

Joy in Victory (John 16:16–24)
By Pastor Jeff Alexander (7/31/2022)

Introduction

1. Jesus had earlier said, “*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now*” (v.12). In verse 16, Jesus began to address that concern. The disciples’ inability to bear the things of Christ lay in the fact that they had no framework to reconcile their notions of the Messiah that included His rejection, death, and departure to make way for another “Helper.” Jesus approached the problem by provoking them to think.

The world is fast descending into the pit of fear and confusion. God’s people will have peace, joy, confidence, and resolve to stand true as they share in Christ’s victory over the world.

2. The text before us continues the implications of the world’s hatred of Christ and His followers (John 15:18). Persecution is difficult; but Jesus promises joy (John 15:11). The practical benefit of trials for Christ’s followers is *strength*: “*The joy of the Lord shall be your strength*” (Nehemiah 8:10).

I. The Prospect for Joy (vv. 16–22)

1. Verse 16 is a transitional as Jesus turned from introducing the age of the Spirit to focus on the sorrow of the disciples. Some manuscripts have, “*because I am going to the Father*” (KJV), probably added to help the reader understand the following verse. The original statement is quite puzzling. What departure or return is referenced? It is best to see it as referring to His death and resurrection, which both occurred in “*a little while*.”
2. Thus, Jesus’ goal in this perplexing statement was to provoke the disciples to think about His words, which they did, asking each other what He meant (v. 17). Their perplexity centered on the words “*a little while*” (v. 18). What was Jesus talking about? They needed to understand *their own attitude*, which was central to the truth He sought to develop in preparing them for what they were about to face.
3. Jesus’ explanation began with the assertive, “*I tell you the truth*,” (“*verily verily*,” KJV) signifying the importance of it. It would be Jesus’ resurrection that would turn their grief into joy. Indeed, John documents this (John 20:20). The disciples would *weep and mourn* (words used together almost exclusively in death settings) because of Jesus’ impending death, but their sorrow would be only temporary. He illustrated their situation, comparing it to a woman in birth labor. The pain of her travail, as awful as it would be to experience, would soon be forgotten in the joy of her newborn child (v. 21; Isaiah 66:7–14). The illustration was applied in v. 22 to the disciples’ present distress. After Jesus was raised (“*I will see you again*”), the disciples would rejoice with a joy that could not be taken away (Psalm 30:5).

Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit: “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience*” (Galatians 5:22). Joy is the result of *obedience* (Psalm 16:11). The implication is that the severe persecution of world would not rob the disciples of the joy of the Lord as they served the Lord in the power of the Spirit.

Why do many believers today *not* experience this joy as promised? The reason for many not having the joy of the Lord is that they are not walking the path of life, serving the Lord in His will. Their focus is on *self*. Self is the greatest enemy of joy in a believer’s life.

II. The Mutual Benefit of Joy (v. 23)

1. Jesus discussed the mechanics of joy and its maintenance: “*In that day [after Jesus has risen, ascended, and the Holy Spirit given] you will no longer ask me anything*” (v. 23). To get somewhat technical, the verse contains two instances of the word “*to ask*.” In the first instance it means simply to make a request for in-

formation—*ask*. After Jesus departs, they would no longer ask for information directly. They would not need to, for they would truly *know* (1 John 2:20).

However, at that time they would need instead to *ask* the Father in Jesus' name. This word is different and means to express a desire. What they desired would be given to them when they asked in *prayer*. There is also a relationship between joy and prayer. The Lord delights to answer prayer when the request furthers the will of God. When the will of God is the objective, then “*your will receive that your joy may be filled*” (v. 24)

2. The greatest need of all humans is to be *happy*. God's goal in all He does is to be *glorified*. As many of the Puritans discovered, these two goals are resolved in a proper prayer life, as John Piper expressed it: “The most precious truth in the Bible is that God's greatest interest is to glorify the wealth of His grace by making sinners happy in Him—in *Him*.”

> The Puritan Jeremy Taylor said, “God threatens terrible things if we will not be happy.”
> Jonathan Edwards wrote, “Resolved: To endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of.”

The hope of joy (happiness) rests in seeking joy in the place where God is glorified. Jesus made it clear that place is the believer's prayer life (John 14:13; 16:24). The unity of these two goals—the glory of God and the joy of His children—is clearly preserved in the act of right praying.

III. The Conclusion (vv. 24, 25)

1. The disciples had not asked *anything* in His name—expressed desires that were related to their joy and God's glory. However, when the Spirit came, they would begin to understand the Lord and His will on earth. Their involvement was now declared—“*Ask*.”
2. The disciples would experience joy in the age of joy about to commence. The exhortation to *ask* would result in their joy increasing to *fullness* as they understood God's will and prayed in Jesus' name (in His authority). “*You make him most blessed forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence*” (Psalm 21:6).

Lesson

1. Do we really pray? Are we experiencing fullness of joy? Are we confident we are glorifying the Father? Are we getting the things we desire? “*Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart*” (Psalm 37:4; 4:5–8; Colossians 1:9–14).
2. The great enemy of our prayer life and the great killer of our joy is *self*—self-indulgence. We find the things around us promise greater joy than what God promises. This is idolatry. That is why John charged his readers, “*Little children, keep yourselves from idols*” (1 John 5:21)