

“The Gift of Joy” John 16:16-24 Shane Hatfield 3/28/21

Alright, well we’re going to continue our study of Jesus’ farewell instructions to His disciples. Every good teacher, every good coach knows that repetition is the mother of learning and if you want to give good instructions, you’ve got to tell them on the front end what you’re going to tell them, and then you’ve got to tell them what you told them, and then you’ve got to tell them and then tell them what you told them. And that’s what Jesus is doing. Jesus is reminding them, He’s giving them His final instructions, and He’s about to remind them again of the main point which is, He’s leaving, okay? But I just want to quickly just summarize what He’s told them so far. So far, He’s said, I’m leaving, and here are all the wonderful gifts you’re going to get because I’m going. I have prepared a place for you with the Father and I have shown you the way to the Father. I have given you a new purpose and a new power. Your purpose is to experience my peace and express it through the power of the Holy Spirit. He has given us a new home with Him, and a new community called the church to experience Him. He has given us the Holy Spirit that will equip us and encourage us to face the opposition that we experience from the world. And now, these last couple weeks, He’s going to wind it down and He’s going to focus again on what’s going to happen when He leaves and He’s going to share two more gifts that we get: the gift of joy and the gift of peace. So, this week we’ll talk about the gift of joy, and next week we’ll talk about the gift of peace. If you’re a young listener, let me give you three things to listen for: a story about a reunion, an unbreakable promise, and a prayer that you can pray for joy.

Alright, let’s read these words from John 16:16-24.

“¹⁶ ‘A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.’” ¹⁷ So some of his disciples said to one another, “What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father?’” ¹⁸ So they were saying, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” ¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me’?” ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. ²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. ²² 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. ²³ 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. ²⁴ Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”

This is the reading of God’s word. All men are like grass and their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the word of our God stands forever. Let’s listen to it.

In January, my family sold our house in Stillwater and we said goodbye to our neighbors, and that was a very sad goodbye because in our little area we had four families with nine kids, and those nine kids have spent a lot of time playing together over the last six years. Pretty much every day they were outside playing gaga ball on the trampoline or hide and go seek tag or capture the flag. They were playing these games together all the time, and so these kids got really, really close. In fact, the last day we were there they spent the entire day playing together

and at the end there were tearful hugs and goodbyes, it was really sad. They were really good friends. We told our kids, 'You're going to see each other really soon, and pretty soon, they can all come over to our house and we'll play together.' Well, after we moved, we got covid and then there was an ice storm, and so there were several weeks when they didn't get to see each other, and they kept asking us, 'When are we going to see our neighbors? When are we going to see our friends? When are they going to come over?' And we just kept saying, 'We don't know! As soon as possible we'll all get together and you guys can play.' Well, one day they got a huge surprise. After covid was over, and after the ice storm was over, one day they were just hanging out in the living room and they looked outside, and a van pulled up and out came the neighbors. And I mean, my kid shot out of that door like a bullet out of a gun and they said, 'You're here! I can't believe it!' And they all started yelling and screaming, I mean, you would have thought it was Christmas day! They went four weeks without seeing their neighbor friends, right? All of their sorrow of missing their friends was turned to joy in that little reunion.

Well, Jesus is preparing His disciples for a similar experience. He's preparing them for the roller coaster ride of the extreme sorrow of His death and the extreme joy of His resurrection. When He says, 'In a little while, you will see me no longer,' He's talking about when He will die, and they won't see Him. They'll spend three days mourning His death. And He says, 'Again a little while, you will see me,' and after three days we know that He's going to rise from the grave and He's going to visit them again and they are going to celebrate, and they are going to rejoice! So, Jesus is saying that seeing Him is going to turn their sorrow into joy, and then after He turned their sorrow into joy and He shared all the rest of the teachings He needed with them, He ascended into heaven and what they did was they took this gospel, this good news, and they shared it with others. They shared the euangelion, the gospel, right? It literally means good news and that word for good can also mean joy! It can mean a message of joy! They took the message of joy out to other people.

