

### **“Your Grief Will Turn to Joy”**

Introduction: As a pastor, I have the privilege to frequently help people when they are going through life’s trials. I get to pray with people and counsel people with the Word of God, and to encourage them. And the trials I see people going through are many and varied. It may be unemployment, or financial issues. Marriage problems. Problems with their children. Problems in college. Problems with friends... or a lack of them. Problems with health. A loved one dying. You may think you’re the only one with big problems, but I assure you that you are not alone. People everywhere are hurting. People everywhere are struggling and grieving.

I have noticed that one of the greatest words of comfort you can give to a person who is grieving is that their sorrow is only temporary. Haven’t you noticed that in your own life? If you know the trouble you are experiencing is only temporary, it gives you the courage to get through it.

If your car breaks down on the side of the road, your stress level goes up. What’s the problem? Who can help? How long will it take? Once all of those questions are answered, the stress level drops. Even if the time is more than you’d like and the repair is expensive, once you know that your situation is temporary, you calm down considerably.

The same thing is true of health problems. There is that time of uncertainty as they run all the tests. What is the problem? How bad is it? How will they treat this problem? How long will it take? Once those answers are in, even if the problem is big, there is some sense of relief in having a diagnosis, a treatment plan and a time-frame.

But when you don’t know that it is temporary... or if it seems like it will go on indefinitely or for a very long time, it’s much more difficult to have hope, isn’t it? You are laid off from your job, and you have no idea how long you will be unemployed. Very stressful. If you have large debts, sometimes that looks like a problem that will never go away. That’s a heavy load that’s on you 24/7. Some problems in this world *seem* like the won’t end. There is no light at the end of the tunnel... just never ending tunnel.

But what if there was an overarching time limit placed on every single trouble you have in this world? Whatever the problem, no matter how big, what if you knew it would soon pass completely and you would only experience joy and peace? Wouldn’t that knowledge help you through it? I mean, you can put up with just about anything for a time if you know it’s not forever, right?

I’ve shared this with some of you before what my grandfather would say in times of grief and trial. He was strong Christian man who trusted the Lord. And he would always say: “This too shall pass.” But will it really? Was that just an empty hope?

Let me give you a portion of Scripture this morning that will give you hope and peace in life’s trials. Let’s take a look:

**Setting:** The words we’re about to hear were spoken by Jesus the evening before his death. His disciples know something big is going down. They are rattled. They are sorrowful. So Jesus seeks to give them the greatest comfort possible by telling them it’s only temporary. He gives them sorrow’s greatest relief: HOPE.

John 16:16-22 **16 “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”**

1) The pledge. This is admittedly a confusing statement. In the verses before this, Jesus had said that he is *going*. He's going to be with the Father. SO essentially he is saying, "In a little while you won't see me, then in a little while you will see me, because I go..."

So what does Jesus mean? Some see this as a promise of the resurrection. He will be killed and they won't see him. Then he'll rise and they will see him. That's possible, but I don't think that's the whole picture. 40 days after the resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven and then they didn't see him again. So I think that understanding is too narrow.

Other people think he meant that he would die, rise and ascend and then they would see him no more, and then after a little while they will see him again... on the last day at the resurrection. That's possible too, but doesn't make sense to me, because the first "little while" was in terms of days, and the second "little while" would have to be understood in terms of a couple thousand years.

So what I think Jesus means by these words is that he would soon be going away... that is he would not be physically present with them anymore. They wouldn't physically walk with him, and sit at his feet and listen to his teaching and eat meals with him. He would return to the Father. But then after a little while they will see him. This began with the resurrection, but did not end at the Ascension 40 days later. Starting with the resurrection, Jesus' presence with them was **spiritual** more than it was physical, then after the Ascension it was only a spiritual presence. This is the promise of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus said he would send. Jesus promised, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age." The Holy Spirit was sent at Pentecost, 50 days after Jesus resurrection, and from that moment on the spirit of Jesus has dwelled in the hearts of believers. We see him and know him through the eyes of faith, as he dwells in our hearts by faith.

This also fits best with the immediate context, because earlier in Chapter 16, Jesus said this, "**It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.**" That Counselor is the Holy Spirit, also called the Spirit of Christ. Through the faith and instruction he gives us, we "see" Jesus. He is with us always. The disciples didn't see Jesus, then they did again... and through the eyes of faith we continue to see Jesus to this very day because of the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

Now if this sounds a little confusing to you, understand that it was very confusing to the disciples. **17 Some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father?'" 18 They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying."**

Have you ever felt that way when reading the Bible? Some have told me they don't read their Bibles much because it's too confusing. Would it help if I told you, that's okay if you're sometimes confused? The disciples were often confused with what Jesus said, but Jesus didn't stop talking to them and teaching them. If you read the Bible and you get confused, think about it more. Study it further. Talk to someone who knows the Bible well. Look at cross references. Keep on reading. No one ever claimed it wouldn't require some mental sweat to read the Bible. Sometime understanding it is hard work. But it's work that brings an enormous reward with it.

Okay, so the disciples are confused. They have no idea what Jesus is talking about. **19 Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'?" 20 I tell you the truth,** [so here's that big phrase of Jesus where he teaches something very important, or maybe something a little hard to believe. It may

be something to wrestle with further, but you really need to remember it...] **you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve...**

Well, truer words were never spoken. That very evening Jesus was arrested and the disciples all fled, grieving at Jesus' arrest. After denying Jesus three times, Peter heard the rooster crow just like Jesus said it would. He wept bitterly. The women along the way of the cross were crying for Jesus. We must imagine tears were shed by his followers who saw him hanging on the cross, bleeding and dying.

