

## **Sorrow and Joy** - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **John 16:16-33** (#503)

**Introduction:** Opposites. Contrast. These are the things that make life interesting. Whether it is the difference between a man and a woman in marriage, or the first rays of sun in the darkness of the morning, the Lord has put something deep inside of us that we enjoy contrast. It's what makes for a good photo, or a moving symphony, or for truth to come alive. That last one might seem like it doesn't fit, but John himself has picked up on the idea of contrast and woven it into his Gospel. In **John 1**, he writes of light and darkness; of the Word that "was with God" and the Word that "was God" even as "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Similarly, many teachings of Jesus highlight the difference between two things – the contrast, as it were: He will be with the people, and yet will end up leaving them (**John 7**), He speaks of the Pharisees as being "from below," while He is "from above" (**John 8**). Similarly, they are "of this world" and Jesus – though fully in the flesh, standing right there in front of them – is "not of this world." Only a little later, Jesus speaks of those who abide in Him being free. Actual slavery comes not from being obedient to and following Jesus – not in the metaphor of **John 8**, anyway – but instead true slavery is doing whatever you or I feel deep inside. It is giving in to our sinful desires. And now here, in **John 16**, we will see two more contrasts. Two more pictures of Christ's work...

As we turn once more to **John 16**, keep the context in mind: Jesus is meeting in the Upper Room during the Passover with His disciples. Judas has left by this point, so only the 11 remain. Much of what Christ has been teaching revolves around coming persecution, the fact that Christ will soon be leaving them, and that the Holy Spirit will come to equip, encourage, and enable them. This part of John's Gospel will come to completion in the next chapter, with Jesus praying for His disciples. That means that our verses today bring about the conclusion of everything that Jesus has been teaching on since **chapter 13**. Let's see how the Master brings together all of His teachings as we pick up the story in **verse 16**...

**16:16-24** I mentioned that there are two major contrasts in these verses, here is the first one: now and later. The topic isn't a new one – in fact, Christ has spoken

about this repeatedly: it is the fact that He will soon go away from the disciples, by which He is referring to His coming arrest, trial, and death. Yet, even as Jesus has given them hope for what is coming – what we know of as the resurrection – He won't stay around for too long even then, ascending to the right hand of the Father. So the contrast that is highlighted here is seen in several different directions. Christ's going to the cross versus His resurrection and return on the one hand, but also the disciples' weeping and rejoicing on the other hand...

As so often, the disciples are confused. Jesus has spoken of a betrayer – whom we and John know is Judas, but it is unclear if the rest of the disciples have figured that out yet. And He has spoken directly to Peter, who will deny Jesus before the events of John's Gospel are complete. Now, Christ is speaking not just of leaving, but of being "seen again" by the disciples. Each of these things is not what Christ's followers would have expected, least of all on what should have been a night of celebration like this one. Is it any wonder that they are having trouble keeping up?

But, as **verse 19** makes clear, Jesus knows all of their questions and concerns. Which, by the way, should be of great encouragement to you and I also: our Savior knows what we need. He knows what we struggle with. He knows what we find hard to believe. Yet, just like with these disciples, He saves even weak, sinful followers just the same. Never forget: you and I are saved by His righteousness, His strength, His faithfulness – not our own. Now, back to the topic at hand...

The disciples' confusion stems from the fact not only that Jesus will soon leave them, but that He'll also be returning at some point. This is the contrast that confuses them, this is the point where their struggle to understand is greatest. They will weep and lament – yet the world will rejoice. Think of what is coming at the crucifixion: Christ will depart from life in the most violent and horrifying way possible. The leader, the teacher, the rabbi that these disciples have given years of their lives to follow will die. From an earthly standpoint, His movement will die with Him. And not only that, but these disciples love Jesus. They are losing not

just a leader, but their friend as well. Is it any wonder that they shall weep and lament?

When Jesus speaks of the other side of the contrast – of how “the world will rejoice,” what does He mean? I think it would be natural to read that as the sinful rejoicing that will come about from those who want to see Jesus put to death. Their wicked task accomplished, they rejoice in the done deed. While this is definitely true, I’m not sure that fits the context. Unless this is the exception – and it may well be – John doesn’t use the word “rejoice” in his writings to refer to what evil people do. So, it is also possible to see the “world” here in a much broader sense: there will be rejoicing, because Christ’s death on the cross will bring about ultimate and eternal good for everyone who follows Jesus. This is what Christ has taught: not just that His death is necessary, but that it is actually good. And not only in a general sense, but specifically for the disciples also. This is what you and I benefit from today: we rejoice, we worship, we have hope, because of what Jesus will do in the next few chapters. Whichever way we land, we see contrast.

What’s more, I think the very next sentence also helps clarify what Jesus means: the disciples will be sorrowful, yes; but their sorrow will turn to joy. They themselves will rejoice in the future. And, indeed, we see that with what is written in the rest of the New Testament.

To make His point even more clear, Jesus uses the imagery of a woman about to give birth. Any of you who have gone through that – or, husbands, any of you who have been with your wife in the hospital room – know full well that there is great sorrow. There is pain, sometimes fear, definitely hardship. Yet, as soon as the baby is delivered, there is great joy. It is as if all the hardship disappears. Not because it wasn’t real – it was, of course. But because the result – a human being, born! – is even greater. Therefore, the disciples have sorrow around the dinner table. Their sorrow will grow in the coming chapters. But their sorrow will turn to joy at Christ’s resurrection. And all of us will have even greater joy at His return.

