

Find Life in the Son: Divine Paradoxes John 16:16-33

Introduction

All of us try to prepare ourselves and our children for the challenges we know will be part of life. That's exactly what Jesus is doing for His disciples in His upper room discourse, recorded for us in John 13-17. Today we reach the end of His training of the twelve, just before He closes with His high priestly prayer for them in John 17. The disciples are facing some severe crises, but Jesus wants them well aware of the blessings they will encounter in the midst of the hard things. A paradox, that is, a seeming contradiction, but true to reality.

If you don't have a Bible with you, you'll find one in the book rack in front of you. Our text begins on page 902.

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. ²⁵ I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸ I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."

29 His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! **30** Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God." **31** Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? **32** Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. **33** I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

1. Sorrow Turned to Joy (16-22)
2. Loving Communion Despite Absence (23-28)
3. Peace in Tribulation (29-33)

1. Sorrow Turned to Joy (16-22)

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.

Jesus starts off with what sounds like a riddle, and the disciples aren't sure what He means. He provides more clarity in verse 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.

When Jesus was illegally tried, unjustly condemned, and brutally executed on the cross, His followers were overwhelmed with grief. But those who hated Him—the world—were joyful. They thought they had finally got rid of Jesus. He could no longer expose their twisted version of biblical religion, nor threaten the prestige and power it gave them.

Mark how people respond when a righteous person is attacked and mistreated—in this

case, one hundred percent righteous. *Godly people grieve when the righteous are harmed. Wicked people, in league with a world in rebellion against God, rejoice when calamity strikes the righteous.* Even more important, note how people respond to Jesus. Those who ignore Him and diminish His importance for the sake of their own little kingdoms show themselves in league with the world.

But Jesus predicts that the disciples' sorrow will be turned to joy. Just as a woman in labor rejoices when her labor pains result in the birth of a child. He explains the reason for this happy reversal in verse 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.

So when would sorrow of Jesus' followers turn to joy? When would they not see Him and therefore weep and lament, then after a little while, see Him and rejoice?

The first obvious fulfillment of what Jesus is describing is the disciples' grief over His crucifixion and then only a little while later—three days to be exact—their joy that He had risen again. What greater contrast of feelings could there be?

The enemies of Jesus were worried that the disciples of Jesus would steal His dead body

and then claim He had risen from the dead as He had predicted He would. That's why they asked Pilate to set a guard and seal the tomb so that no one could pull that off. Their precautions only served to prove the reality of His resurrection and the deception of their claim that the disciples had stolen the body. It's just not credible at all that these fearful and grief-stricken disciples could overcome the military guard and steal the body. Nor would their doing so provide the internal joy and strength to preach the resurrection of Jesus everywhere. They championed truth and were willing to die for it. No lie among such common men could ever have that effect.

Jesus' words likely have further fulfillment. After His resurrection He was with His followers another 40 days, but then He ascended to heaven. They saw Him no more. That had to produce some level of grief, though the description of weeping and lamenting seems better suited to His burial than to His ascension into heaven. Still, *on the day of Pentecost, a few days after His ascension and 50 days after Passover, Jesus sent His followers the Holy Spirit from God the Father. He empowered the disciples to proclaim the gospel—the news that brings joy—everywhere in the world.* And He never left the followers of Jesus to this day. Through the Spirit, Jesus made good on His promise in

Matthew 28, "Behold, I am with you all the days, even to the consummation of the age." The Spirit produces love, joy, and peace in the lives of truly born-again people trusting in Jesus, along with the rest of what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5.

Still other Bible interpreters hold that Jesus' words point to His coming again at the end of the age. For believers in Jesus suffer in this world right now. They face persecution, imprisonment, and death for the sake of Jesus, along with the common calamities and sorrows that all humanity suffers in this world. We live in a world of suffering and dying. The blessings of belonging to Jesus do not remove these scourges on us as part of the human race. *So the ultimate fulfillment of sorrow turned to joy has to be, they argue, when Jesus returns and sets all things right.* Resurrection of our bodies from the grave, entrance into the eternal inheritance not just of the heavenly city, but into a universe where sin and death are no more and where righteousness and life rule supreme through Jesus.

It seems to me that all these interpretations are correct, and that none of them preclude the others. The Scriptures often foretell future joy in this kind of developmental way, just as the OT saints looked forward to the coming of Jesus. When He came He accomplished His

mission, but He also made it clear there was more to come that was rooted in what He did at His first coming.

As followers of Jesus we live out this paradox in all three ways. We grieve over the brutal, unjust death of Jesus that caused joyful gloating on the part of His enemies. But we rejoice greatly at His resurrection. His resurrection guarantees our own spiritual life. His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension made possible the coming of the Holy Spirit who empowers us and gives us joy even in a world of sorrow. But the best is still yet to come, when Jesus will complete all that He set in motion in His first coming. The joy that comes from His resurrection life will fill the entire universe, and we get to be part of it. He guarantees that our sorrow will be turned to never-ending joy.

Applications

- What sorrows do you carry at present, and what sorrows do you fear?
- In what ways does the resurrection of Jesus generate the reversal of our sorrows both short and long-term?
- What can you do to bring the joy of the resurrection, and of the Holy Spirit's powerful presence, and of Christ's certain return into your sorrows and sufferings so that they no longer ruin your life?

