

The Densest Moment | Jesus Christ's Farewell Conversation "I Have Overcome the World"

John 16.16-33

3.19.23

"A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me." ¹⁷ Some of His disciples then said to one another, "What is this thing He is telling 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 '?" ¹⁸ So they were saying, "What is this that He says, 'A little while ' ? We do not know what He is talking about." ¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, '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, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. ²¹ "Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. ²² "Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.

²³ *"In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. ²⁴ "Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.*

²⁵ *"These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. ²⁶ "In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; ²⁷ for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father. ²⁸ "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father."*

²⁹ *His disciples said, "Lo, now You are speaking plainly and are not using a figure of speech. ³⁰ "Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God." ³¹ Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? ³² "Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. ³³ "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."*

We've been looking at a speech and conversation between Jesus Christ and His disciples presumably at the Passover Meal just hours before Jesus is arrested.

We've called this sermon series on *The Upper Room Discourse* "The Densest Moment" because all the big truths that Jesus Christ taught now come pressing down on the disciples and it's all intensely serious and heavy.

The moment is now come that we've been anticipating since the Garden, symbolized in the first Passover and in the countless sacrifices and rituals and feasts from the time of Abraham forward: the redemption of all God's people is now going to occur in time and space. The True Firstborn, the True Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ will be sacrificed, crucified, buried and raised from the dead.

And as speeches often end with a wrap-up and a big conclusion, so this speech closes with a summary – the densest part of the densest moment! So many of the themes in *The Upper Room Discourse* are now repeated and brought to a point. Themes in all the teachings of Jesus and some of the major, sweeping motifs of the whole Bible are now tied up... all pointing to the Guest of Honor.

These words are meant to sustain the disciples in their hour of deepest need. They'll focus on the idea of God's will and ability to transform evil into good in the lives of His people. What Joseph told his brothers at the end of Genesis, what some have considered the summary of the entire Bible, "*What YOU meant for EVIL, God has turned to good!*" (Gen 50.20) – those words are now epitomized and embodied in Jesus Christ. The idea that God will turn trials to gold, turn evil to good... that theme isn't especially important to the eleven disciples now – but soon that truth will be more necessary to them than food, water or oxygen. God is able to transform evil into good.

- 1) **Appalling Ignorance into Knowledge**
- 2) **Excruciating Pain into Joy**
- 2) **Cosmic Defeat into Victory**

Jesus used lots of methods to communicate to the crowds and disciples that their preconceptions about what the Messiah would DO were incomplete (at best) and, at worst, totally mistaken. What their grandmothers told them and their rabbis and their whole culture about how Messiah would rule and judge and defend Israel were true but lacking – Messiah would conquer and heal the world by judgment, but the sentence would fall on HIM! (Isa 53)

Jesus gave them direct statements – "*From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.*" (Matt. 16.21)

He used parables like the Landowner's Son who checks up on the vineyard workers and finds them grossly irresponsible, but they seize the Son and kill Him (Mat 21.33ff).

He pointed to the Hebrew Scriptures – from Psalm 118: "the stone the builders rejected..."

He used figurative language: "*unless a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it can bear no fruit*" (John 12.24). or "*The Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep*" (John 10.11). He even dramatized His whole mission by washing their feet – those seven verbs (in John CH 13) that tell the whole story (Jn 13.4-5) of His coming in disguise and pouring out Himself to cleanse us.

But whether by symbol or by Scripture or demonstration or by direct statement or parable – the disciples could NOT get past their cultural programming and their sinful spiritual-blindness... and they COULD NOT see the need or the possibility that Messiah would die for the sins of His people. That's the one truth they couldn't admit.

