

September 27, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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**WE DO NOT SORROW LIKE THOSE WHO
HAVE NO HOPE
John 16:16-24**

We naturally prefer not to think about some of the warnings and promises Jesus left with the disciples. We like the promises like, “Behold I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). But those warnings about certain persecution from a world that does not accept Jesus or His followers – no, we do not relish the thought of experiencing that. Such a balance is common in Scripture. The reality of suffering because we seek to be righteous like Christ is balanced by the promise of eternal life where there is no suffering because everyone will be like Christ. We call that hope.

The Psalmist experienced this sweet and sour flavor of life. He confessed in a time of great conflict, “I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope” (Psalm 130:5). Try to imagine how Jeremiah felt as he sat in the rubble of what had been his hometown. He had preached for decades that if the people of God did not repent and return in faith and obedience to fellowship with God, they would pay a price. He had preached specifically that God was raising up the Babylonians who would come and destroy Jerusalem and Judah. God fulfilled the warning He sent through Jeremiah, and now the city lay in ruins. What hope is there in such devastating circumstances? In the face of very real and negative circumstances, Jeremiah chose to have positive thoughts. *But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:21-23).*

Paul the apostle and missionary was only too familiar with the persecutors’ whips and prisons. He regularly experienced the

fulfillment of Jesus’ warnings that unrighteous people will persecute Christ’s followers. He wrote to Christians in Rome just a few years before major persecution broke out against Christians, “*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope” (Romans 15:13).* His conclusion in all negative circumstances was really quite simple: *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).*

There is no doubt that life will at some point throw dirt all over our party. We are going to face hardship or unfavorable circumstances at some point. We might have to deal with genuine, painful persecution. We might have health problems, financial problems, family problems or relational problems. It is impossible for anyone to live their entire life in a world that is thoroughly infected with sin and not face negative circumstances. The question is, “How will you respond?”

A younger generation possibly chuckles at us older folks who like to talk about heaven. I have discovered an interesting connection over the years. If you attend a typical, old-fashioned southern gospel concert, you will discover that almost everyone there is over the age of sixty. You will also discover that 90% of the songs are about heaven, going to be with Jesus, or meeting up with Grandma on the streets of gold. Actually, that is a Scriptural response to a sin-infected world.

Jesus told the disciples, “I have good news for you. You are going to be sorrowful because you are not going to see Me. But that’s okay, because you will see Me again which will bring you great joy. And in the mean time, you can have joy by simply asking for it.” How is your joy level in a life marred by sin? Maybe we need to ask for it more directly, since Jesus gave us permission.

Sometimes Disciples Are Confused (vv.16-18).

While Jesus was giving His followers final promises, warnings, and instructions before He was taken away, He said something that caused confusion. He told the disciples, “*A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me” (v.16).* This statement coincides with previous statements Jesus made.

He had already promised that he was going to be absent. Six months earlier at the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus told the crowds, and particularly the temple police who came to arrest Him, *“I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me”* (John 7:33). Then just a couple of days before this event during His last Passover, Jesus warned the people, *“The light is among you for a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you. The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going”* (John 12:35). And again, earlier in the evening in which our text is set, Jesus told the disciples, *“Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come’”* (John 13:33).

That Jesus would be gone at some point was not new news to the disciples. In fact, back near the beginning of His ministry, Jesus warned the disciples that a time of sadness would come when He, the Bridegroom, would go away. He said, *“Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast”* (Matthew 9:15).

So why the confusion? Well, it appeared at times, based on what Jesus said, that His absence would be brief. In the same statement when Jesus promised that He would be gone, He also promised the disciples that they would see Him again. Several times Jesus had stated that He would be raised from the dead. He had even instructed the disciples to meet Him in Galilee after the resurrection (Mark 16:7; Matthew 28:16). That would certainly be encouraging news once the disciples figured out what was happening.

Well, maybe not. As Jesus continued to explain, He said that though the disciples would see Him again, He would suddenly be gone again. What is the deal? These multiplied mentions of Jesus’ absence refer to His long period of absence between His ascension and His second advent. This is where we, Jesus’ disciples, are living right now. He is absent because He is with the Heavenly Father. Yes, He is here with us in the person of the Holy Spirit, but His bodily presence is absent. Unlike the disciples at that point, we are not confused. We do understand that the Lord is gone in a bodily form.

But we also know that we will see Him again. In the Discourse on the Mount of Olives (Mt. 24-25), Jesus made it quite clear that He would come back to earth in bodily form. There of other passages in the New Testament that promise that Jesus will come to earth again to set up His kingdom which He will rule personally. We who look forward to our Lord’s return can be confident that we will see Him again—sometime—somehow. John promised in his first letter that when that day comes, we will see Jesus in perfect understanding and we will finally be just like Him. He wrote, *Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is* (1 John 3:2). We do not see Christ, but we will see Christ.

