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John 16:16-33

Your Sorrow Will Be Turned Into Joy

When I was in college, I had a friend whose mom sadly passed away. His parents were missionaries to southeast Asia, but they happened to be on furlough that year, staying on our campus as missionaries in residence. Many of us knew her, everyone knew of her, and the campus as a whole grieved when she sadly died due to sickness. My friend, her son, is a gifted musician and he had the opportunity to lead us in a song during our chapel service in her memory. And I'll never forget how he led us in singing Psalm 126, which says this: "Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him." It's a powerful picture of sowing in tears - planting seed in the field with tears - and reaping a harvest from it not of tears and sorrow, but of jubilant joy and gladness! You could hear the tears in his voice, yet also the resolute hope of the gospel in his heart. It was a powerful picture to me of what it looks like to mourn as those who have the sure hope of the resurrection and eternal life in Christ. It's the sure hope that our sorrow will be turned into joy; that our tears will give way to shouts of joy.

I couldn't help thinking of that memory, and of that psalm, while studying our sermon passage this week, because I think it's a powerful picture of exactly what Jesus is talking about here. We've now come to the very last section of the Farewell Discourse - of Jesus's final words to His followers the night before he died. He's already told His disciples that He would soon be leaving them. And he's told them that persecution would come - that the world would hate them, and all who follow Jesus, because the unbelieving world hates Jesus. He's spoken of the help and comfort that the Holy Spirit will bring to help us through such hard times, but now he ends, on a climactic note, by assuring His followers that all this sorrow will not last forever, but will actually be turned to joy. It's a message of the hope, joy, and peace that the gospel of Christ gives us, even in the darkness of sorrow of this fallen world that we face today. And it's a message we badly need to hear, isn't it?

We've been particularly reminded recently that the world does indeed hate Christians, and that life in this fallen world inevitably brings sorrow and suffering. It feels like we've just been bombarded by terrible news these days, doesn't it? What feels like endless war and death around the world; turmoil and violence and crime in the streets of our own land, like the brutal

murder on a train in Charlotte, constant mass shootings at churches and Christian schools, terrorist attacks, violent attacks on police officers and federal law enforcement, riots, the assassination of Charlie Kirk (in what has rightly been seen as a martyrdom for his faithful witness to the gospel). And on top of all this, a lot of faithful Christian leaders and pastors have died recently; great warriors of the faith like John MacArthur, James Dobson, and Voddie Baucham. And then add to that list all the burdens and sorrows from your own personal life and circle of friends and family, that are burdening your heart today!

We all need to hear the comforting words of Christ: *your sorrow will be turned to joy!* This is the hope Jesus holds out in the gospel for all who come to Him in faith. If your faith is in Christ, then you can have confidence that your sorrow will be turned to joy because of Jesus's resurrection and return, because we have full access to the Father even now in Christ through prayer, and because He has overcome the world and all that causes us sorrow in it. That's what Jesus tells us here in this text. Beginning with point 1...

I. Your sorrow will be turned to joy because of Christ's death and resurrection (16-22)

Jesus begins this section with v.16: "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." The disciples have no clue what he means, asking each other in the next two verses what he could possibly be talking about. On the one hand, we can understand why they're confused. To this day, people debate what exactly Jesus is referring to. But on the other hand, this side of Jesus's cross and resurrection, the veil has been removed and we should be able to see what Jesus is talking about. When Jesus says he's going away in just "a little while" and they will see him "no longer," he's talking about his pending death on the cross and burial in the tomb. That's what he's been talking about for a few chapters now. Back in chapters 13 and 14 he began to prepare the disciples - and us - for his upcoming departure through His death, so that we can start to understand the importance and significance of Christ's death on the cross as the suffering servant, who lays down His life in love so that we may be cleansed from sin and raised to eternal life with Him in His Father's house. Judas has already been filled by Satan and left to betray Jesus; very soon, Jesus will be arrested, tried, and executed. In a very short "little while" he would be gone - the very next day He would be buried, the disciples would see Him no more, the unbelieving world will rejoice at Christ's death, as the forces of darkness think they have won, and Jesus's followers would be filled with sorrow and grief, just as He says will happen in v.20.

