

EXPOSITION OF JOHN

Message #64

John 16:16-22

Things that appear to be so sad can actually end up turning out to be that which makes us very happy. One of the amazing examples of this very reality is Mel Trotter. Mel Trotter was a drunk. One cold wintry night on the streets of Chicago in 1897, he decided to walk out on a pier on Lake Michigan and commit suicide by jumping in. On his walk toward the lakeshore, his route took him by Pacific Garden Mission where he was invited to come in. Harry Monroe, who had been an alcoholic, counterfeiter and criminal, who had come to faith in Jesus Christ, was the superintendent and in the next hours he pointed Mel Trotter to faith in Jesus Christ. Mel Trotter had a great passion to help men of skid row and he became an amazing evangelist. He became the superintendent of the Mel Trotter Mission in Grand Rapids and he superintended a chain of over seventy missions in the United States from Boston to San Francisco. A man who is on his way to commit suicide is about the saddest thing there is. It was his final walk, but it turns out that a story that was just minutes away from ending so sad, ended up so happy.

What was about to happen to Jesus Christ initially looked so sad, especially to the disciples, “sorrow had filled their hearts” (16:6). But that is not how His story would end. What was about to happen to Jesus Christ in just a few hours would be that which can bring joy forever.

You will notice that there is a word that shows up some seven times in these seven verses (v. 16-twice; v. 17-twice; v. 18-once; v. 19-twice). In Greek the word is μικρον, and in English the word is “little while.” The emphasis of this word is on something very small, something very little (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 293). As this word relates to time, it refers to a very short and small amount of time.

As Jesus begins this section, He only had a few more moments to spend with these disciples. Time was running out. There wasn't much time left. What Jesus actually tells His disciples is this:

IN A VERY SHORT TIME I AM GOING TO LEAVE YOU VIA DEATH BUT ALSO IN A VERY SHORT TIME YOU WILL SEE ME AGAIN VIA RESURRECTION AND YOUR SORROW WILL BE TURNED TO JOY .

In a short amount of time things can dramatically change. One phone call from a doctor can instantly change your whole course of life. One plant closure or layoff can instantly change your career. One may drive down the road and in a moment be mangled or dead. Things can drastically change in a very short time.

Jesus knew it was all true for Him and His disciples and He needed to give them final instructions that would help them cope with what would happen in a little while. There are three categories of “little while” points that Jesus wanted to communicate:

LITTLE WHILE TEACHING #1 – Jesus teaches His disciples that in a short time they would no longer behold Him but then would see Him. **16:16**

There are two different words used for seeing Christ in this verse. The first one “behold” (θεωρεω) is one that means to look at in the sense of being a spectator (Ibid., p. 206). The second word “see” (οραω) means to see a physical object (Ibid., p. 321). **The emphasis of both of these words is on physically seeing someone.** So what Jesus is saying is that in a short time you are not going to be able to physically see me, to actually visually look at Me, but then in a short time you will be able to visually see Me. He was just a few hours away from dying and He was a few days away from rising from the dead.

Truth is, we have been waiting for awhile now to see Jesus Christ. I don’t think we will have to wait much longer. Speaking for myself, if I live to be the average age of a man, I am about fifteen years away from seeing the Lord. I also believe the Rapture is very near and it is very possible we are just moments or days away from seeing Him. But when all is said and done, whether we see Him via the Rapture or death, it will have turned out to be a “little while.”

LITTLE WHILE CONFUSION #2 – The disciples could not figure out what Jesus meant by this “little while” instruction. **16:17-18**

This entire discussion was still a perplexing maze to these disciples. In fact, they said, “We don’t even know what He is talking about.” Here they are walking to the Garden of Gethsemane so that Christ could be betrayed and crucified and they still do not have a clue as to what is happening.

When He said they would see Him in a little while, to them He could mean in a little while we’ll receive the Holy Spirit or in a little while He will show us His spectacular glory or He will be killed and in three days we will see Him for forty more days.

The imperfect tense of the verb would indicate they kept asking, what is He talking about. They had no answers to these statements.

Understanding the Word of God is hard work. This is a very important principle to see here. There are things in the Bible which are not simple to grasp and grasping them takes time. If these disciples were having a hard time grasping some of these things after physically spending time with Jesus Christ for three plus years, we may expect that our growth will also take some time.