What are the disciples supposed to do as a result of this teaching? What are we supposed to do with it? Christ's answer is – once more – nothing new. In fact, it is what He has already told them repeatedly. The way to deal with their sorrow and lamenting: it isn't to take up arms against the Roman government. Nor is it to run away in fear or form a commune in the wilderness. Instead, the call is to go to the Father in prayer. It is to depend upon Him, just as Jesus told them in **chapters 14 and 15**. And, what's more, just as Jesus speaks of joy here, He also said that those who do go to the Father – who abide in Christ and keep His commandments – they will have joy.

For you and I, then? Don't think that we need a different application. What's your praying look like? Among very real needs for health and the situations of life, do you pray that the Father would give you joy? Not because life is going well, but because you will be safe for eternity with your Savior? Do you ask Him to help you see and think – and even talk – about the long term rather than just what matters now in the moment? Are you calling upon the Lord to change your perspective, so that you would have the wisdom to embrace His Word rather than the passing "words" of this world? This is how you will have joy in a world filled with weeping.

Now and later. Our second contrast is similar: tribulation and peace...

**16:25-33** Christ's earthly mission has been all but fulfilled – only His sacrificial death and amazing resurrection remain. When and if the disciples will do what Christ has told them – when they will ask the Father in Christ's name – then we see that there will be a relationship with the Father Himself. Not apart from Christ, but because of Christ. It is because true disciples obey Jesus that they have the Father's love.

At this, the disciples seem to perk up. They find this saying a lot clearer than the previous one. Frankly, I find it a bit harder! Though I'm sure that's my own ignorance speaking. Nevertheless, the disciples seem to think that teachings like this confirm that Jesus is from God. Christ, for His part, doesn't condemn them, nor does He correct them – though He does seem exasperated by them!

Ultimately, He simply points to what is coming – the second contrast: there will be tribulation. But there will also be peace. What does this look like?

First, tribulation: **verse 32** – “the hour is coming... when you will be scattered.” We know that “the hour” would come that very evening. **Matthew 26** records that all of the disciples fled from Jesus at His arrest. And, from a larger perspective, these disciples will largely hide out in fear until their Master’s resurrection. Only after He appears to them will they be emboldened to go about the mission that He has called them to.

But that isn’t the only image here. Jesus continues with the contrast: in a picture of tribulation, He reassures the disciples of three things. *First*, that even if and when they leave Him, He won’t be alone. The Father is with Him. I daresay that God Himself is a far closer and more loyal friend than even the most faithful disciple here on earth! *Second*: Jesus is teaching these things not to worry the disciples, but instead to give them peace. As strange as that sounds, I think it makes a lot of sense: you and I can go through great hardships a lot better if we know what’s coming, even if it will be hard. So often the unknown is what discourages us more than the actual hardship. I think this is one reason that we struggle so much with faith these days: we live during a time that is scheduled and planned, an era that loves to know what is coming and when and why, so that all unpleasantness can be avoided or minimized as much as possible. Well, the Lord has told us the most important parts of what is coming, because He’s told us about eternity. But too many of us focus not on being faithful each day. Instead, we worry about tomorrow and the next day, which leads to paralysis for every day. No: believe Christ. Trust Him. Then you shall have His peace. He promises help for the day. So ask and depend each and every day.

*Third*, Jesus puts the contrast in stark terms: the disciples *will have* tribulation (which isn’t a new message either). Yet the response to this, the summary, isn’t “Get ready. Grit your teeth and bear it.” No, the response is: “Take heart; I have overcome the world.” Friends, none of these are new teachings. Jesus has spoken of tribulation before – back in **chapter 15**. Similarly, He has spoken of peace, in

**chapter 14.** John himself will pick up on these themes of overcoming the world, not by our strength but by Christ's work, in **1 John 4 and 5**. As a sidenote, I think this goes to show us something vital: in a world that craves everything "new," what we actually need is not new, but old. We need to be reminded of what is true, even if it isn't the most novel and flashy thing being sold these days.

So, what should we do with these truths? On the one hand, be ready to suffer. I know that's not a popular idea, especially when it seems that all of the Western world is oriented around insulating us from as much suffering as possible. It can seem like an almost impossible – perhaps even irresponsible – task to prepare for suffering. Yet it is a necessary one, as the New Testament makes clear. If we are following Jesus, then we will not avoid suffering. How could we? The same hatred that brought Him to the cross still exists today, even if we'd like to pretend that it doesn't. So how should you prepare? Just as Jesus taught the eleven: by knowing what is coming and trusting that He will give you what is needed – not before you need it, but in the moment. Just because tribulation is coming doesn't mean that there can't be peace. Victory may well look different than the sorts of "victories" that this world celebrates. But then again, it looked like a cross several centuries ago and was no less certain for that. Hold to this truth: Jesus has and does and shall overcome the powers of this world and the sin in our own hearts. We need only look to Him. Keep your eyes fixed not on the hardships of now, but rather on the joy that is coming. That is how we remain in Him. Let's pray...