

Joy Comes

Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice and your joy no one will take from you – John 16:12-24 (22 printed)

Background

Jesus and his disciples are in the transition point from ending the Passover meal and going to the garden to pray. In this time, Jesus is giving final instruction to the disciples. He is preparing them for his departure, which even though he had been saying this for years, was not something they were willing to accept, much less prepare for.

But now I go away to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, “where are you going? But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart” – John 16:5-6

Understandably, the disciples were not happy about the conversation from Jesus, but it was more than just being annoyed. They were in a state of complete sorrow. So much so that even though they heard what he was saying, they couldn't even muster a response. The disciples were crippled with sorrow over not only the potential loss of their friend. For them, this affected their entire life: some of them had given up businesses, others had aspirations of future favor. Some were finally being accepted after years of ridicule. With all of the changes in their lives attributed to giving up everything and following Jesus, all of that was about to come crashing down because he was about to go away.

As Christians, we are expected to be joyful, and often feel at odds with our faith and ourselves when we face crippling sorrow and despair. Jesus continued to speak to the disciples to give them the means to address the sorrow, and to accept the joy that he was promising would come.

Faith and Sorrow

The disciples had gone through a lot with Jesus. There were certain expectations laid on them by each other and by those that followed Jesus.

*Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic, and suffers severely. For he often falls into the fire and often into the water. **So I brought him to your disciples but they could not cure him** – Matthew 17:15-16*

With all that they experienced, there were undoubtedly expectations that they had of their own faith, their own ability, and what they would allow to affect them. Jesus was merciful, but in his mercy also pointed out to the disciples that they would

experience points of failure, frustration and challenge. In this, he never rebuked them – he encouraged them to know that he would be there to walk through the challenge with them.

For us, there are times when faith and sorrow will actually go together, and our sorrow is not a lack of faith.

*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, **who for the joy that was set before him** endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God – Hebrews 12:1-2*

Jesus as our example did not lose faith because he experienced sorrow, frustration, despising or shame. In this example, he shows us the key to maintain faith through those tough times: **the joy that was coming**

Who Do You Turn To?

Jesus continued to speak to his disciples about what was going to happen. He promised that the spirit of truth would come, that he would convict the world, and would show them everything that the Father had given to Jesus. When he reiterated that he was going to the Father, the disciples turned **to each other** to ask what it could possibly mean.

*Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask him, and he said to them, "Are you inquiring **among yourselves** about what I said...?" – John 16:19a*

Many times in our sorrow or distress, even when we may receive direct information from the Lord, we turn to other people or other things for validation. The problem with this is that we will never get the answer, validation or release we need. Furthermore we do not get the joy that can come because of the action of the Lord.

Jesus continued to be gracious to the disciples and engaged them in their questions even though they were too sorrowful, too fearful, or too distressed to ask.

*My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, **let him ask God**, who gives to all liberally and **without reproach** and it will be given to him. – James 1:2-5*

In times of trial or distress, we are invited to turn to God, knowing that he will provide what is needed to be able to deal with the trial itself. Jesus was teaching the disciples that even in those times when they couldn't understand or couldn't face the prospect of what was coming, he would be there to anticipate their needs and

provide what is needed without judgment. **Faith is not having no questions, it is knowing who to go to with your questions.**

The Dark Night of the Soul

What happens when the sorrow becomes too great for us? When, as Charles Colson says, “God seems distant”?

I walked around at night asking God why He would allow this. Alone, shaken, fearful, I longed for the closeness with God I had experienced even in the darkest days of prison – Charles Colson, “My Soul’s Dark Night”

Charles was at a place of ultimate darkness - a place where even the darkest days in prison were more desirable. Trying to find joy in those times seems impossible. In reality, we will settle for just an explanation – something to justify the pain and bitterness.

My soul loathes my life. I will give free course to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, “Do not condemn me. Show me why you contend with me.” – Job 10:1-2

Isaiah also describes people’s path toward this crippling state of distress:

And when they say to you, “seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter. “ Should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. They will pass through it hard-pressed and hungry. And it shall happen, when they are hungry, that they will be enraged and curse their king and their God and look upward. Then they will look to the earth, and see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish; and they will be driven to darkness. – Isaiah 8:19-22

These people are looking for answers – answers to their distress, to their darkness, but they cannot find it. Finally after looking to themselves and to others, they look up, but only to lash out at God. It might have felt good to get it off their chest, but when they looked back down they were still in the place of darkness. They looked up, down and out, but *never looked forward*. They could not see what was coming.

Joy on the Horizon

Nevertheless...

The power of that word cannot be underestimated. God was about to bring the answer they needed, and give us promise and hope for joy in our lives.

Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, as when He first lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward more heavily oppressed her by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee

of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Those that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy. They rejoice before you according to the joy of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. – Isaiah 9:1-3

Normally we would expect judgment for those that would spout curses to God, but God didn't respond in that way. He responded with grace, hope and joy. For those that had no light – no dawn, God provided light – a means to look *forward*.

*Most assuredly I say to you that you will weep and lament but the world will rejoice. And you will be sorrowful but your sorrow will be turned to joy. A woman when she is in labor has sorrow because her hour has come. But as soon as she has given birth to the child she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow, **but I will see you again** and your heart will rejoice and your joy no one will take from you. – John 16:20-22*

Jesus acknowledged their sorrow as very real, but gave them the means to look forward to see **what was coming**. Joy was not just some arbitrary or empty emotion to be conjured up at will – joy was attached to **who Jesus was, and to what he would do in their lives**. Isaiah wrote of people who would rejoice as they do over harvest, and that joy was also not without reason:

For unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given. And the government will be upon his shoulder. And his name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. – Isaiah 9:6

Jesus is the source and reason for joy. Not just because of who he is. Joy doesn't come just because there is a baby born. Joy comes because of who the baby is for us. Jesus telling the disciples "*I will see you again*" is a promise that goes back to all of the other promises he made. It is a pledge that what he started he will finish. It is the embodiment of what is said of him in Hebrews, that he is the *author and finisher of our faith*. People rejoiced over harvest because there was not always a guarantee that a harvest would come. When it did, it was both the culmination of hard work, faith, sweat, worry and even some tears, and the beginning of the next phase of the farmer's life. Harvest meant caring for family now, and the ability to plant for future harvests. Jesus declaring that he would see them again was a promise that not only would they be happy to see him, but that they would begin a new life again with Him.

The woman in labor hates the pain, but *looks forward* to the baby being born. The farmer agonizes over the process, but looks forward to the harvest. Jesus hated the cross, but looked forward to the joy that would come. In all of these, we can take heart that **joy is coming**.

In The Mean Time

So, joy is coming. It is future, at a time of God's choosing... What do I do now?

*And in that day you will ask me nothing. Most assuredly I say to you whatever you ask the Father in my name He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. **Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full** – John 16:23-24*

While we wait for the joy that He brings, we are given the ability to enter into the joy, even before it comes. What Jesus offered the disciples was a preview of the joy. In the same way he brought light to those that “walked in darkness”, or brought what was needed to them at the time, he gave access to the Father to help us on our path to joy. This way, even though the situation may not have changed, *the outlook had changed*. God wants to give us the ability to receive joy, even if the promise is far off – we can rejoice now that the *giver of the promise* is faithful to not only bring the promise in its time, but to keep us while we wait for the promise to be revealed.