Maybe they didn't see sin for the unsolvable problem that it really is – couldn't see that only a perfect life is acceptable to the Holy God... *"We're not perfect (who IS?) but if we shape up, amend our ways a little, I'm sure God will forgive our few sins and overlook our small flaws..."*

So, in one final exposé of their APPALLING IGNORANCE, the Messiah tells them a riddle. I LIKE RIDDLES; do you? They catch people off guard and make them think and see in new ways: *"A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me."*

But even this last-ditch-effort *only shows how super, super mega-blind these guys are*. It's NOT that Jesus Christ failed as a Teacher. All the seeds He planted will eventually bear fruit and be remembered, but for NOW the truths do not register, because they are culturally and sinfully blind.

And if THEY, who physically accompanied Jesus for three years – if THEY were STILL that blind... how about YOU?

You may not feel spiritually blind... 'Truth IS: people rarely see (notice the word "see" is repeated a lot in John's Gospel and concentrates right here – 7x in the first few verses). It's translated as "k-n-o-w-" in v. 30: *"Now we know that You know all things and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God."*

And Jesus says, "DO you now believe?" And the obvious answer is NO. They DON'T see Him and they don't see their own blindness. So, again, is it possible that YOU and I think we see certain things clearly but DON'T ...AND that we don't even see that we have giant blind-spots?

But all that will change for those disciples. They don't see and they don't believe in Messiah and His mission – but they will. Because Jesus Christ will ascend into Heaven, and present Himself to the Father and the Father will send the Heart of God, the Spirit of Truth, the Helper who's the only Agent capable of transforming our cultural, spiritual, sinful blindness into TRUST, KNOWLEDGE and VISION.

THE BAD NEWS, those disciples DON'T yet see, is that Jesus Christ will die under the cruelty of man and under the justice of God and it will crush the disciples to the point of insanity. THE GOOD NEWS is: their ignorance won't last much longer. How long, you ask? "A little while" (7x)!

Second, Excruciating Pain Leading to Joy. This also is a giant THEME in the Bible. *"Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his harvest with him."* (Ps. 126.5-6)

We think again of the Joseph Story in Genesis and how it culminates in this truth – God is able to turn personal failure and sin and evil into good, sorrow into joy. That inaugural sermon of Jesus Christ, *"Happy are the Sad – i.e. blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted."* (Mat 5.4)

The pain these men will feel will be literally “excruciating” – you see the root of that word is “cruc” as in crucifixion so, excruciating literally means, “out of the cross”. Seeing their Leader, whom they THOUGHT was the King of Israel, seeing Him impaled and covered in spit and blood, hanging there writhing, gasping will crush them. And somehow the extreme physical torture is DWARFED by the terror of His being somehow in discord with the Father, under the wrath and hot displeasure of God, His Father. He screams out, “*My God, My God, WHY have you forsaken Me?*” It's the voice of a Man counted guilty of breaking God's Law – a Man under justice and wrath – a Man in Hell.

When the eleven see it or hear about it – not only will they hurt for their best Friend... but they'll be convinced that everything they THOUGHT about Jesus was only an illusion and they were wrong – He's deluded or deceptive, a FAKE.

And do you know how long they will feel the anguish, the pain, the weeping, the lament – how long will they be frantic with sorrow? How long? “*A little while*” – 3 days in fact.

Then the thing that strangled their hope *and that killed the One who loved them like they'd never been loved*, that worst moment in all of human history when God was rejected by His creation and by His own people THAT THING, “the cruc-” (in excruciating) will become their source of joy – NOT that they'll somehow recover and move on with their lives and find happiness somewhere else BUT THE SOURCE OF THEIR PAIN WILL BECOME THE SOURCE OF THEIR JOY! It's divine alchemy: the LEAD of pain will be changed into the GOLD of joy, of forgiveness, of hope!

If only there was some way to explain the transformation.. Is there anything, IN this life, that starts with extreme pain but ends in EXTREME JOY? (See OT seeds: Isa. 26.16-19; 66.7-14; Mic. 4.9-5.1)

“Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. Therefore, you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.”