Well, we live in a different era than the disciples, right? They lived before the cross and then right after His resurrection. We live after that, right? So, Jesus had His life, death, resurrection and ascension, and now, we come into the picture. So, we come into the picture in this era where Jesus has already ascended and we have these amazing promises that one day, some day, He is going to return and He is going to take away all sorrow, all sickness, all death, but He hasn't done that yet. We live in between the times. We live in what theologians call the already and the not yet, the kingdom is here, the gospel is here, it's already here, but it's not yet fully here, because Jesus isn't back. And so, our sorrow is a little bit different. We have this sorrow of Jesus' departure where we are wondering, 'When is Jesus going to return?' And when He returns, fully and finally, then we'll experience the joy of the resurrection.

So, what I want us to do this evening, is I want to look at this passage and how Jesus prepares the disciples for His departure, and I think what we can do is, we can see how Jesus wants us to experience joy, the joy of the resurrection in our lives now. We can begin to see how He wants to turn our sorrow into joy, now, so that it can be fully experienced in the resurrection. So, I want you to open up yourselves tonight, like I said earlier, to bring your sorrows to Him and to listen to how He can bring joy into your life. There are three ways I think He wants to bring joy into our lives: there's the promise of joy, the process of joy, and the person of joy. The promise, the process, and the person.

The first thing that Jesus does is He gives us the promise of joy. If you look back at verse 20, He says, "20 Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy." Notice there that He is very realistic,

and He is very honest, about our suffering. He says, “You will weep. You will lament. You will experience sorrow.” But He is also equally certain about the joy that we will experience. He says, “But your sorrow *will* turn into joy” (emphasis added). He doesn’t say, ‘it might’ turn into joy, or ‘it could’ turn into joy, it doesn’t say ‘if you’re lucky’ it will turn into joy. He says, “Your sorrow *will* turn into joy.” Jesus is making an unbreakable promise to them, that because of His resurrection, our lives will not end in sorrow, they will end in joy. We know that for the disciples, it didn’t end that way. Like we said earlier, Jesus came back, and He visited them! They saw Him! They saw the resurrected Christ and over 500 people saw Him, right? This wasn’t a hallucination! This wasn’t a story that they made up. This was a real historical event, that the person of Jesus Christ died and came back from the dead in the resurrection.

So, what does this mean for us? This means that Jesus gives us a promise, an unbreakable promise, that He’s going to turn our sorrow into joy, and He is that promise, right? His resurrection is that promise. His resurrection secures it. He, right now, is sitting in heaven. It’s an objective historical reality that He is in heaven, that He’s undefiled, unperishable, and so, because of that, our future in Him is secure. Now, this is good news for us because everything that we put our hope in, in this world, is circumstantial. They are things that can be taken away from us. If we look for joy in money, we can lose it. If we look for joy in things, they will break. If we look for joy in people, they will disappoint us. The world is always focusing on getting its’ joy out of these circumstantial things that can perish! But Jesus gives us something that’s unbreakable, something that’s unperishable, something that cannot change, to put our hope in. He gives us His resurrection! That’s the thing that whenever sorrow comes into this world, whenever we experience sorrow because the things of this world break down, we can cling to, we can trust, His promise. We can trust the promise of the resurrection.

There’s a Christian musician named Ellie Holcomb and she wrote a song called “Fighting Words” and she tells this story about “Fighting Words” and she says that she had a friend who was struggling with depression, and the friend was in the throes of depression, and they couldn’t figure out how to help her. And so, what they did is they got their Bibles and they went to the coffee shop, and they set down their Bibles and they opened to Genesis and they literally went through the Bible and they found every promise that they could remember in the Bible and they read those promises together. And she said to her friend, she said, “These are your fighting words. Whenever you’re depressed, you pull out these promises and you fight the depression with these words.” This promise that Jesus gives us, these are your fighting words. When sorrow comes, you fight it by saying, ‘My sorrow *will* turn into joy, thanks to the resurrection. There’s nothing that can take it from me, there’s nothing that can pull the resurrection out of heaven. Nothing can change it. It is mine and my future and my hope is secure.’ Because of the resurrection, our sorrow will turn into joy. That’s the promise of joy.

The second thing we see is the process of joy. Look back at verse 21, it says, “²¹ When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.” Jesus compares this process of going from sorrow to joy, to giving birth to a child. Now, I have not personally experienced what it feels like to give birth to a child. I hear it’s painful. The closest I’ve come is being in the room when my wife had a C-section and smelling her burning flesh. She’s not here so I can talk about that without her passing out. That smelled painful. Now, imagine all the pain that we go through now, bearing a child, imagine doing that without anesthesia. Maybe some of you have done it, I want to meet the woman who has done that, by the way. That’s what Jesus is saying! He’s saying, all that pain that you have to go through to

have a child, all the pain, all the suffering, that pain is transformed into joy! Now, why did you experience all that pain? Why would you experience all the sorrow of having a child without anesthesia? Because it's worth it! Because you want the joy of having a baby! You want the joy of bringing that human being into the world. There is sorrow, not just in natural birth, but the pain of adoption is difficult, and the pain of infertility is difficult, there's all this pain that comes with it, but we want that joy of having a human! So, what is Jesus saying? He's saying that pain and suffering are necessary to experience joy. There's a process you have to go through to experience joy, and that process includes suffering. This means that we cannot experience the joy of the resurrection in our lives, without the sorrow of the crucifixion. You can't experience it. The Bible from cover to cover says that humiliation brings exaltation. Death brings resurrection. Suffering brings joy. Joy is not something that we can just learn in the abstract. It's not an idea or a philosophy we can just read about and say, 'Oh yeah! I've got joy down.' No! It's a process that takes hold as you experience suffering. And likewise, sorrow is something that God actually uses to bring joy.

Now, we have to ask ourselves, do we like sorrow? No. We don't like sorrow, do we? We are masters at trying to eliminate sorrow and suffering from our lives, and I think there are three ways we try to avoid it, we try to get rid of it, right? The first one is we try to numb it. We want to numb sorrow with drugs and alcohol and pleasures. Or we want to try to avoid it. If there's sorrow in our relationships, we just break those off and we leave. We want to break the commitments. We want to get away as quickly as possible. Or we just try to deny it, we try to act like there's not sorrow and suffering in our lives. We just ignore it. We think if we ignore it long enough, it'll just go away. We try to numb it, avoid it, or deny it. Christians are just as bad at doing this as anybody else. We come to church, we put on a happy face, we act like everything's okay, when on the inside we're suffering, we're dying, we're struggling. Somewhere along the way we believed this lie, that Christians won't suffer, that if you just believe the gospel, you're somehow immune to pain and suffering in the world, and that is not true. Jesus is even saying that to try to avoid pain and suffering in our lives is to actually forfeit the process of joy!

So, I think the first thing that we have to ask ourselves is, what are we sorrowful about? Where do we struggle? Where are we suffering? Are you suffering from the pain of chronic disease, or just chronic pain? Are you suffering from the sadness of broken families and broken homes? Are you suffering from being continually slandered? People are lying about you. They're trying to destroy you and your family. Are you suffering the grief of the loss of loved ones? Are you suffering from the guilt and shame of sin? When that suffering comes, when you experience it, don't try to numb it, don't try to avoid it, don't try to deny it. Acknowledge it. Bring it to Jesus. Trust that God is in the process of doing something in your life. Scripture says over and over again that God is using our suffering to make us look more like Jesus. He's using it to bring endurance and character and hope. He's using it to give us a more mature faith! Our suffering is not meaningless. Our suffering has a purpose to it.

One of the challenges and blessings of being in the ministry is you get to walk with people through intense pain and suffering. It's challenging, but it's also beautiful sometimes, when you see someone who's trusting Jesus in the midst of their sorrow. They have this air about them, that they're just closer to Jesus than you are. I say this, this is going to sound weird, but I've had a few friends who have gone through intense suffering and I see how close they are to Jesus and it almost makes me jealous, because they're so close to Jesus because of their suffering. I've got a friend going through it right now. He's just a wreck. His life is a wreck. And I look at it, and I just weep for him. And then I talk to him, and I say, 'How are you doing?' And

he says, 'I feel closer to Jesus than I've ever been.' I don't know what you're going through, but I can assure you that God is at work in the process. He's drawing near to you. He is changing you and there is a purpose to your suffering, and part of that purpose is to experience the person of joy, which is the last thing we see in this passage.