But then He adds that this won't be the end of the story: "but your sorrow will turn into joy." Jesus is referring to His death on the cross and resurrection from the grave on the third day. He will be gone in just a little while - the next day - but yet again a little while - just until the third day - they will see him again, when He rises from the grave! Their sorrow will be turned to joy. The disciples will weep and lament in sorrow while the world rejoices at the departure of Christ through His death on the Cross, yet the tables would soon be flipped: their sorrow would be turned to joy that Sunday morning when Christ arose.

In vv.21-22, Jesus gives us an illustration of what he's talking about by comparing it to a woman in labor. "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." A woman has intense sorrow in her labor pains, and yet is a labor of love that turns to joy when the childbirth is complete and she holds her precious baby in her arms. It's an amazing thing, really. If you've gone through labor yourself, or watched your wife go through labor, you know exactly what He's talking about. Childbirth is so excruciatingly painful that it makes the idea of getting a giant needle stabbed into your spine sound like sweet relief! Yet then the pain melts away and turns to joy when that sweet little newborn is cuddled in mom's arms. So much so that, despite the pain and anguish, she very well might turn to her husband in the next couple of years and say, "I think I'd like to go through all that pain again and have another baby." The anguish is worth it because it turns into much greater joy. In the same way, the death of Christ brings sorrow, yet it is a labor of love that results in the great joy of Jesus's resurrection. We see this in v.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." The death of Christ results in the resurrection, the necessary labor pains of childbirth leading up to the climactic delivery of Christ from the grave! It brings unspeakable joy to all who trust in Christ, an eternal joy that cannot be taken from us, because it is the joy of believing that *we* will indeed be raised with Him unto eternal life! That we will see Him again in eternal glory and a life of unending joy and bliss, all because of His death for our sins and victorious resurrection!

Just as the disciples experienced great sorrow at Jesus's death, and were encouraged here to take hope and comfort in the fact that Jesus would return to them in His resurrection, so all disciples - including us today - experience great sorrow in this world, after Christ has gone back to the Father in heaven; and yet we are to take great hope and comfort in the fact that we will see

Jesus again in the resurrection from the dead, when our sorrow will be turned to joy! Jesus has left in His ascension and gone back to the Father yet He has not abandoned us. It may feel like it sometimes, and our sorrows stack up and feel so great that it feels like they're going to overwhelm us, crush us, suffocate us at times. We feel sorrow because of our own sins and failure, our regret and guilt and shame. We feel sorrow in trials and suffering. We feel sorrow because of sickness and injury and tragedies, because of the suffering and death of loved ones, friends, and family. We feel sorrow because of all the wickedness we see in the world around us and because of persecution against Christians and those who are just speaking the truth or trying to do the right thing, and are being mocked, fired, sued, imprisoned, beaten, or even murdered because of it. We feel sorrow because of all the terrible crises and tragedies we see on the news. All this sorrow weighs us down and it can feel like too much to bear at times, can't it?

Yet the wondrous comfort of the gospel is that this sorrow will not last. Even though it feels like a weight too heavy for us to bear, we don't have to bear it alone. Christ bears it for us! He has already borne the weight of the world's sins and sorrows on His shoulders by dying on the cross and rising from the dead in order to take our sins and sorrows that we bear and bury them for us, deep into the depths of the earth, defeating our sorrow by going to the very root of our problems, crushing the power of Sin and Satan that lies at the root of it all; and then He rose from the dead, leaving our sins and sorrows buried in the ground so that we can be raised up to a joyful life in Him!

Even though we walk through sorrows now, we know that our sorrow will be turned to joy. We have joy in our hearts even now, because Christ has risen from the dead! Christ has already returned from the grave and given us the eternal joy that can never be taken from us! And that eternal joy is this: no matter what suffering and sorrow you bear in this fallen world, if your faith is in Christ, then He will raise you up to see Him again, to live with Him in eternal life and glory! His resurrected has defeated all sorrow, even the sting of death, so that when a believer dies, we know with certainty that he or she simply closes his or her eyes as if they are but going to sleep, and the next instant, they awake and open eyes that behold the glorious face of Jesus Christ, and know nothing but infinite joy and love and peace forevermore! When a believer dies, it feels like our loss but it is *their gain*! And we know that one day Christ will return, so that all the sorrow and pain we bear because of all the tragedies of this world right now will turn out to be but labor pains before the birth of the New Heavens and new Earth, when

Christ shall return to this world, raise the dead, right every wrong, and turn our sorrow into joy! Our lament shall be turned to laughter, our weeping into shout of joy, our tears of sadness into gladness! So we can have joy and hope even now and trust that every sorrow will be turned to joy in the future, because the resurrection of Christ guarantees our resurrection at His return.

