

*May 19, 2019*

*Rev. 21:1-7 & John 16:12-22:*

***“Your Sorrow Will Turn to Joy”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

When Jesus said, “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me,” the apostles did not know what he was talking about. Truth be told, the words have puzzled Christian minds ever since. I’m not going to bog us down with all of the different theories. Suffice it to say that the many views on the subject can be supported by the names of many well-known preachers and theologians of different shades and stripes from the past and present. One in particular stands out to me: a confessional Lutheran theologian by the name of Dr. Paul E. Kretzmann. He discusses the matter in his *Popular Commentary*. He begins by saying:

Only a little while it was, only a few short hours, and the Savior would be hidden from the eyes of His disciples in the darkness of the tomb, and they would not be able to behold Him. But then it would again be only a short while, a matter of a few days, when their eyes would be gladdened by His reappearance as their living Savior.

Dr. Kretzmann is correct. When we look at verse 16 of our text, the natural conclusion that one must make is that Jesus is talking about the time period between his death and his post-resurrection appearances. However, if one continues to read on to verse 17, one discovers that the apostles were also including other words of Jesus that are not recorded in the initial statement of Jesus in verse 16. They were also discussing these words of our Lord: “because I am going to the Father.” Dr. Kretzmann goes on to add:

But the intention of the Lord seems to be to convey also another great truth to their hearts, since He says that he is going to the Father, making this statement the basis for others. His ascension was but a few days away, after which they would no longer enjoy the comfort of His personal, physical presence; but His return to glory would follow very shortly after that. In either case, and with either intended meaning, the words were full of comfort and cheer for the disciples.

I agree. And I think that there is further evidence of this reality in John 20:17. You might recall that in the account of his resurrection appearance to Mary we are told that Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” When Jesus tells Mary not to cling to him, it is that the time has not yet come for such “clinging.” The “clinging” comes in the future. He has not yet ascended to the Father. So, what do we then make of all of this? What can be said?

“A little while in verse 16 is about the time between his death and post-resurrection appearances. Verse 17 is a broadening of his departure that moves us to his ascension and beyond - “because I am going to the Father.” Back in John 14:3, Jesus says “And if I go [the Father’s house] and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” Again, we have Jesus announcing a departure and a return. So, what do we then make of all of this? The variety of discussions that we have regarding Jesus leaving and going to the Father and then considerations of sorrow that will give way to joy, are pointing us to a very important truth.



In these passages, and many more that we could consider, Jesus is pointing the apostles and us to a certain reality of the Christian experience that applies to every generation till the very end. It can be summarized in these words of Jesus in our lesson, "I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but **Your Sorrow Will Turn Into Joy.**" It is at this point that we must now ask, "Why the Sorrow?"

The sorrow is due to the death of Jesus. Yes, he rises from the dead, but he departs and goes to the Father and leaves his apostles and us to struggle along in this life, while looking forward to his return and our departure with him. In other words, we look forward to our own resurrection and ascension to the place prepared for us in the kingdom of heaven. The hard truth is that, until our departure, the Christian life is one of sorrow. It is a sorrow that we experience in the recognition of sin, dying to sin, experiencing sin in everything that we think, say, and do, and living in a sinful creation and unbelieving world.

Hidden in all of this sorrow is a real joy that the Christian has by faith. "Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Yes, Jesus is with us always in the means of grace, and for that reason we are joyful, but life that is presently lived is one of sorrow and longing to leave this mess behind in order to be with Jesus face to face. What allows the sorrow to remain in our lives is that we presently live in hope, and hope is an anticipation of what we have and yet do not have. Seeing through the eyes of faith gives us a joy that rises above these earthly cares, but with our own two eyes we look down here and see sorrow. We still struggle with sin, we face the onslaught of this unbelieving world, and the accusations of Satan are always doing their best to convince us of the absence of God in our lives. All of this would rob us of our joy that we presently have by faith, as well as the joy that is to come.

When Jesus says that "**Your Sorrow Will Turn Into Joy!**" these words remind us that our Easter morning is still on the horizon. In the meantime, here we are daily living in the cross of Jesus, which means suffering and dying with him in the reality of sin, death, and the devil. The constant struggle for all of us then is to embrace what Paul says (Col. 3:1-3): "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

We live "in the meantime," and this is no easy thing for us. Jesus goes on to describe exactly what it's like to live this way in our lesson. He says (John 16:21-22), "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. 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." I have been through watching the birth of four children. I will not pretend for a moment that I understand what it's like to give birth, but I can say that I wouldn't want to do it. However, there is something I can credibly say about it. I have never seen a person change from pure anguish to pure joy in such a short moment as I have watched my wife move from the anguish of labor to the joy of holding her baby.



Jesus endured this transition on the cross. He lived “in the meantime” as we presently do. It’s expressed in the familiar words of the writer to the Hebrews (12:2) when he spoke about Jesus who “...for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.” Jesus has birthed it. But, where do we presently stand in all of this from a Christian perspective? The truth is that we have it with Jesus, but we are enduring the cross and are looking forward to the joy - and so we endure. Faith holds onto the great promise of Jesus that serves as the theme of our message today: **“Your Sorrow Will Turn Into Joy!”**

Consider the joy that the apostles had when they saw their risen Lord and really understood what it all meant for them. Consider the joy that we have when we truly understand our sin and what we deserve, only to hear that God loves us through his one and only Son, and that we have the hope of an Easter morning like his. Yes, the “birth pains” of Jesus on the cross gave way to the arrival of a “baby” - and we are in the birthing room as he was. Just like any natural baby, it is a combination of a male and a female. In the incarnation of Christ we see the offspring of the woman who is both God and Man - a combination of that which is uncreated and created. It is no surprise then to consider that which is to come for us is a new creation where Immanuel is God with us face to face - where heaven combines with the earth - and the birth of something wonderful - like a baby! As Revelation 12 states:

She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth ... And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it ... but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days. Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

The war of the dragon is our sorrow, but Jesus will make everything new - the baby! As our epistle lesson says (Revelation 21:1-7): “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth ... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man ... He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

**Your Sorrow Will Turn Into Joy!**

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott