

LIFE IN HIS NAME

JESUS TURNS SORROW INTO JOY

John 16:16-24

“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” So some of his disciples said to one another, “What is this that he says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me’; and, ‘because I am going to the Father’?” So they were saying, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, “Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me’? Truly, truly, 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. 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. 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.

This morning we are going to talk about joy, and how Jesus takes sorrow and turns it into joy. In one sense, this is a one-time fix. Then in another sense, this is something that you renew and choose to walk in. Obviously, the one-time fix I am talking about is when we come to Christ and trust in him as the Savior of our lives, and we experience a relationship with God. We move into a joy which is found in Jesus Christ, and it’s a one-time experience. Yet, Jesus talks about that experience being “filled up.” You and I, if we are trusting in Christ, are learning how to walk in the fullness of that.

Perhaps the greatest joy I have ever experienced in this life is the joy of having children. The Lord has blessed my wife and me with six children. She gave birth to four and we adopted two. That experience has brought amazing joy in our lives, and I hope that doesn’t change. The experience of giving birth is amazing. The experience of adoption is equally amazing, though very different.

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Now, in the experience of giving birth, I didn't contribute a whole lot. I observed. I tried to offer support. And I found that my joy in a given child increased over time. But I observed something in my wife. When she gave birth, it was immediate. There was an instant, immediate bond and joy that I grew into. I know that makes me sound like a horrible person, but really, I think a lot of men have that experience. If so, we are all horrible and someone might want to say, "Amen."

I deliberately used this superlative: "greatest joy." Maybe marriage is the greatest joy. Maybe I'm not allowed to use "greatest" twice, but I did. It's because they are just so unique, one-of-a-kind. But isn't it true that all of those earthly kinds of experiences can also bring tremendous sorrow and heartache? Jesus is focusing on the joy of a woman giving birth when he uses this illustration -- that her sorrow is immediately, instantly turned to this amazing, sorrow-canceling joy. And this joy is something you can't lose. It can't be taken from you.

The whole thing starts with kind of a riddle. "In a little while you won't see me; in a little while you will see me." They are scratching their heads. "Here we go again. I don't understand what he's talking about." He anticipates that and gives this explanation. They are going to have this intense sorrow and it will be replaced by joy. It's because they won't see him, then they will see him. I believe that the interpretation of this is that he is going to be gone. He is going to be crucified. He is going to be in the grave. Then he will be raised and they will be reunited with him.

Now, here's what's key for you and me in understanding this powerful principle. Jesus is taking their experience, but then he is saying it's not just about a momentary sorrow and joy. He then turns that into a universal truth that we all experience in the Spirit of God, in relationship with God, through Christ, by prayer. In other words, Jesus will go to the cross and die and pay for the penalty of our sin. He will be raised and conquer death, then 40 days later he will pour out his Spirit, and the Holy Spirit will live in the hearts of all who trust in Jesus. They will internally experience God abiding in them, and this amazing joy. Okay?

So, let's unpack it. Let's go through some observations.

I. You cannot have the joy without the sorrow.

They cannot be filled with joy unless Jesus goes away. They cannot, because the cross has to happen. Why the cross? Well, Jesus uses the illustration of a woman giving birth to a child. We know that you can't give birth without the labor, without the pains. And we know that the cause of those labor pains, the cause of that sorrow specifically, is also the cause of sorrow in general. In

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fact, it's at the root of all sorrow, and that is sin. Genesis Chapter 3 - as a part of the separation from God and the curse of sin, Jesus says to Eve that in pain she will give birth, and that that is a consequence of a broken relationship with God. Scripture tells us that's the explanation for all disappointment and loss in life - all genuine sorrow, great and small.

For you individually, hear me. This is an increasingly neglected truth. This is very important. You can't come to Jesus if there is not sorrow over sin. You can't come to him because you don't really need him if you don't understand that at the root of what's wrong with the world and our own lives is a broken relationship with God that's caused by our own rejection of God and his way. Then the joy will never replace the sorrow because the sorrow has never been acknowledged. It's never been dealt with.

I know that it seems like: "Brian, this is a really unpopular message. It's heavy and it's intense." I want to tell you that it's kind. It is kind to be honest and say that this is our spiritual condition. That's what scripture teaches us. When I'm trying to counsel or disciple or correct my kids now that they've become adults, I will often say: "You know, when there's a struggle going on and you can identify it as sin in your life, that's really good news."