But the resurrection and ascension of Christ also gives us another way to deal with the burdens of sorrow that we bear in this world, by giving us full access to the Father, so that we can bring our burdens to Him in prayer and lay them at His feet. Which brings us to point two...

II. Your sorrow will be turned to joy because we now have full access to the Father in Christ (16:23-27)

After the resurrection of Christ, Jesus's disciples will have full access to the Father through prayer *in Christ's name*. We see this turn to talking about prayer begin in vv.23-24: "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. Until now, you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." "In that day" refers to the day when they see Jesus again: that is, the dawn of Christ's resurrection and defeat of the grave. After Jesus rises from the grave, he says they will no longer ask Jesus directly, but will now pray directly to the *Father*, with full access and confidence. That's interesting, isn't it? First, he says on that day the disciples will see Him again - and yet also that they will no longer ask Him directly in person, like they have been! We know now because after the resurrection, Jesus would ascend into Heaven, preparing a place for us and reigning over the earth until He returns. Yet He speaks as though this will be even *better for us*. We saw previously how, after the resurrection, we will now have the very presence of God in our hearts through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Now we see how we have full access to the Father because of the resurrection of Christ.

He says we can pray directly to the Father and rest assured that He hears us when we pray "in Christ's name" - that is, when we come to the Father through faith in Christ as our mediator who has obtained full atonement for our sins and declared us righteous children of God. He says we can rest assured that God hears and answers our prayers. This came up back in chapter 15, but I'll just briefly remind us that this doesn't mean God will give us whatever we ask for so long as we utter the magic words, "In Jesus's name." That's not what he's saying. This isn't superstition.. God isn't a cosmic vending machine. It's not mechanically saying the words but believing what they mean. He's talking about if we pray with a heart and posture of faith in Jesus

Christ. He gives us everything that we pray for that is in alignment with His Will and arising from our union with Christ and the indwelling Spirit within us. We've seen that before; but what Jesus is emphasizing here is the *access* to the Father we now have in Christ, so that our joy may be "full" or "complete." In other words, this full access to God that we have in prayer, because of the finished work of Christ on the cross on our behalf, is a vital reason why our "sorrow" will be turned to joy; we have access to God in prayer, so that we can bring our sorrows and burdens to Him, through faith in Jesus, and He will fill us with joy and make our joy complete.

In v.25, Jesus acknowledges that He has been speaking more obscurely about what will take place, but that once it does - after His death and resurrection - clarity will be given. In vv.26-27, Jesus repeats that after the resurrection, His disciples will pray directly to God the Father. Jesus and the Spirit pray for us, but also assure us that in Christ, we can *and are invited and exhorted to* bring our prayers directly to God! Look at vv.26-27: "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; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God." We are assured that the Father wants to hear our prayers, will hear our prayers, and will answer them *precisely because He loves us and because we have believed in His Son, Jesus Christ*

Note that our assurance arises from the Father's love for us. The incredibly, infinite love of the Father assures us that He will hear our prayers because he *wants to*, because He cares about you and all that you're going through, all that burdens your heavy heart and weighs down your soul. But also note that this confidence in prayer is based not only on the Father's love for us but also on faith in Christ. This is a love that is shown and given specifically to those who love Jesus and believe in the gospel - that is, Christians. All Christians love Jesus and believe in the gospel because God has first loved us and opens the eyes of our hearts, through the indwelling, illuminating, and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, as we saw from the previous passage a couple weeks ago. Therefore, Jesus is telling us about a type of love and confidence that the Father gives specifically to *believers*, a way that the Father loves *Christians*. We see here the particular love of the Father *for His children, specifically for believers*.