LITTLE WHILE EXPLANATION #3 – Jesus gives His disciples a clear understanding of what He was teaching. **16:19-22**

The Word of God when properly handled becomes clear. It comes to life. That is what Jesus does right here for His disciples.

(Observation #1) - Jesus knew of their deliberation concerning what would happen to Him in a little while. **16:19**

One of the most important lessons to learn is to go to God and ask Him to help you understand His Word. Acknowledge your lack of understanding. He knows it anyway.

(Observation #2) - Jesus knew the disciples emotional response to what would happen to Him in a little while. **16:20**

Now you will notice that **verse 20** begins with a “truly, truly” statement, which means this is dogmatic certainty that cannot be altered. There would be two emotional responses of the disciples:

Response #1 - The initial response of the disciples would be sorrow.

There will be things God will permit to come into every one of our lives that will initially hurt and cause us sorrow. There are things that will hit us that will initially grieve us. But if we will just stay faithful and dedicated to the Word and will of God, every one of those things will eventually be turned into joy.

Response #2 - The eventual response of the disciples would be joy.

Reuben Archer Torrey, the man called by D. L. Moody in 1889 to be the head of his newly formed Bible institute, Moody Bible Institute, tells a remarkable story from his own life that illustrates this point beautifully.

Dr. Torrey and his wife watched their twelve year old daughter, Elizabeth, die of diphtheria. They went through a terrible time of tragic heartache. The funeral was held on a miserable, rainy day and as they stood near the little grave, watching her body being buried, Dr. Torrey said to his wife, “I’m so glad Elizabeth is with the Lord and not in that box.” He said the next day he was walking down the street and he became overwhelmed with a lonely, heartbreak and he cried out loud, “Oh Elizabeth! Elizabeth.” Dr. Torrey then describes in his own words what happened: “And just then this fountain, the Holy Spirit, that I had in my heart, broke forth with such power as I think I had never experienced before, and it was the most joyful moment I had ever known in my life. Oh, how wonderful is the joy of the Holy Spirit! It is an unspeakably glorious thing to have your joy not in things about you, not even in your most dearly loved friends, but to have within you a fountain ever springing up, springing up, springing up, always springing up, springing up under all circumstances into everlasting life” (R. A. Torrey, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 95).

Terrible sorrow was turned to supernatural joy. That is exactly what Jesus was telling His disciples right here. You will have a low moment of terrible sorrow, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.

(Observation #3) - Jesus knew the world's response to what would happen to Him in a little while. **16:20**

The noun world is articular “the world” which means Jesus had two specific things in view: 1) The satanic world that hates God; 2) The Jewish world that also was not right with God. The world’s response to Christ’s leaving would be rejoicing. Jesus had confronted Israel and her leaders with their sin (John 15:24-25). He had told them that they did not have the righteousness to get into the Kingdom of God (Matthew 5:20). That made people mad. He was hated because He told the truth. So when Jesus would die and leave, “the world” would rejoice.

I cannot help but think of the Tribulation and those two prophets who are killed, lying in the streets of Jerusalem and the whole world rejoices and throws a party and exchanges gifts (Revelation 11:8-11). They are happy because the prophets who were proclaiming the truth and confronting sin were gone. That was exactly the response toward the murder of Jesus Christ.

What the world doesn’t realize though is that just as the disciples’ sorrow would be turned to joy, so their joy will be turned to eternal sorrow. The moment one drops into eternity into the eternal flames of hell which are so hot that one drop of water would quench a thirst will be the moment the laughter stops and the anguish and eternal torment begins. That glee that once mocked Jesus Christ and ridiculed the Bible and made fun of God will be gone in the blink of an eye as one burns forever and ever in eternal condemnation.

(Observation #4) - Jesus illustrates the joy the disciples would have in view of what would happen in a little while. **16:21-22**

Jesus uses the illustration of childbirth to illustrate what would happen to his disciples. When a mother is in labor the pain is intense, but when the baby is born she forgets about the pain and rejoices at the new baby brought into the world.

That is the way it is for God’s people. They have moments of sorrow and hurt and pain, but eventually it is all turned to joy.

I want you to notice the end of **verse 22** - “no one takes your joy away from you.” There will come a time when we will see Jesus and our hearts will rejoice forever and never again will anything rob us of joy.

Some of you have lost loved ones and there is an emptiness and grief in your heart. Don’t lose sight of what is communicated here; in just a little while your sorrow will be turned to joy.