It's really good news because scripture tells us exactly what to do with sin, right? We take it to Jesus and we leave it there. We just call it what it is and say, "Lord, forgive me for this sin and all the pain that it has caused." Jesus frees us to do that. Without that, what are we left to do? We are left to defend and justify and makes excuses. The problem with that is that we still live with our sorrow and we live in our bondage to it, but we get free of it the second we go to Jesus Christ.

The way Jesus teaches this and presents this first observation is by saying that you cannot have one without the other. If you are here today and Jesus Christ is not yours, you don't belong to him, I want to encourage you that this is a starting place. You begin to get a glimpse of God and his love and his greatness, and immediately his Spirit begins to bring a conviction and an awareness of shortcoming in our own lives. What do we do with that? We go to Christ. We admit it and we receive the gift of forgiveness and salvation. Amen?

II. You cannot lose your joy.

You can't have it without the sorrow to begin with, then secondly, once you get it you cannot lose it. That's the amazing thing that Jesus teaches here. He says, "I'm going to go, but then I'm going to come back, and when I come back, everything is going to be different. It's not just that you are

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without me and then you have me, but I'm going to enact a fundamental change that will affect the entire universe -- that will change the entire spiritual realm. I'm going to pay for sin, and I'm going to conquer death, and when I come back, you will have joy forever because I have permanently solved sorrow." That is good news! Jesus is saying, "I don't come back the same. I come back and I have redeemed all of God's creation." So you cannot lose this joy. It's permanent.

Joy can be fleeting. Can we pause for a minute? Some people say there is happiness, and then there is joy, and that joy is different from happiness. I don't really like that definition. I know why we do that. We want to say that happiness is circumstantial. It's connected to circumstances and therefore it's up and down. If that's how you understand it, that's fine. But I think joy is the same thing as happiness. It's just more robust. It's deeper. Yeah, less circumstantial, but it's the same thing. Something doesn't seem right when you say, "You can have joy, but you'll be unhappy." "I don't know. I just want to be happy." Are you with me? It's like people who say, "I don't like you, but I love you." Right? I'd like to be liked as well as loved. They are connected. They are on a continuum.

Even the deeper happiness of this life can be taken from us in a moment, and that creates fear. It creates anxiety if we don't have it, then fear once we get it, that we might lose it. How do you live your life with true joy if it's attached to something that can be gone in a second? Jesus is saying, "I'm permanently solving all of that." Remember, there is a one-time fix, and then Jesus gives us a key here on learning how to live in the reality of it nonstop. And that brings us to our third observation.

III. Prayer fills up your joy.

He says in verses 23 and 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." Friends, understand this. Here Jesus is saying: "I'm leaving. I'm coming back. You will have sorrow, then you will know joy to replace that sorrow." Then he starts talking about prayer? It's a little mystifying. What's the connection? What Jesus does here is bring together some strands that have already been introduced to us in the book of John. He has taught about prayer. I want to go to two previous passages and connect them. If you are able to do that, it will make a lot more sense and help us get to this spiritual key in terms of how we walk in our truth.

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The first one is John Chapter 14. Just go back a few chapters to John 14, verses 13 and 14, where we read this. Notice how the passage I just read echoes some of these same phrases, ideas, themes. “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.” We are given here this promise that at first – is it qualified at all? Whatever you ask, anything you ask, Jesus will give it. Okay? That’s prayer. Anything that you ask from God, he will give it.

It is qualified, though, when you look more fully at the verse, right? “Whatever you ask in my name” – that’s the first clue. I think that means two things. It means, first of all, that Jesus is the mediator between you and the Father. Jesus is the one way to get to God the Father. We ask in his name. It means that my sin is forgiven by my faith in Jesus and he has given me an audience with God the Father. I am going to God in the name of Jesus.

Please understand that when we sign off prayers in Jesus’ name, it’s not just something we do out of rote, out of tradition. It has deep theological impact for us. We are asking in the name of Jesus because Jesus is the only way that we have this audience with God opened up and our relationship with him restored. That’s the first thing it means.

But the second clue is given right here in this verse. This is very important. He says, “...that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” This is a key truth. “In the name of Jesus” means it’s that which glorifies God in Christ. So, I would give you this practical advice. When you pray and you want something from God, learn to argue with God. Not argue like in a fight, but make a reasoned argument before the Lord. Isaiah said, “Come, let us reason together.” Bring your argument, and here is your argument: “God, this will glorify you.”

So, what could you ask for? “Lord, I am asking for a new Cadillac, a brand new Cadillac. Not a small one, because that would not glorify you, but a great big one, the biggest one possible.” Listen, if you own a Cadillac and in particular if you own the biggest one possible, God bless you. This is not in any way an insult to you or to your car. In fact, if you want to just let us borrow it, we will put some miles on your Cadillac.