Maybe you're offended by what I just said, that God loves believers in a special way, more than non-Christians, because you yourself haven't professed faith as a Christian. But I want to sincerely ask you, friend: do you recognize the truth of what Jesus is saying? Do you *really* feel like you've experienced the relationship with God that Jesus describes here? If your faith

isn't in Christ, then you haven't. At least not yet. But you can. Jesus invites you, too, if you will turn and believe in His life, death, and resurrection.

And if you are in Christ, you can enter into the presence of God *with confidence and full assurance* that God wants you there, that He invites you to come in and lay all your burdens down at His feet. When you're bearing the burdens of sorrow, unburden your heart by laying them down at God's feet through prayer. Christ has secured your access to the Father, tearing down the barrier between us and God by His own flesh being torn on the cross, as our sacrifice, to pave the way for sinners like us to come into the very presence of the Holy God! As Hebrews 10:19-20 tells us, "we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh We can now have full access to the Father and enter confidently and boldly into His presence because we come in the name of Christ!" Brothers and sisters, *you* can have full confidence when you prayer that God wants you to come and speak to Him, even to vent our soul and pour out your heart, even to lament and mourn, to cry out in the anguish of your soul, to bring your ever burden and petition and plea and cry for mercy and request for aid! God invites you to come into His presence and cast your every burden on Him, so that you don't have to bear it anymore but can let Christ bear it for you. And the way you unburden your heavy heart, weighed down by sorrows, is through *prayer*. As we heard from Pastor Chris Ortiz's excellent sermon last week, on Psalm 39, when we walk through times of suffering - times of sorrow - and it's all bottled up inside of us till we feel like we're going to burst, we must *pray*! There's only one way to unburden your soul. Cry out to God in prayer. Tell Him about your burdens, asking Him to take them from you, and then trusting that He loves you and cares for all of these sorrows just as much as you do (even more than you do!), that He can do something about it, and that He will do something about it. In fact, He will do what is best, using every single one of these burdens and sorrows you bear to bring about the best possible outcome for you and all of His people! He will turn it to joy.

Friend, if your soul is heavy, then I encourage you to pray today. Don't wait. If you feel like you can't stand beneath the weight of your burdens it's because you're not meant to; you're meant to fall on your knees beneath the weight of it all so that you can find relief and let the Lord take your burdens from you. There is no substitute for a private prayer life; there is no healthy personal relationship with the Lord without prayer. There is no peace and joy without prayer. Is

your heart heavy? Then pray. Is your soul burdened with sorrow? Then pray. Do you feel lonely and isolated, like you're suffocating or drowning in sorrow, like you're stuck in the dark with no way out? Then pray. Maybe you've never prayed before - not really. Maybe your soul is heavy with the burden of sin that's never been dealt with. Friend, pray! Cry out to the Lord in faith! Come into His presence in Christ's name, trusting you belong there because Christ paid the penalty for your sins and washed you clean and invited you into the very throne room of God. Pray so that your joy may be full, as Jesus invites you to do right here in v.24. As we draw near to God in prayer, He takes the burdens of our souls and turns our sorrow to joy, giving us peace even now as he fills our hearts with the full assurance of hope in Christ.

III. Your sorrow will be turned to joy because Christ has overcome the world (16:28-33)

We see this in verses 28-33. In this last section of our passage, as Jesus wraps up the Farewell Discourse, Jesus gives a summary statement of what he's been saying in v.28, saying, "I came down from the Father and have come into the world, and now am leaving the world and going to the Father." He's going back to the Father in Heaven, through the route of His pending death on the cross and resurrection. The Disciples respond in the next two verses, saying that they understand now, plain and clear, and understand and believe that Jesus knows all things because He is from God. But then Jesus responds to their response, and as we read it, we get the sense he's talking a bit tongue in cheek, in vv.31-32: "Do you now believe? 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." He's saying, "Oh, you believe and get it now, do you? Ehhh, no, you don't; not yet, not fully. In just a little bit, you're all going to scatter and abandon me when your sorrow comes and you don't know what's going on." They will abandon him - and yet the Father won't. Even as he corrects them, they do get some things right. Jesus does know everything and truly is from God. He even knows that they will abandon Him, yet it will all be part of the Father's good plan.

