them that though they saw Him physically, He would be out of their sight during His Passion, but upon His resurrection and His ascension to the Father, when He would send to them the Holy Spirit, they will always “see Him.” He was promising that He would always be with them and that He would never forsake them.

This was also the understanding of **John Calvin** (1509-1564), who wrote in his commentary on John:

And again a little while, and you will see me. Yet some explain this second clause differently: “You will see, Me when I shall have risen from the dead, but only for a short time; for I shall very soon be received into heaven.” But I do not think that the words will bear that meaning. On the contrary, He mitigates and soothes their sorrow for His absence, by this consolation, that it will not last long; and thus He magnifies the grace of the Spirit, by which He will be continually present with them; as if He had promised that, after a short interval, He would return, and that they would not be long deprived of His presence.

⁴ Donald Carson, **The Gospel According to John** (William B. Eerdmans. 1991), pp. 542f.

⁵ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), pp. 689f.

Nor ought we to think it strange when He says that He is *seen*, when He dwells in the disciples by the Spirit; for, though He is not *seen* with the bodily eyes, yet His presence is known by the undoubted experience of faith. What we are taught by Paul is indeed true, that believers, so long as they remain on earth, are absent from the Lord, because they walk, by faith, and not by sight (2 Cor. 5:6, 7).

But it is equally true that they may justly, in the meantime, glory in having Christ dwelling in them by faith, in being united to Him as members to the Head, in possessing heaven along with Him by hope. Thus the grace of the Spirit is a mirror, in which Christ wishes to be seen by us, according to the words of Paul, “Though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet we know Him no more; if any man be in Christ, let him be a new creature” (2 Cor. 5:16, 17).

And then here are Calvin’s comments on the words, “*Because I go to the Father.*”

Some explain these words as meaning that Christ will no longer be seen by the disciples, because He will be in heaven, and they on earth. For my part, I would rather refer it to the second clause, *You will soon see Me*; for My death is not a destruction to separate Me from you, but a passage into the heavenly glory, from which My divine power will diffuse itself even to you.” He intended, therefore, in my opinion, to teach what would be His condition after His death, that they might rest satisfied with His spiritual presence, and might not think that it would be any loss to them that He no longer dwelt with them as a mortal man.

If this is the case, and I believe that it is so, then the same kind of lesson is found here as in Luke 24 when Jesus “appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He prevented these two disciples from recognizing Him. But He spoke them in the way and opened the Scriptures to them. And He sat with them to share a fellowship meal. It was then that they recognized Him when He blessed the bread. The lesson is that although Jesus had died and had risen and was soon to be with His Father in glory, nevertheless, His disciples could continue to experience and enjoy His presence with them by the Holy Spirit blessing their reading and discussion of the Scriptures and through the mutual fellowship between His disciples.

We next read of...

B. The coming transition of their sorrow to joy (16:19-24)

Our Lord used the confusion of His disciples to tell them that their deep sorrow, which would soon come upon them, would very soon be turned to joy. We read in verses 19 and 20,

¹⁹Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, “Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’? ²⁰Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.”

We read that Jesus “knew that they desired to ask Him.” He not only knew what they were saying, but He knew what they were thinking.

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is *a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*. ¹³And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. (Heb. 12:12f)

Our Lord compares and contrasts the joys and sorrows of His disciples with those of the world. “The world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful.” He was speaking of the reaction of people toward news of His death on His cross. It resulted in great sorrow for His disciples, even while it brought great joy to the world. The point is that the realm in which His disciples lived and moved was wholly different than the world of the

lost. They are two entirely different realms of existence. They are in conflict and contradiction with one another. “That which is the grief of saints is the joy of sinners” (Matthew Henry).

Of course our Lord was speaking of the experience of His disciples upon His resurrection from the dead. Although they were filled with grief due to His crucifixion, upon their seeing Him risen from the dead, their sorrow would immediately cease and be replaced “with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet. 1:8). But the crucifixion of Jesus, which was so distressing and depressing to His disciples, was the cause for satisfaction and happiness on part of the fallen world. Whereas we desire and delight in knowing and seeing God in Jesus Christ, the fallen world would desire and delight in His death and demise, that His name be discredited and dismissed.