We should sympathetically understand that apart from our revealing hindsight, we too would be very confused by the statement Jesus made to His followers. But we have the completed Word of God. The Bible tells us the whole story of redemption. It explains God’s plan for the ages in great detail. Therefore, we read the Bible and sometimes wonder why the disciples were so challenged in their understanding. We might be more sympathetic if we try to imagine having only the Old Testament but no Gospels, no Acts of the Apostles, no Letters from Paul, Peter, James, Jude, John, and no Revelation. No doubt with such limited resources, we too would think just like the disciples who expected Messiah to show up, restore Israel, and establish His promised kingdom. That is what Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zachariah promised for the most part. Therefore, the disciples were so sure this was the plan that they were vying for seats in the King’s cabinet.

But modern believers wonder what the disciples did with the teachings about redemption, the final sacrifice for sins? That too is in the Old Testament. Somehow that most wonderful teaching escaped the disciples. Apparently, they assumed that God’s obedient people would just go on sacrificing animals, shedding animal blood to make people right with God.

Maybe it would be good for us modern followers of Christ to stop to wonder what we don’t know and don’t understand from the Bible. It is so easy for us to read the Bible and come to unbending, unchanging conclusions. We do this in spite of the plethora of clear and plain teaching in the Bible. The important doctrines are stated so

clearly and repeatedly that we would be dishonest to ignore them debate them.

Okay, we have little confusion about those important matters. But what about those amazing events described in the Revelation and other prophetic statements? Who are the beast, the false prophet, the harlot, the two witnesses, and so forth? Who is God and Magog? Where is America in this whole story? And did Jephthah really sacrifice his daughter, and where did Seth get his wife, and how can we see light from stars that are millions of light years away if the universe is not billions of years old?

Let's not be too hard on the disciples for being confused. We have not even begun to consider all the questions that common events in life generate for us. Why does God allow wicked rulers to persecute His people? Why doesn't your teenager love God and read his Bible? Why didn't your friend for whom you prayed for 40 years trust Christ? We should be sympathetic with the disciples' confusion.

The followers were perplexed (vv.17-18). Generally, the statement they just heard from Jesus did not make sense at all. *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'" (v.17)?* Why did they not understand? Who beyond Jesus ever taught more plainly, simply, clearly? The crowds were impressed with His teaching. They realized that He spoke with authority. Even little children can understand the deep truths Jesus illustrated with simple stories.

So why were the men who desire to be like Him, men who have heard every word He taught for three years, confused? Jesus taught the disciples God's words, God's purposes, and God's plans. Many of God's purposes and plans eclipse human comprehension. It is still true that there are "secret things" that belong to God (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Specifically the phrase "a little while" didn't make sense to the disciples. *So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about" (v.18).* They had heard Jesus tell them, "The wicked rulers will kill Me." He promised, "I will rise again." He told them, "I will return to My Father in Heaven." He said, "You will not see me, then You will see Me."

Putting all those statements together seemed so contradictory. The disciples were sure Jesus was the Messiah. How could it possibly be God's plan for rulers to kill Messiah? How could He rise from the dead (what about Lazarus)? Why would Messiah rise from the dead and then disappear to heaven? How can Messiah restore Israel if He is not here?

How often do we read the Bible and conclude, "We do not know what He is talking about?" Many people simply stop reading the Bible because it does not make sense. Jesus was with the disciples to explain the truth He taught. He has given us the Holy Spirit to teach us the truth of the Bible. Apart from the Holy Spirit giving us understanding, we will regularly conclude, "I don't know what God is talking about" when we read the Bible. Instead, we who are born again know what the Bible teaches as long as the Holy Spirit teaches us.

One day disciples will experience perfect joy (vv.19-24).

In this world there are times of sorrow (vv.19-20a). Jesus understands His disciples' quandary. *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'" (v.19)?*

Because Jesus is God, He is omniscient, and, therefore, He knew the disciples wanted to ask Him a question. We should be joyful that we have a Savior and Master who knows our needs and concerns better than we do. David concluded, *O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether" (Psalm 139:1-4).* That is a great testimony to how well our Lord knows His own people.

Furthermore, the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to express thoughts to the Father that we cannot even articulate. Paul taught, *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts*

knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Romans 8:26-27).

Even the Bible is so penetrating in its work that it discerns our thoughts. *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).*

Acknowledging that God has this intimate knowledge of our deepest thoughts should cause us great joy not fear. Of course, if our inner thoughts are in conflict with God's character and will, we should fear. If we imagine, fantasize, long for the satisfaction of fleshly desires, we will not have joy because that conflicts with righteousness. But if we long to have fellowship with our Creator, if we love Him and love His Word, we will rejoice to know that He knows us better than we know ourselves.