Now, I may have trouble in my heart making the argument that this really glorifies God. It might be that if I make that argument persuasively, then I’ve got a really messed up heart, right? The moment you start filtering what you are asking for through that goal, God begins to shape you and your desire. So, “God, I’m asking you to save my son or daughter. This will glorify you. Lord, it

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brings no glory for that child to go off and live a life contrary to you and to what glorifies you. Lord, this will honor your name.”

You can make financial arguments. I don't want to give you the impression you can't. I pray all the time for this church to be completely debt free. I pray for my family to be free of debt and to have everything we need, and to pay for our responsibilities. I believe that's a biblical prayer. "Give us this day our daily bread." I know I'm extrapolating a principle, but I think for us, in this moment, in this culture, in this day, we bring our needs before God and we ask him to meet those, right? But we have to work out what that looks like when we are asking, and why we are asking, to his glory. Okay, that's passage #1. You heard that echoed in the passage in John 16.

Let's go to the second passage, which is in the next chapter, John Chapter 15, verses 7 and 8. "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." Please skip down to verse 16. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you."

Here's what I take from John 15. There is a lot here. We are abiding in Christ by faith. Christ is residing in our hearts. I think it's a similar idea here to "in Jesus' name" but there is more to it. We don't have time to develop it right now. Notice that the idea of glorifying God is directly connected to what? Fruit-bearing. Do you see it? "Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit..." "Ask anything that you might bear fruit." God wants you to be fruitful. If we say, "Okay, what does fruit mean?" I think it means two things biblically.

- 1) Fruit is godly character. It's godly behavior. It's a life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, longsuffering. It's the character of Jesus, walking in obedience to Jesus. It's the way we live and the kind of man or woman that we are in Christ. Our character, the fruit of our lives, glorifies him.

Let me just say this about this kind of fruit. Fruit takes seasons. God gives us gifts and they are given instantly. Boom - you have them. Character takes time. Fruit takes time to grow. There has to be pruning, there has to be watering, there has to be fertilizing, there have to be trials, there has to be nourishment, there has to be repentance, confession, faith, the process of growing in Christ. That glorifies the Lord.

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Christian, as you walk in Christ, you may have this experience. My wife and I have had seasons where family members look at the choices we make and say, “You guys are crazy! Why are you doing this? Why are you doing that?” But by God’s grace, over time they have seen the fruit of Christ. They have said, “Wow, look at Brian. He has been this prideful, arrogant jerk and wow, look, we are even beginning to like him. What could that be?” That’s fruit. That’s Christ at work, taking an arrogant sinner, and by his mercy, in an undeserving way, molding and shaping him into Jesus.

So I say this to you, young Christian: As you make decisions, sometimes friends and family won’t understand why you are doing them. You be faithful to Christ. You believe the gospel. You ask him to help you. You keep humbling yourself, and God will begin to produce a fruit in your life where people say, “I kinda like that. That’s attractive.” That’s Jesus in you and it’s a very powerful argument for who Jesus is. That’s #1.

- 2) The second way is people. People come to Jesus. They get saved. They follow Christ. You are sharing. You are giving away what God has given you, and that’s a second way that you bear fruit. You disciple others. You share Christ with others. You serve others. You help others. You do acts of kindness, and that is something that glorifies the Lord.

Back to John 16, verse 23: “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.” Here we go. I’m going to put it all together. Here’s the spiritual key for you to live in joy, to walk in the fullness of joy. Sorrow is directly related to abandoning the glory of God, not living for God’s glory. When you come to Jesus, you are admitting, “Things are not right because of my sin. Jesus, you have paid for it and I am cleansed in you.” From now on, I am living for a new goal. What is that goal? I am living in Jesus’ name. I am living to bear fruit. I am living for God to be glorified. This means in every single trial and every single moment of sorrow, you functionally turn that to joy when you ask, “What will glorify God in this moment?”

It’s radical, right? If you lose your job, you are having to deal with a lot of emotions in a single moment. “What am I going to do financially? What will this look like?” The humiliation of it, potentially – all of those things. Maybe you deserved it, maybe you didn’t. You are going to have a lot of goals that pop up in that moment – a goal to provide, a goal to defend yourself, a goal to

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justify yourself, a goal to replace that job – whatever it might be. You will not have joy if that is the basis of your joy until it happens. But you can say in that moment, “Alright, this is going to take grace. This is going to take a miracle, but Lord, I want to live to glorify you in this moment. Give me wisdom. Give me grace to do that. You can know joy even in the trial as you go through it, because one is outside of your control (whether or not you have a job and how fast you get it and what your finances are); the other is immediately in Christ, within your grasp.