But upon the resurrection of Jesus Christ and having shown Himself alive to His disciples, and as the fallen world of hypocrites and Pharisees came to hear and learn of this event, the attitudes of the world and His disciples experienced a great reversal. The sorrow of the disciples was turned to joy, a joy that no one or no thing could extinguish in them. And with the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost their joy became accentuated; joy characterized their existence and their experience.

Here are the words of **John Calvin** on these matters:

He means the *joy* which they felt after having received the Spirit; not that they were afterwards free from all *sorrow*, but that all the sorrow which they would endure was, swallowed up by *spiritual joy*.⁶ We know that the apostles: so long as they lived, sustained a severe warfare, that they endured base reproaches, that they had many reasons for *weeping and lamenting*; but, renewed by the Spirit, they had laid aside their former consciousness of weakness, so that, with lofty heroism, they nobly trampled underfoot all the evils that they endured. Here then is a comparison between their present weakness and the power of the Spirit, which would soon be given to them; for, though they were nearly overwhelmed for a time, yet afterwards they not only fought bravely, but obtained a glorious triumph in the midst of their struggles. Yet it ought also to be observed, that He points out not only the interval that elapsed between the resurrection of Christ and the death of the apostles, but also the period which followed afterwards; as if Christ had said, “You will lie prostrate, as it were, for a short time; but when the Holy Spirit shall have raised you up again, then will begin a new *joy*, which will continue to increase, until, having been received into the heavenly glory, you shall have *perfect joy*.”

Our Lord then gave an illustration of a woman in labor to bring forth her child. As soon as the child is born, there is an immediate and profound change of outlook and perception of what has occurred. Jesus said,

²¹A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²²Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.

Our Lord was not only promising them that their sorrow would give way suddenly to great joy, in doing so He was preparing them to face the sorrow that they would shortly experience. Knowing that God has ordained what troubles us, and knowing that God has purposed that they will be of relatively short duration--our short life in comparison with eternity—though the cause of our sorrow be great, it will seem to us to be much lighter than it would otherwise appear to us, for our knowledge of God and His ways both tempers our trials and assures us that they are but temporary. This is in contrast to the fallen world from which we were redeemed. Where the Scriptures tell us that “the *joy of the hypocrite* is but for a moment” (Job 20:5), those same Scriptures declare that the *sorrow of the Christian* is but for a moment. And this comforts us and strengthens us to encounter and endure what the Lord brings us to experience.

This was Paul’s opinion and attitude of the great difficulties he encountered. Although they were quite severe and extreme by human standards, when he weighed these trials and troubles in the light of eternity, he regarded his difficulties as relatively “light affliction.” He wrote of his own experiences:

⁶ Consider Paul and Silas singing hymns and rejoicing even while in a prison cell after having been abused for their testimony of Jesus Christ (Acts 16.25).

⁸We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— ¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So then death is working in us, but life in you...

¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷***For our light affliction, which is but for a moment,*** is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:8-12; 16-18)

The Lord Jesus also declared to His disciples, ***“your joy no one will take from you.”*** **John Gill** wrote:

The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment, and the joy of the chief priests, Scribes, and Pharisees, was a short lived one, on account of Christ's death; for Jesus was soon raised from the dead, and the apostles were filled with the Spirit, and went forth boldly preaching in the name of Christ, to the great grief of these men. But the joy of the disciples was durable; their risen Lord would never die more; the blessings of grace, such as redemption, pardon, righteousness, and atonement, would, and do ever remain as the foundation of solid joy: nor could a stranger intermeddle with it; “not one”, either man or devil could take it away, not by all the reproaches they could cast upon them, or persecutions they could follow them with: and so, though a believer's joy may be damped by sin, and satan, and the world, it may not be always in lively exercise; yet the matter of it always remains in Christ, and the principle of it in themselves can never be destroyed, but will issue in everlasting joy in another world.