2. Loving Communion Despite Absence (23-28)

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. ²⁵ I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. ²⁸ I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.

What the disciples dreaded losing was the personal interaction they had enjoyed in following Jesus through His three and half years of ministry. Whenever they had a question or a need, they could just ask Him directly. But He is about to leave them. He has made that clear. They would no longer be able to come to Him the way they were used to.

But He wants them to understand that His leaving would not be the end of their

connection to Him. In fact, He would be interceding for His own at the Father's right hand. He would be their mediator. So when they prayed, they could make their requests directly to the Father in His name. In John 17 we have the record of what His intercessory prayer for His own sounds like. It is one of the most moving passages in all the Word of God.

Hebrews 9:24

For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

Hebrews 4:14-16

14 Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **16** Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

But in our text Jesus makes an even more amazing claim:

John 16:26-27

26 In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on

your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

God the Father loves those who love Jesus and have come to believe that Jesus came from God. They heard His words and saw His works and came to the unmistakable conclusion that He is the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior-King. They have transferred their love and trust to Him over their own selves. In so honoring the Son, they also honor the Father. They acknowledge that they are One. So God the Father treats them as His children. Just as a father delights to give good things to his children, so God the Father delights in us. Whatever our needs, we can come to the Father and ask. Incredible privilege all because of Jesus! And when the Father answers our prayers in Jesus' name, we experience exuberant joy.

Jesus has physically left this world, but because of His saving work, and because of the indwelling Spirit who interprets even our praying so that we pray in line with God's will (Romans 8), we get to experience the full gladness of children who have communion with God the Father and receive extraordinary gifts from Him. This is the second paradox that we experience as a gift from God through Christ.

Applications

- Why does it seem easier for us to ask help of someone we can see and touch?
- Given what Jesus promises here, how can we exercise real communion with God the Father?
- How often are you praying to the Father in Jesus' name?
- What are some reasons you may be reluctant to do ask anything of God, and do those reasons hold up in the face of what Jesus teaches in this text?

3. Peace in Tribulation (29-33)

²⁹ His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech!" ³⁰ Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God." ³¹ Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe?" ³² Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. ³³ I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

The disciples affirm their faith in Jesus. They are convinced He knows all things and that there is no reason to question what He says. They know He has come from God. But they

have no idea just how shaken they will be in only a few hours. They will all flee at His arrest, leaving Him alone. Peter will deny three times that He even knows Jesus. So when Jesus is crucified Peter grieves not only over the brutal death of Jesus, but over his own cowardice and fear. All the disciples will hide behind locked doors for fear of being arrested and executed themselves. With Jesus gone, what hope could they have even to survive?

Jesus has not overestimated their strength. He knows their frailty. He knows their fears. He knows the horrific trial they are about to be plunged into. And He wants them to know He knows. He will not be caught off-guard by their faltering faith. Because their weakness is not the only fact that will prove relevant to the situation. It will not determine the final outcome. They will in fact be restored. Jesus will see to that. They have to be, else the rest of what Jesus has already predicted could not come to pass.

Here's what they need to take away from the terrible experiences they will go through over the next few days—and indeed through their remaining years of ministry on earth: the tribulation—the pressure and affliction that will flood into their lives from the world—will not win the day. Just as the crucifixion of Jesus could not keep Him dead. He would rise

again. He would restore them. He would teach them again. He would commission them. And they would proclaim the gospel of Jesus to a hostile world. Miraculously, because of the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, persons from all ethnicities all over the world would turn from being hostile to Jesus to trusting Him, loving Him, and serving Him. The apostles would get to have a front-row seat on seeing it happen.

Jesus would give them great peace—shalom—in the world. Not just absence of war, but everything set right. They would see God call out a people for His name from every tribe, and nation, and tongue, and kindred. Jesus would be given all authority in heaven and on earth. So everywhere they would set their foot on their gospel mission would be a place where Jesus rightfully reigns, not matter how rebellious a region might be to Him and to His followers.

No wonder they could take heart even in the face of persecution and martyrdom. Jesus has overcome the world and the ruler of this world, Satan himself. Sin has been purged. The grave has been conquered. The Spirit would use the Word of God spoken from the mouths of the apostles to bring cleansing and life where sin and death reigned. To turn enemies of God enslaved by darkness into children of God who live in the light.

We need not be overwhelmed by suffering or by hatred. It is temporary. It will end. It will lose. Jesus has overcome the world, and we have been made participants in His victory.

Romans 8:18, 35-39

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? **36** As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Applications

- What pressures and afflictions (tribulation) are you experiencing or expecting from the world in rebellion against God?
- If you are trusting in Christ as your Savior, why are you not at the mercy of such tribulation?

- What peace in times of trial have you experienced through Christ?
- What significance do you draw from Jesus' words that He has already overcome the world?

Conclusion

The Christian life in this world is one of great paradox because of the work of Christ and the power of God.

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2. Loving Communion Despite Absence (23-28)
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Do these divine paradoxes accurately describe your life?

If not, why not?

If so, how can you introduce others to this way of life through Christ?

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