A lot of times it looks like this. It’s like: “Oh, I’m so anxious, I’m so worried. Wait, wait, wait. I’m supposed to live for your glory. I live for your glory. Okay, God, help me to walk in humility. Help me to admit my sin. Oh, what am I going to do? I’ve got this bill to pay.” You are back and forth and you are a little bit neurotic. It’s okay. Just be neurotic unto Jesus and give him the glory. Freely admit: “I’m anxious, I’m fearful. I’m giving it to God.” Go back and forth until you can just live in that moment.

You may say, “Wait a minute, Brian, don’t we have to go out and look for a job?” Of course. You know why I know that? Well, it will glorify God. It’s a very simple test. If you are married to someone who says, “I’m just going to sit at home and watch TV until God provides me a job,” you can go to that lovely man or woman and say, “Hey, this doesn’t glorify God. You know what I think will glorify God? I’m going to ask God to strike you right now...with spirit of ‘Let’s go find a job.’”

I want to conclude. I want to give you some summary statements that will help you.

1. All sorrow has its roots in sin, either directly or indirectly.

It’s very likely you are experiencing sorrow because you live in a fallen world. It’s nothing you did. It’s not that you deserve it. But you live in a fallen world. Jesus is still the answer. That’s statement #1. We have abandoned the glory of God. That’s it. That’s at the root of all sorrow.

2. There is no sorrow that Jesus cannot replace with joy.

Nothing, no sin, no root, no fruit of sin is greater than Jesus Christ. No matter what you’ve done, there is forgiveness in Jesus. No matter what’s been done to you, you can overcome in Jesus Christ.

3. Trust in Jesus and he will turn your sorrow into joy.

That’s the message of the bible from this text. Trust in Jesus and he will turn your sorrow into joy.

4. The experience of joy in Christ is so overwhelming and redefining that you forget about the sorrow.

Think of childbirth, the moment mom holds the baby. Nine months fully pregnant: “This is it. We’ll never have another child.” The child is born, you hold the child: “Hey, let’s have another one.” Right? That’s an exaggeration, but the joy of the experience so diminishes what it took you to get there. That’s what happens in Christ. It is this reality. Because the sorrow led me to the joy, because it testifies to the magnitude of the joy, it becomes a part of my story.

We used to live in a day where women never talked about what happened in the birthing room, and now it’s horrible. We get all kinds of details we just don’t want, right? I talked to my Dad. He goes, “I wasn’t even there, man, I was in the waiting room. It was wonderful.” No, no. I loved the experience, I just don’t want to talk about it. But there is an appropriate place where you are telling the story of the labor and the pain and the work, because it’s a part of the life. That’s what happens in our testimony. You find people who say, “Once I was so ashamed of this in my life, but that sorrow has been replaced by joy because of the mercy of Christ.” You hear people freely talk about things and you think, “Wow, it’s amazing that they so freely admit that.” The experience of joy is so overwhelming.

5. There is a single truth, a key that helps you daily experience joy, and that is living for the glory of God.

No matter what you experience moment by moment, if you can set the rudder of your ship on glorifying God, you will find it to be life-giving, even in the moment. This is a single truth, a key that helps you experience daily joy.

6. The reality of permanent joy in Jesus allows us to embrace momentary sorrow.

There are trials in life. There are huge disappointments and losses. They will redefine you. You will carry them with you. You cannot escape them. This sermon is not meant to trivialize them. They are real. But the grace to grieve and to experience healing is found in the permanent joy that is ours in Jesus Christ. The reality of joy in Jesus allows us to embrace momentary sorrow.

7. The last one is this: Joy in Christ perfects and protects all other joys.

I started off by saying that children are a fantastic joy in my life. That is the testimony of God’s grace. But I could be in fear for my kids and not be able to handle loss and disappointment in their

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life unless there is a greater joy found in Jesus. So what do I do with that lesser joy? I say, “Alright, God, glorify yourself in this child. No matter what it takes, the goal is for this child to glorify you. It’s not my reputation. It’s not protecting them always from hurt and disappointment. It is your glory that we are after and you are fully trustworthy in this.” If I don’t do that, my twisted love will kill that joy and darken it with sin. It will take away from the glory of God and the one life-giving source that’s found in Christ. Joy in Christ perfects and protects.

We will close with these glorious verses from the prophet Isaiah.

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

Let’s pray.