Now our Lord indicated to His disciples that not only will their sight of Him risen from the dead be a cause of great *joy* for His disciples, but also ***the blessing of prayer that He secured for His disciples through His death would also be a cause for great joy.*** We read in verses 23f:

²³***“And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. ²⁴Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.***

In the relationship that His disciples had enjoyed with the Savior throughout His ministry, they had asked directly and repeatedly for blessing to come forth from Him unto them. But through His death on His cross and His resurrection from the dead, our Lord entered fully into the role of Mediator between His disciples and God the Father. A whole new understanding and manner of prayer to God came to be the experience of His people.

What, then, should characterize our attitude and approach to our Father in prayer? **Matthew Henry** (1662-1714) may help us with this:

We are here taught how to seek; we must *ask the Father in Christ's name*; we must have an eye to God as a Father, and come as children to Him; and to Christ as Mediator, and come as clients. Asking of the Father includes a sense of spiritual blessings, with a conviction that they are to be had from God only. It included also humility of address to Him, with a believing confidence in Him, as a Father able and ready to help us. Asking in Christ's name includes an acknowledgment of our own unworthiness to receive any favour from God, a complacency in the method God has taken of keeping up a correspondence with us by His Son, and an entire dependence upon Christ as *the Lord our Righteousness*.

The willingness of our Father to hear us, the readiness of our Savior to mediate for us, and the promise that the Father will answer us, should encourage us to be diligent and persistent in employing this great gift of grace (prayer) that our Savior has secured for us. Here, again, are comments of **John Calvin** on our Lord's words, ***“Whatever you shall ask the Father in My name”***:

He shows whence they will obtain this new faculty. It is because they will have it in their power to draw freely from God, the fountain of wisdom, as much as they need; as if He had said, “You must not fear that you will be deprived of the gift of understanding; for *My Father* will be ready, with all the abundance of blessings, to enrich you bountifully.” Besides, by these words He informs them that the Spirit is not promised in such a manner that they to whom He is promised may wait for Him in sloth and inactivity, but, on the contrary, that they may be earnestly employed in seeking the grace which is offered. In short, He declares that He will at that time discharge the office of Mediator, so that *whatever they shall ask* He will obtain for them from the Father abundantly, and beyond their prayers.

By the way, this reveals the error and wickedness of those who seek to come to God through any other mediator other than Jesus Christ. The Scriptures are very clear on this matter: “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). To pray to the Father through anyone or any thing other than Jesus Christ is not only ineffectual, it is sinful. It is through Jesus Christ alone that prayer is to be offered. It is terrible sin to pray to the Father through angels or “saints”, Mary or Joseph, through self-proclaimed priests or popes. The Lord Jesus declared, “*Whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you.*”

We now arrive to what may be called the epilogue of our Lord’s farewell discourse to His disciples. The discourse itself began with John 13:31 and it ends at the end of John 16: 33. The epilogue of this discourse includes verses 25 through 33, which are before us.

II. Epilogue: Jesus spoke plainly of His departure and of peace (16:25-33)

We might refer first to...

A. The Christian faith and the coming “hour” (16:25-28)

We read of our Lord declaring that He would speak to them in less figurative language, not like much of the language that had characterized much of His instruction to His disciples in the past. The subject to which He would give great attention was the relationship His disciples were to enjoy with God the Father through His role as their Mediator. We read the words of our Lord in **verses 25** through **28**,

²⁵“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; ²⁷for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. ²⁸I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.”

Our Lord told His disciples that His relationship with them would undergo significant and remarkable change and development due to His death and resurrection that was about to take place. Upon His resurrection He would begin to instruct them in matters regarding God the Father in a manner and in detail that He had not done previously. **Thomas Boston** (1676-1732) gave a sermon on this subject entitled, “*Of Praying in the Name of Jesus Christ.*” Here are his words of introduction to this sermon:

Our Lord Jesus is here comforting His disciples under the want of His bodily presence which they had so long enjoyed, showing them that it should be well made up to them. They should see Him again after His resurrection, though not to return to the familiarity with them as before; they should see Him by the Spirit, in His exalted state; and find God so reconciled to them by His sacrifice of Himself, that they should have a boldness of access to the throne of heaven, which they had not before; that in that day they

should ask Him nothing in that manner they used while He was with them in the days of His flesh; but in a manner more to His honor and their comfort.⁷