Wouldn't it be better if Jesus Christ didn't have to die for us at all – wouldn't it be better if the Fall hadn't taken place and evil had never pervaded and soiled everything on this wicked planet? Well, ask the mother, even the one who had a very hard labor and delivery... ask her as she bounces that baby on her knee...or when he says “momma” or when he waves at her with his toothless smile at first grade school program or when she watches him awarded a high school diploma. Joy. (“*Felix Culpa*”!)

The labor and pain and anguish and agony of delivery actually becomes the source of joy because the child could not be born apart from that process. And so it is with the New Life and Forgiveness we receive when we begin trusting in Jesus Christ. The Cross becomes the Source of Joy.

In the resurrection, DEATH dies. *“Weeping endures for a night, but JOY comes in the morning...”* (Ps 30.5) The resurrection of Jesus tells us that WE who trust in Him will also rise and even now, we’re privy to a joy that can’t be taken from us. So, Jesus says, *“no one will take your joy away from you.”*

Last, the Cross and Resurrection changes cosmic defeat into victory. It’s as if all demonic powers, like wild wolves (Ps 22), latch on to Jesus Christ in His moment of defeat ...and THEN they’re unable to let loose of Him when He drags them down into eternal death and everlasting shame.

He rises and they remain defeated – (so, St Paul in Colossian CH 2) *“When Christ had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through the Cross.”* (v. 15) The instrument of Jesus Christ’s COSMIC defeat becomes the very means for His Victory.

And in the wake of His death and resurrection, He tells those disciples, soon to be devastated by the horrific and cursed way their Teacher will die, He gives them words to cling to, *“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”*

In the defeat of Jesus, is His great victory, He conquers by weakness and death. As we said last week: *God at His weakest is infinitely stronger than evil at its strongest.*

And so, we too, boast in our weakness. *“Not many of us were wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong”* (1 Cor. 1.26-27)

Are you bummed that you're not where you wanted to BE at this point in your life? Are there things – sources of shame and regret, of defeat or hurt? Don’t you see that these are, in the Kingdom of God, some of your greatest assets? They keep you depending on Jesus Christ.

AND THAT, as we’ve seen, is the opposite of the world. And good thing because, the world, the whole approach to life that seeks independence from God, is thrown down and destined for destruction.

If you have ignorance, study, learn, listen, grow. If you have pain, I mean real hurt, grief, loss disappointment and even despair – well, talk it out with someone – really, get counsel (maybe professional counsel). If you have defeat – personal failure, un-achieved goals, divorce – get help in not repeating those self-inflicted wounds.

But there’s only One who can work alchemy on those things and actually transform them so that in some strange way, you come to see them as redemptive – as reasons for you to abide in Christ, to remain needy and utterly reliant on Jesus Christ. Your apparently greatest spiritual deficits are, by the Cross and Resurrection and Descent of the Spirit – *they’re transformed into your greatest assets*: peace, joy, the love of the Father, answered prayer, the knowledge of God, faith in Jesus Christ and life with God!

DO remember the bottom line in this conclusion of the formal address (next week starts the final prayer) but DO remember the bottom line and SEE how these words, when believed, transform everything: Jesus Christ, the Victor says, *"In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."*

QUOTES:

Count on tribulation – while in the world; count on tribulation – from the world. Expect temptation, and manfully resist it; expect suffering and patiently endure it; expect persecution, and rise above it, – overcome it by “the irresistible might of weakness.” Never seek peace in the world. Even the men of the world do not find it there, – far less will you. Seek it in Christ: there you are sure to find it; and when the world troubles you, say to your heart, “return to thy rest.” ... **The Voice, which was once heard in the solitude of Gethsemane, now proclaims to you, from the throne of the universe, “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”** the

– John Brown (of Newington), *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord Jesus Christ* (Vol 3; pp. 490-491; 1850)

A Riddle:

Dead men eat it.

If you eat it, you’ll die.

It’s the only thing more evil than the devil.

It’s the only thing greater than God.

Before God became a Man, it was the only thing we could do to please Him.

What is IT?