Imagine what it would be like to live with someone who can read your mind. More specifically, what would it be like if your spouse could read your mind? A husband in that case might say to his wife, "I love you." But she knows very well that he not only does not love her, but he loves himself so much that he seeks the attention of other women. That is a scary thought. But what if the husband truly does love his mind-reading spouse? He thinks about her during the day, he tries to do things that will bring her happiness, he really desires for her to have the best. That man should rejoice to know that his mind-reading wife is well aware of his thoughts. Jesus reads our minds. Are we happy about that?

He who knows His peoples' inner most thoughts taught that if you weep, the world does not weep with you. He said, *Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful (v.20).* Was this the right response to the disciples' question? As happened sometimes, Jesus didn't answer the question! His response went beyond the disciples' confusion to the next level. It is true that when Christ was gone the disciples would sorrow and weep. While they were sorrowing, they should not expect any sympathy from the world who does not appreciate their absent Christ. Ella Wheeler Wilcox (November 5, 1850 – October 30, 1919) was an American author and poet. One of her most well-known works was

titled *Solitude*, which contains the oft repeated lines, "Laugh, and the world laughs with you; weep, and you weep alone."

That is the state of the Church, the Bride, as we await the absent Bridegroom's return. Let's be quick to acknowledge that life is not a bed of roses and that we really do look forward with hope to the redemption of creation. *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now (Romans 8:22).* Let's admit that we see that Jesus was exactly right when He promised the wars, rumors of war, earthquakes, famines, and stuff like that. But let's rejoice with the certainty that *"All these are but the beginning of the birth pains" (Matt. 24:8).*

To claim that Christians do not suffer in this world is foolish and a contradiction to Christ's teaching. But, at the same time, it is true that Jesus turns sorrow to joy (vv.20b-24). Sure there is suffering. But joy is coming. Jesus illustrated His promise with a picture everyone understands. He said, *"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" (v.21).*

The illustration is well known and understood. Maybe you know women who play out this illustration well. It is not uncommon that when a mother gives birth to a child, she vows that she never, ever wants to go through that pain again. And often that same woman has four, five, or six children. Somehow the memory of the pain disappears when the warm, cuddly, little baby looks up into his or her mother's eyes as if to say, "Thanks Mom, I love you."

Paul applied the same truth to our lives when he wrote, *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:20-23).* We are all involved in this looking forward to the end of suffering. The next time you think life is tough, just remember that we are in labor looking forward to delivery.

Jesus promised to replace our suffering with eternal joy (v.22). Jesus acknowledged that His people will suffer, but went on to say, *But your sorrow will turn into joy (v.20b)*. Jesus did not mean that a single event, His resurrection, changed the disciples' sorrow to joy. Yes, the reality of His resurrection does cause joy, but the joy He gives has a far wider application. In a much broader, more important truth, the resurrection gave such meaning to the cross and death that even that human tragedy causes joy as we meditate on it in our hearts.

The preaching of the cross is to the ones who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is power! We often sing this testimony when we sing Steve and Vicki Cook's song, "I will glory in my Redeemer, whose priceless blood has ransomed me." Jesus' act of redemption turns our sorrow into joy because we know that we will see our Redeemer.

Jesus went on to say, *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 (v.22)*. We should be as confident as Job who looked forward to Christ paying the price of redemption and beyond to when he would see his Redeemer. Job concluded in the face of his intense suffering, *"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!" (Job 19:25-27)*.

Is it not likely that our Lord intends for us to encourage each other with such words of promise. Paul promised, *For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words (1Thessalonians 4:16-18)*. Knowing this wonderful promise, we are supposed to encourage each other with the truth. We will see Jesus.

Can we have such joy? Is it possible for people who live in a very sinful world? Jesus promised joy for people who request it (vv.23-24). The general principle is, "Ask and you will receive." *"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" (v.23). After Jesus ascended to heaven, He was not present for the disciples to ask questions. But under the direction, leading, and teaching of His replacement, the Holy Spirit, they asked God the Father for help. And God answered their requests. And we have the same privilege.

Jesus' specific instruction is, "Ask for joy." *"Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full"* (v.24). Answered prayer rooted in faith in Jesus' atoning and intercessory work brings great joy. It is not that we find joy if God grants our three wishes for things, like some kind of Genie. Rather, when God matures us to the point that we ask for whatever brings God joy, it brings joy to us also.

Life is not always easy. To pretend that it is or should be is unrealistic. But when life get tough, we need to recall that Jesus' followers have two special privileges. 1) We remember that He is coming again to make all things right and we rejoice that we will see Him. 2) We can ask for anything that brings Him glory and He will do it. Therefore, even when we suffer outwardly, we can have joy in our hearts. A joyful heart erupts in joyful praise even while the saint sits in prison with a bruised back.