Through the death of the Savior, believers in Jesus Christ, being citizens in the kingdom of God, have greater privilege and familiarity with God the Father than any human being had ever enjoyed before His cross. Our Lord had once spoken of the least one in the kingdom of God as greater than John the Baptist, who had been the greatest man born of women (cf. Luke 7:28). One of these greater privileges and blessings that Christians came to know due to the death and resurrection of Christ was that the disciple of Jesus Christ had the privilege and authority to call upon God as his Father. This was a relationship that was new and unique to the people of God. Yes, in the Old Testament people would call upon God as the Father collectively of the nation of Israel, having caused that nation to be born into existence. And the sons of King David who ascended their father's throne over Israel had entered into a relationship as God's "son" and He their Father as they were to rule His nation on His behalf.⁸ But the individual Israelite, even the believer under the old covenant, did not think of, or call upon God as his (personal) Father. But upon the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, through faith in Him as the Son of God, believers in Christ themselves have become the sons (and daughters) of God who may call upon God their Father. For we are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26).

And yet, when we are to pray to God our Father, we are to do so through the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus said to them in **verse 26**, "*In that day you will ask in My name.*" What does this mean? What does this imply or suggest to us of the nature and in the manner that we pray to the Father? **Thomas Boston** addressed this in his sermon mentioned above. He spoke of praying in the name of Jesus both negatively and positively:

Negatively, it is not a bare mentioning His name, in prayer, and concluding our prayers therewith, Matthew 7:21, "Not every one that saith unto Me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven." We must begin, carry on, and conclude our prayers in the name of Christ, Colossians 3:7, "Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him." The saints use the words, "through Jesus Christ our Lord," 1 Corinthians 15:57; but the virtue is not in the words, but in the faith wherewith they are used. But alas! These are often produced as an empty scabbard, while the sword is away.

Positively, we may take it up in these four things.

First, we must go to God at Christ's command, and by order from Him. This is the import of the phrase "in His name," Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered in My name, there I am in the midst of them." If a poor body can get a recommendation from a friend to one that is able to help him, he comes with confidence and tells, such a one has sent me to you. Our Lord Christ is the friend of poor sinners, and He sends them to His Father to ask simply of their wants (needs); and allows them to tell that He sent them; John 16:24. And coming that way in faith, they shall not be refused...⁹

Secondly, we must pray for Christ's sake, as our motive for duty. This is also imported in the phrase, "in the name;" Mark 9:41, "Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink, in My name, because ye belong to Christ,--he shall not lose his reward." As we must be influenced by His command, as the reason of our praying, so with regard to Him as our motive...

Thirdly, we must in praying to God act in the strength of Christ. This is also imported in the phrase; Luke 10:17, "And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name." So in Zechariah 10:12, "I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in His name." We must go to prayer, as David went against Goliath; 1 Samuel 17:45, "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts."¹⁰

⁷ Thomas Boston, **The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston**, vol. 11 (Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), p. 81.

⁸ Cf. 2 Samuel 7:12-14; 1 Chron. 28:9

⁹ Boston then set forth 5 particulars as to what this implies. I wish that I could have listed these. [Actually, I attached a file of this sermon of Boston that I scanned.]

¹⁰ Boston, vol. 11, pp. 82-85

We then read of...

B. The acknowledgement of the disciples' understanding (16:29-30)

²⁹His disciples said to Him, "See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech!
³⁰Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God."

Our Lord's teaching them of His going away for a while and then returning to them now seemed to be understood by His disciples. Our Lord had prepared them for what they would soon witness, even His arrest, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, and then His appearances to Him. He had also convinced them of their great advantage for Him to undergo His Passion on their behalf. It would bring them into a deeper and greater relationship with God as their Father through Him as their Mediator. They understood that God His Father had sent Him to accomplish this work, this mission, on His behalf for their eternal benefit and blessing.

C. A final exhortation: Jesus declared, "I have overcome the world" (16:31-33)

³¹Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? ³²Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.

