

INTRODUCTION

Tom and Joe were out hunting in the woods and they got lost. Tom said, "I've heard that if you ever get lost, you fire three shots into the air and if anyone is around they will come to help you." So Tom shot three times into the air. Nothing happened. Then Joe shot three times in the air, and they waited. Nobody came. Tom, said, "I sure hope it works this time because we're down to our last three arrows." That's what I call being clueless.

On this night before the cross, the eleven disciples were clueless. They were literally and figuratively in the dark. It was the middle of the night before the cross. Jesus knew He would be crucified in a few hours, but the disciples were confused and afraid.

These eleven men had been with Jesus for over three years. They had witnessed amazing miracles. He fed 5,000 people with five muffins and two sardines. They had seen Him literally walking on top of the water. They watched as a man dead for four days came stumbling out of a tomb wrapped in grave clothes. Even having seen these miracles, they were full of doubt and fear because of what Jesus had said.

But Jesus didn't rebuke the disciples because they were filled with sorrow and despair. Instead He gives them promises of hope and joy. He promised them that their sorrow would be turned to joy.

We need to hear these words from Jesus now more than ever before. In this passage Jesus gives us four ways for us to move from sorrow to joy.

Rather than reading the full passage, I want to divide the scripture up as I introduce each point, so keep your Bible open for the whole message.

John 16:16-22. "In a little while, you will no longer see me; again in a little while, you will see me." Then some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this he's telling us: 'In a little while, you will not see me; again in a little while, you will see me,' and, 'Because I am going to the Father'?" They said, "What is this he is saying, 'In a little while'? We don't know what he's talking about."

Jesus knew they wanted to ask him, and so he said to them, "Are you asking one another about what I said, 'In a little while, you will not see me; again in a little while, you will see me'? Truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice. You will become sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. When a woman is in labor, she has pain because her time has come. But when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the suffering because of the joy that a person has been born into the world. So you also have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy from you."

1. ANTICIPATE THE JOY OF REUNION

In John 8 Jesus had said, "I'm going away, and where I'm going you cannot come." At the Last Supper in John 13 He said it Peter, "Where I'm going you cannot follow me—but one day you will follow me." He was speaking about His death.

But rather than focusing on their separation, Jesus told them to look forward to the joy of reunion. He said in verse 16: "In a little while, you will no longer see me; again in a little while, you will see me... So you also have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy from you."

So what did Jesus mean by that? There was going to be an immediate application for that and then an ultimate application.

The IMMEDIATE APPLICATION meant that they would weep at Jesus' death; but rejoice at His resurrection.

Within hours, Jesus would be arrested and put on trial. Then He would be held by the Romans until they crucified Him. Then He was placed in a borrowed tomb. During that "little time" they wouldn't see Him. That would be a time of sorrow and mourning. But then Jesus said, "In a little while you will see me." And when they saw that Jesus was alive, their sorrow was transformed into joy.

The ULTIMATE APPLICATION: We'll leave this world of tears to enter into the joy of the presence of the Lord!

Jesus has ascended into Heaven. But one day there will be a joyful reunion. We will see Jesus either at His return or at our death, but all the sorrow and tears of this life will be transformed into the joy of seeing the Lord face to face.

Jesus illustrated this joy by comparing it to childbirth. I'll never forget the births of both of my daughters. When Cindy was pregnant with Jenni, we took Lamaze classes for natural childbirth. We were a team. I was the coach, so WE were going to have the baby. Part of their teaching was that you never said, "Labor pains." Instead they were contractions.

And I knew how to record the time between contractions so we would know when to leave for the hospital.

In the early hours of May 14, 1978, Mother's Day, I started recording Cindy's contractions. But something was wrong because they were coming too close together—so I would just scratch out the time when she said she was having a contraction and say that was a false contraction. But then Cindy let me know in unmistakable terms they were NOT false contractions and that it was time to go. The hospital was 30 minutes away in Montgomery and it was mostly all Interstate. It was about 3:30 a.m. and I put the pedal to the medal on that '74 Malibu Classic. We made it in about 15 minutes.

As I was driving I was also trying to coach Cindy to focus and breathe; but she was rather uncoachable during that drive.

I was afraid she was going to have the baby before we could get to the hospital. We pulled into the ER and the nurse said, "Just relax, it's your first baby." Then she examined her and screamed, "Call Dr. Johnson NOW!" Meanwhile I went to park the car in the parking garage and by the time I got suited up to go in and coach, Jenni had almost arrived. She was born 20 minutes after we reached the hospital. And based upon the sounds Cindy was making in the car ride there, forget contractions, she was in PAIN. But then when we each got to hold our precious daughter, all the panic, fear, and anxiety was replaced with the JOY of seeing our first child.