IN the final verse, we see that Jesus has said all these things to give His disciples *peace*. "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." Jesus is saying we can have peace, even when tribulation and suffering comes, by trusting that God is sovereign and His plan is being accomplished, even through the dark night of sorrow and the anguishing labor pains, in order to bring about immense joy. We can have peace by trusting that Christ has overcome the world,

even through what seemed like the greatest moment of weakness, sadness, and defeat - His humiliating death on the cross - because the resurrection proved that it was but the means of victory over sin, Satan, and death, the birth pains necessary to bring forth glorious triumph, victory, life, and joy everlasting. We can have peace in knowing that no matter what tribulations and trials, sorrow or suffering, pain or persecution we may face in this life, Christ is already victorious, he already reigns as King, and He has already won the battle and victory over the world, the flesh, and the Devil. No matter how dark the days may seem, the light has already won and will soon break forth and dispel the dark clouds of night once and for all. Even when it seems like the forces of evil are winning and will overcome us, we can trust that that's not true, that the tides will turn, that if we are on Jesus's side we are on the right side of history, the victorious side, and that we shall share in His victory and soon reign with Him. We can have peace by resting in Christ the conqueror, He who conquered over Sin, Satan, and Death for our sakes, so that we can now be more than conquerors in Him. We can keep fighting, with joy and peace in our hearts and a jovial song of triumph on our lips, even when the fighting is at it's worst and the night seems darker than ever, because we know these tribulations are but the ingredients God is using to show the world that He rules and reigns over it. Christ has overcome the world, brothers and sisters, and that means He will turn our sorrow to joy!

When Christ rose from the grave, He declared to all the world that if we put our hope and trust in Him alone - if we believe in Him as our Lord and savior - then He promises to raise us up with Him! The world killed Jesus and rejoiced thinking He was dead, and the disciples lamented and mourned and wept in sorrow for three days thinking Jesus was dead; but when Jesus rose victoriously on the third day, He turned their sorrow to joy! The tears of sorrow turned to tears of laughter and joy! And Jesus offers you that same joy today, friend. Jesus left again, and you may feel like those first disciples and want to mourn and lament and weep for all the sorrows that plague you in this world - and there is a place for sorrow and lament - but we do so as those with eternal *joy and hope*, even now, because we know that Christ has risen from the dead! We know that Christ has gone but to prepare a place in Heaven for us; that Christ has gone to sit at His Father's right hand, so that we are seated with Him in the heavenly places even now, so that we have full access to the Father through Him; that Christ has overcome the world by victoriously conquering over sin and Satan and Death; that Christ has ascended to His glorious throne where He reigns over all the world as the King of Kings; that He has gone merely to prepare for when

He shall return again, and raise us from the dead, and restore the world as it is meant to be in the glorious New Heavens and New Earth! Brothers and Sisters, if you are trusting in Christ, rest assured that your sorrow is all part of God's good plan and He will turn it all into your joy!

And in Christ's loving, gracious wisdom, He has given us a physical, tangible sign of this reality: the Lord's Supper. The bread and cup of the Lord's Supper visibly represent Jesus's death on the cross - His body broken in our place, His blood poured out for our sins. Gruesome realities; the very thing that brought great sorrow to the first disciples. Yet we are to remember Jesus's death by *eating food and drinking the fruit of the vine*. Why do you eat in remembrance of events? To *celebrate* them, like a birthday party meal, an anniversary dinner, a wedding feast! We celebrate the death of Christ by eating and drinking, because the death of Christ has been turned into our eternal joy through the resurrection, reminding us that all our sorrow, every burden that weighs on us because of the curse of sin in this fallen world, has been dealt with on the cross and shall be turned into our eternal joy. Christ's death is our joy because He died for our sin and rose again that we can be raised to eternal life with Him! That's the great hope we're proclaiming and celebrating when we eat this meal together.

So if this hope is yours - if you love Jesus and are believing in Him alone for salvation, if you have professed your faith in baptism, and are in good standing with a gospel believing church - then we invite you to come to the Table with us in just a moment. But if any of those three things don't describe you, we invite you instead to draw near to Christ in faith, so that your sorrow truly *can* be turned to joy. If you have any questions about how to do that or what the next steps are, such as baptism, we would love to speak with you after the service. Just let us know. Until then, let's have a moment of silence as we prepare to come to the Table.