He was not calling their faith into question, but He was suggesting its weakness that would soon become evident even to them. He knew the nature and strength of their faith better than they knew themselves. Their faith was real and sincere, but as yet quite weak. **F. F. Bruce** (1910-1990) described their present faith well:

It was sincere and genuine, bound up with their love for Him, but it was about to be exposed to a test such as they had not imagined. For all their faith and love, they would abandon Him in the hour of His greatest need. Peter had already been warned of the impending collapse of his resolution (John 13:38), but they would prove unequal to the coming test. If their support was all that their Lord had to rely on, it would prove a broken reed. But the Father's presence and support were assure to Him (cf. John 8:29); confident of these, He would go forward.¹¹

And **John Gill** (1697-1771) paraphrased our Lord's words that suggest their weakness of faith:

The words carry in them a tacit reproof, that they believed no sooner, or were not before this time more established in their faith, when He had been so long with them, and they had heard so many discourses from Him, and had seen so many miracles wrought by Him: however, it was not too late, and they would do well to go on believing; but it is suggested to them they would meet with something that would try their faith: and it is as if Christ had said, ye believe in Me now, while I am with you, and all things go according to your mind; but what will you do anon (*soon*), when I shall be taken from you, be apprehended by Mine enemies, be delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, be crucified, die, and be laid in the grave? will ye believe then? one of you will betray Me, another deny Me, and all will forsake Me, and some express their doubts about Me.

Our Lord concluded His farewell discourse with the words recorded in **John 16:33**. Jesus said to them, "*These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*"

For the Christian, who is thinking and believing rightly, the world fails to give true peace in his soul. The world cannot give peace, but thankfully for the Christian, the world may not take away his peace, if that peace is settled upon and in Jesus Christ. Our presence and permanence of our peace is not from our...

¹¹ F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 325.

duties, services, and performances of men; no, not from an attendance on the Gospel, and the ordinances of it; nor even from the graces of the Spirit; for though peace may be enjoyed herein, and hereby, and through these, as means; yet does not come from them, but from Christ, in whose strength alone all duties are performed aright; who is the sum and substance of the Gospel, and the ordinances of it, and the object of all grace: it is in Him, and in Him only, in His person, blood, righteousness, and sacrifice, which speak peace, pardon, and atonement, that a soul finds any true, solid peace, rest, comfort, and joy; and here He may, and does find it, in opposition to the cry of sin, law, and justice, for wrath, ruin, hell, and damnation. There is a peace by Christ, which He has made for His people by the blood of His cross; and there is a peace in him, which is enjoyed through faith's looking to His blood for pardon, to His righteousness for justification, to His sacrifice for atonement and satisfaction; and by having communion with Him, and discoveries of His love, and by seeing safety and security in Him. (John Gill)

This world will bring the Christian "tribulation." The belief and teaching of so many evangelicals that the church will not go through "the tribulation" (i.e. a supposed future 7 year tribulation) is not taught in the Scriptures. For the Christian life in this world is commonly, even generally characterized by tribulation. If Christians seem to have escaped it, it is only for a time due to the mercy and wisdom of God.

But thankfully, true, lasting, unshakeable peace is the privileged blessing of every true Christian who is thinking and behaving rightly. Jesus declared, "*in Me you may have peace.*" Moreover, we can rejoice that though it may seem to us that the world has the upper hand and wins the day, this is not the case. King Jesus has overcome the world. The world might and will trouble you, but it cannot ultimately destroy you. He has saved you from it and will preserve you in it, until He calls you into His presence one day.

Believers, of all men, notwithstanding their tribulations, have reason to be of good cheer, since their sins are forgiven, the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts, their redemption draws nigh, and they have hopes of glory; and particularly, because as Christ here says, for their encouragement under all their tribulations in the world, "I have overcome the world": satan, the god and prince of the world, with all his principalities and powers, which Christ has led captive, ransomed His people from, and delivers them from the power of; and all that is in the world, the lusts and sins of it, their damning power by the sacrifice of Himself, and their governing power by His Spirit and grace; and the men of the world with all their rage and fury, whom He has trodden down in His anger, restrains by His power, and causes the remainder of their wrath to praise Him; in all which conquests He makes His people share, and even makes them more than conquerors, through Himself: so that they have nothing to fear from the world; nor any reason to be cast down by the tribulation they meet with in it. (John Gill)

The last words of the Bible from the pen of the Apostle John:

²⁰He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen.
Even so, come, Lord Jesus! ²¹The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.