Jesus said that's what the joy of reunion in Heaven will be like. I know there's a lot of people we love who are in Heaven, and that will be a joyful reunion. I want to see my parents and grandparents. I want to see so many of the people who've died since I've been pastor here. But our most joyful reunion will be with Jesus.

In 1923 a lady in Tennessee named Nettie Washington wrote a song about a dream she had of entering Heaven. The song was virtually unknown until Michael English and the Gaither Vocal Band released it in the 1970s. Here are the lyrics to the last verse: As I entered the gates of that city, My loved ones all knew me well. They took me down the streets of Heaven; Such scenes were too many to tell; I saw Abraham, Jacob and Isaac; Talked with Mark, and Timothy; But I said, "I want to see Jesus, 'Cause He's the One who died for me." Then I bowed on my knees and cried, "Holy, Holy, Holy."

With everything that's happening in the world today. Why don't you take a moment and move your perspective from earth to Heaven? Take a moment and anticipate the joy of reunion.

Now let's read John 16:23-24: "In that day you will not ask me anything. Truly I tell you, anything you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. Until now you have asked for nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete."

2. ASK THE FATHER ANYTHING IN JESUS' NAME.

There are many precious promises of answered prayer in the Bible. But these promises have been used and abused in what is known as "the prosperity gospel." Some greedy preachers have twisted these words of Jesus to mean that if you enjoy health and wealth if you have enough faith. Then they say, "But the way you move into prosperity is by trusting God enough to give me all the money you have." This false gospel has ruined many churches, especially in Africa.

Praying in the name of Jesus isn't just some magical formula that unlocks the vaults of Heaven for you. It means you align your will with God and pray according to His will.

My friend Ron Dunn used to tell a story that illustrates what it means to ask in the name of Jesus. Once he had taken his three kids to a county fair where there were carnival rides. So he bought a bunch of tickets, and as his kids entered each carnival ride, he would tear off the required number of tickets and give them to his kids. This system was working great. But Ron said he had just torn off the tickets at the tilt-a-whirl and given them to his son Steve. And then right behind Steve, a boy he had never seen before held out his hand to get some tickets. Ron said he pulled those tickets back and said, "I don't know you." Then Steve turned around and said, "Dad, he's my friend. I told him you would give him some tickets."

Ron said he wanted to honor his son, so gladly gave that boy the tickets in Steve's name. The boy really had no right to the tickets, but because his son had asked him to do it, he did.

When we go to our Heavenly Father in prayer we can ask in the name of Jesus. And because of who Jesus is and what He did at the cross, God answers. God doesn't hear me because of what I have done or because of who I am. But He will move heaven and earth to honor the name of His Son.

Let's continue as we read John 16:25-30: "I have spoken these things to you in figures of speech. A time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. On that day you will ask in my name, and I am not telling 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. I came from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father."

His disciples said, "Look, now you're speaking plainly and not using any figurative language. Now we know that you know everything and don't need anyone to question you. By this we believe that you came from God."

3. ADMIT THAT WE WILL NEVER KNOW ALL THE ANSWERS.

I have to smile when I read these words. Jesus said, "I've been using figures of speech, but the time is coming when I will speak to you plainly about the Father." And the disciples responded by saying, "Okay, now we understand everything. We don't need to ask you anything else." Wrong. They still didn't get it. In just a few hours, they would leave Jesus like rats leaving a sinking ship.

Have you ever had someone explain something to you and you say, "Okay I got it?" But truthfully, you DIDN'T get it?

The disciples didn't finally understand because we see their fear and doubt over the next few days. Over the course of His ministry Jesus predicted several times that he would be crucified. Just before they got to Jerusalem we read these words from Matthew 20: "While going up to Jerusalem, Jesus took the twelve disciples aside privately and said to them on the way, 'See, we are going up to Jerusalem. The Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes,

and they will condemn him to death. They will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked, flogged, and crucified, and on the third day he will be raised.” (Matthew 20:17-19)

But the disciples were clueless. If they had truly understood what Jesus said, they wouldn't have been hiding in fear behind locked doors on the first Easter. They would have all been gathered at the tomb on Sunday morning to welcome the Resurrected Jesus.

They didn't know. But Jesus knew that they didn't know. And He didn't rebuke them. He understood that they wouldn't totally begin to understand the truth until the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit filled them, and He would guide them into all truth. So after the Resurrection Jesus spend 40 more days with the disciples. Then just as He was getting ready to return to His Father, do you know the LAST question they asked Him? In Acts 1:6 they asked, “Lord, are you restoring the Kingdom to Israel at this time?” They still didn't get it. This was ten days before Pentecost.

The personal application for us is that we are like the disciples. Even though we can study the Bible for decades and take seminary classes and study BSF or Navigator materials all of our lives, there will always be more for us to learn. So, none of us can ever make the claim the disciples made that night, “Hey, Jesus, we have it all figured out now.” We will always be students of the Bible.