Verse 22, Jesus says, "22 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." I think it's interesting, Jesus says, "I will see you." He's saying, so you have this sorrow now, but I will see you again. Jesus is promising that He is going to come meet them in their sorrow. I just love it, right? You're not alone in your sorrow! Jesus comes and meets you in it. This is the amazing thing about the Christian God. Every other god is away, is aloof, is up on high, is removed from the sin and suffering in this world, and only the God of the Bible says, 'I'm going to come down and meet you in it. I'm going to come down and rescue you from it.'

I heard a rescue story this week about a man named Pete and Pete was an alcoholic, he'd been in rehab six or so times, and after the sixth time, it didn't work, he was basically on the road to death. He was a homeless man out in the street. Well, while he was homeless on the street, suffering from his alcoholism, his dad was in Atlantic City with his wife and something told his dad, 'You need to go check on Pete. You need to go find Pete.' So, his dad drove from Atlantic City to Brooklyn to find Pete and he followed all the clues he had, and eventually he tracked down Pete. His dad was on one side of the street, and Pete was on the other side of the street. Pete said he could hear his dad yelling for him, but he was so ashamed because he was a homeless man that he began to try to get away. He began to run, but he fell. His dad came across the street, picked him up, held him close and just kept saying, 'I will not lose my son to this. I will not lose my son to this.' He began weeping, saying, 'I will not lose my son to this.' And it was in that moment that Pete's alcoholism was broken. Hearing his father come to him in his misery and sin and saying, 'I will not lose my son to this,' changed him.

Don't try to escape your suffering! Jesus is there. Don't leave it. He is going to come meet you in it, and He is saying, 'I will not lose you to this. I will not lose you to this. For the joy that was set before me, I endured the cross to rescue you from sin and suffering. I will not lose you to this.' He comes and He meets us in our suffering. He rescues us. He saves us and when we find Him, our hearts rejoice, and His heart rejoices as well. He endured the cross for us, for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross. It was for His joy *and* our joy. And so, when you're there in your suffering and your sorrow, this is what I want you to pray, very simply, "Jesus, where are you? Help me see you. I know that You're there. You promised that You're there. You promised that You were going to come and save me. Save me. Jesus, where are you?" He will be there! He has promised to be there and He has secured it through His life, death, and resurrection. He will come. And when He comes, He will bring joy with Him.

I want to close tonight by telling you the story of the song, 'It is Well,' and then later we're going to sing this song. It's a very traditional hymn, you've probably heard it before, it was written by a man named Horatio Spafford in the nineteenth century and he wrote it after two traumatic events in his life. One was the great fire of Chicago that cost him his business and his only son. Then, not long after that, he put his family on a boat, his wife and his four daughters, and he sent them across the sea to go to England where he was going to meet with D. L. Moody, and they were going to do some evangelistic crusades in England. He stayed behind to tidy up some business. Well, while the ship was going across the channel, it sank and he lost all four of his daughters, and his wife sent him a letter from the other side that said, 'I alone survive.' And these were the words that he penned after that occasion.

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin—oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!—
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!

And Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
A song in the night, it is well with my soul.

Spafford didn't numb the pain. He didn't deny the pain. He didn't avoid the pain. He brought it to Jesus. He brought it to Jesus. And Jesus met him in his sorrow. He'll meet us too. He's promised to do it and He's secured it with His life, death and resurrection. So, let's go to Him again and let's just pray and open our hearts to Him and ask that He would meet us there.

Christian, if you've been convicted that you're putting your hope in the things of this world, now is the time to ask God to change that. If you're here tonight and you don't believe, but you want to believe, now is the time to pray for that. If you're here tonight and you don't have joy, you've been in the church your entire life, and you still don't have the joy of the gospel, then ask Jesus to be real to you now, and to give it to you. Let's pray together.