APPLICATION: The truth is our lives as followers of Christ will frequently be filled with tears, sorrow and grieving. Sometimes the grieving comes simply as a result of living in a dying decaying world. We suffer under disease, or accidents, or natural disasters, or at the hands of sinful people. Sometimes we suffer because of the sins we commit. How have you suffered because of words you never should have spoken? Because of failures to love when you should have? How have you brought suffering upon yourself because of your own laziness, selfishness, wrong priorities, poor decisions and foolish actions? Sometimes we suffer because we are followers of Christ. Have you ever been singled out and mocked because of your faith? Your values? Your morals? Your godly viewpoints?

Friends, Jesus words truly do apply to you and me today. You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You *will* grieve... Now the important question is now what pain you have, or what's causing your grief. The question is, how will you deal with it?

**In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.** That phrase "a little while" repeats 7 times within just 3 verses. Do you suppose this phrase gives us the key to dealing with the grief and trials of this world? What Jesus is encouraging us to do is to take a step back and see the big picture.... The eternal picture. Yes, you have trials and griefs of many kinds. Yes, they are hard to deal with. But let your mind go back to the phrase: "for a little while." Jesus says: **You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve..., but your grief will turn to joy.**

Pay close attention to Jesus' words. He doesn't say, "Your grief will be replaced by joy. Or that joy will overpower your grief. But the very thing that causes you grief will later cause you joy. In other words, there would be no joy without the thing causing you grief.

Well what does that look like? Jesus gives an illustration:

**21 A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.**

I obviously have not experienced the pain of childbirth, but I have seen my wife go through that pain 6 times. Each time it was obvious that she was in intense pain. I have also seen what happens the moment that baby born. That intense pain quickly fades into the background because of the joy of that child being born into the world. The very thing that caused pain turns into incredible joy. In fact, without that pain the joy would not come either. *This is how God describes what will happen with your grief and sorrow in this world.* The very thing that currently causes you grief, will "in a little while" become the source of incredible joy.

Nowhere is this more clear than at the cross of Christ. The Son of God was nailed to that cross by sinful men. They mocked him mercilessly. Jesus was forsaken by the heavenly Father. He hung there in darkness. And finally he died. All who knew him and loved him were filled with the deepest loss, a massive hole in their hearts, an indescribable grief and sorrow washed over them. That loving miracle worker and teacher, the Christ promised of God, was DEAD! Oh, the grief! Have you ever felt that kind of grief? Doesn't it feel like there are lead weights in your legs. You move slowly. Every movement is a monumental effort.

But on Easter Sunday morning, the discovery of the empty tomb changed everything. The one who died was now alive. There sadness turned to confusion and fear, and then joy. Overwhelming joy. Their hearts felt like it would explode with joy. And suddenly, no more lead weights in their legs... their joy led to whole bunch of running! The women ran back to tell the disciples that Jesus had risen. Peter and John RAN to the tomb to see if it was true. Later, two disciples hurry all the way back from a village called Emmaus to Jerusalem... some 7 miles... to tell the others they had seen Jesus.

The very thing that causes so much grief was now the cause of great joy. The cross that had looked like utter defeat, the place where Jesus succumbed to his enemies and died, it now became the symbol of complete and total victory! At the cross, sin was paid in full. At the cross, Satan all his work was completely destroyed. At the cross, death was vanquished and it lost its sting and power. At the cross death was swallowed up in victory... thanks be to God!

And Jesus concludes: **22 So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.**

In this world we experience many griefs. But only for a time... and then will come rejoicing... a rejoicing no one will take away. Isn't this story amazing? Look at the love and compassion of the Lord Jesus Christ. The disciples were sad and disturbed. Within three days, the disciples would understand all of this much better after the resurrection. But Jesus doesn't leave them hanging. He comforts them by letting them know their time of sorrow will be brief.

Jesus wants us to know that too. Your time of sorrow on this earth will be brief. Brief in the scope of the eternal joys that await you in heaven. Christ's resurrection guarantees that we will not live in the sorrows of a sinful, broken world forever. He rescues us and promises us an eternal home. We will not be hurt by sinful people forever. We will live with all the saints in glory everlasting. We will not die eternally for our many sins and faults. Jesus forgave us completely at the cross, and the guarantee is in the empty tomb. You are forgiven! You are a dear child of God. Heaven is your home.

A fellow pastor told about a funeral he conducted in an old country church. A 2 year old boy succumbed to cancer. It was his funeral. The grieving father wanted to address the congregation at the beginning of the service, but he didn't think he could say what he wanted to say looking everyone in the face. So from the sacristy, over the church speaker system, he said what was on his mind. "Me and the wife just wants to thank you all for your loving support. It means so much. But we also want to let you know that today is not a sad day because we got to do something that not every parent gets to do . . . we gots to usher Jacob all the way to heaven where our Savior took him from our arms into his."

The little boy's parents believed what the words of Jesus which are also his promise to you today: **"In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me. . . . I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy."**

Friends, go today in the joy of the resurrection. For a limited period of time, you will grieve. But it's not going to last. It is going to pass. You have Jesus' promise that your grief will turn to joy. One day you will see Jesus with your own eyes. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, which we celebrate this morning, guarantees it. Go with hearts filled with his joy! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.