Let's read the final section in John 16:31-33: Jesus responded to them, “Do you now believe? Indeed, an hour is coming, and has come, when each of you will be scattered to his own home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world.”

4. ACCEPT THE PEACE JESUS OFFERS IN TIMES OF SUFFERING.

Right now, our church, and our nation need to hear this powerful promise of peace. We are living in stressful times. People were already full of anxiety over the pandemic. Then when you add the economic meltdown. Now we've seen graphic examples of racial hatred. And a culture that was already pent-up from stay-at-home orders has exploded into protests and some have led to violence. The stress meter is off the chart.

Dr. Matthew Flinders, a Professor at the University of Sheffield, writes that we are suffering from “crisis fatigue.” He writes: “We live in a media-saturated context, where catastrophizing is the common denominator. If there's a molehill, it will become a mountain. And this degree of social amplification, driven by 24/7 social media means that the noise level is constantly at a very high volume. The result is the layering of crises upon crises upon crises, until our sense of well-being is eroded.”

Brothers and sisters, we don't get our world view from 24-hour news networks, or from social media, or from the headlines. We are blood-bought children of the King and our world view is shaped by who Jesus is and what He has done.

Remember, these are the last words that Jesus spoke to the disciples before He went to the cross. And the promise He made on that dark night applies to us in these dark days.

"I have told you these things so that IN ME you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world." (John 16:33)

There is suffering all around us. But in this promise, Jesus included a command. Be courageous! This is the last command He issued to His followers before the cross. Be courageous!

Peace is not the absence of suffering. Peace is being courageous in the middle of suffering. And we only find that when we are IN JESUS.

So where is the source of your security? Is it in your job? Is it in your money? Is it in your family? Is it in your health? All of those can fail you. But Jesus will never fail. If your security is IN JESUS, He will give you the strength to be courageous and to move from sorrow to joy.

CONCLUSION

Many of you have heard the story behind the song, "It is Well With My Soul" but it's good to be reminded because it is an example of being courageous in a time of great suffering.

Horatio G. Spafford was a lawyer and real estate investor in Chicago. He lost much of his fortune in the great Chicago Fire of 1871. About that same time his four-year old son died of scarlet fever.

In 1873 Spafford planned a European vacation for his family. In November of that year, due to some last-minute business, he had to stay in Chicago, so he sent his wife, Anna, and four daughters ahead on the ship and he would follow a few days later. In the middle of a foggy night in the Atlantic Ocean the ship the Spaffords were on collided with another ship and sank in 12 minutes. Anna was rescued by a sailor who found her clutching to some debris. All four daughters drowned. Ten days later, Anna arrived in Scotland and sent a telegram back to her husband. It said, "Saved alone. What shall I do?"

Immediately Horatio boarded a ship to join his wife. Only parents who have had children die can understand the depth of the grief that the Spafford's were carrying. On the voyage, the captain of Horatio's ship pointed out the general vicinity where his daughters had been lost. Horatio was a man of deep faith. So while on the ship, he wrote these words that are famous to most of us. "When Peace like a river attendeth my way; When sorrows, like sea billows roll. Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, "It is well. It is well, with my soul."

And my favorite stanza says, "Though Satan should buffet and trials should come. Let THIS blessed assurance control. That Christ has regarded my helpless estate. And hath shed his own blood for my soul. It is well. It is well with my soul."

Can you say that today? The world is full of suffering, but Jesus has told us to BE COURAGEOUS for He has overcome the world. There is so much suffering around us. And only IN JESUS can we move from suffering to joy.

Jesus has two words for you today. It is "BE COURAGEOUS!" Turn to your neighbor and say, "Jesus said, 'BE COURAGEOUS!'" Say it louder, "Jesus said, 'BE COURAGEOUS!'"

OUTLINE

1. ANTICIPATE THE JOY OF REUNION (16-22)

IMMEDIATE: They would weep at Jesus' death; but rejoice at His resurrection.

"In a little while, you will no longer see me; again in a little while, you will see me... So you also have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy from you." *John 16:16, 22 CSB*

ULTIMATE: We'll leave this world of tears to enter into the joy of the presence of the Lord!

"In that day you will not ask me anything. Truly I tell you, anything you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. Until now you have asked for nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete." *John 16:23-24 CSB*

2. ASK THE FATHER ANYTHING IN JESUS' NAME. (23-24)

3. ADMIT THAT WE WILL NEVER KNOW ALL THE ANSWERS. (25-30)

4. ACCEPT THE PEACE JESUS OFFERS IN TIMES OF SUFFERING. (31-33)

Jesus' last promise to the disciples before the cross:

"I have told you these things so that IN ME you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world." *John 16:33 CSB*

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For the Joy...
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