

June 11th, 2017

NO ONE WILL TAKE YOUR JOY FROM YOU

John 16:16-22

When George W. Bush ran for president in 1999, he was asked “What political philosopher or thinker do you most identify with and why?”¹ He answered “Jesus Christ.” Because, Mr. Bush said, “He changes your heart, He changes your life.” Regardless of what you think about the former president, his answer was profound. Has there ever been a better thinker or philosopher than Jesus Christ? Philosophers spend their time seeking an answer to the grand question: “what is the chief happiness and end of man?” Jonathan Edwards said that all the philosophers who preceded Christ had no less than 288 answers to that question.²

In our passage this morning, Jesus answers the question so clearly. Look at v.22 “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.” What is the chief happiness and end of man? Jesus answers ‘Me!’ “I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”

Marilyn Sullivan, our dear sister in the Lord who passed away this week, had a few lucid moments in the last hours of her life. Her ability to speak was about at 10%. It was so hard to understand her. But she knew who her Chief

¹ This question was asked at the 1999 Iowa Presidential debate <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xMiP9zfqITl>

² Jonathan Edwards said “Before our Savior’s time, the world was infinitely divided on this important head. The philosophers were miserably bewildered in all their researches after the chief good. Each sect, each subdivision of a sect, had a chief good of its own, and rejected all the rest. They advanced, as Varro tells us, no fewer than 288 opinions in relation to this matter; which shows, by strong experiment, that the light of nature was altogether unable to settle the difficulty. Every man, if left to the particular bias of his own nature, chooses out a chief good for himself, and lays the stress of all his thoughts and cations on it.” *They Word Is Still Truth: Essential Writings on the Doctrine of Scripture from the Reformation to Today*, Ed. Peter A. Lillback & Richard B. Gaffin Jr., (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 2013), pg. 494

Happiness was. One request came through very clear: read John 14—the beginning of Jesus’ farewell discourse.

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and *will take you to myself*, that where I am you may be also.” **John 14:1-3**

As Marilyn lie dying, she found comfort and satisfaction in Christ’s promises “I will take you to myself.” Dear congregation, if your main goal in life—that which you are pursuing above all other goals—can’t comfort you on your death bed, it is worthless. In this farewell discourse, Jesus just promised the disciples—humanly speaking—the worst possible endings to their lives. He said in **John 16:2** “They will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God.” How did they endure? With the certain promise of **v.22** “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.” Jesus is saying ‘No matter what the world does to you, whether they plunder your property, or feed you to the lions, no one can ever touch your joy. Because I am your joy—the omnipotent, the invincible, the everlasting God.’ That’s the end the disciples lived for. That was Marilyn’s end. I hope this morning, that it is your end.

The Big Idea...

No one will take can ever take your joy from you if you belong to Jesus Christ

- ☆ The Problem of Joy
- ☆ The Parable of Joy
- ☆ The Promise of Joy

I. The Problem of Joy

The confusion of the disciples

Jesus first addresses the problem. He says in **v.16** “*A little while*, and you will see me no longer; and again *a little while*, and you will see me.” The disciples haven’t spoken since Thomas in 14:5. But this statement that Jesus makes created massive confusion.³ In their minds, Jesus being the Messiah meant that He was going to establish His earthly reign. It cannot be overemphasized as to what the disciples expected from Jesus when He first came on the scene. Triumphalism was in the air. Jesus did works which no one else ever performed (**John 15:24**) When He chose the 12, there was a prevailing expectation among them that He would take over the world. Which is why you see the disciples arguing over who would sit at His right and left hand (**Mark 10:35-25**) Despite Jesus’ numerous predictions of His death, they didn’t get it (**Mark 10:32-34** etc.) Because of these expectations, we see the disciples respond they way they do in **v.17-18** says “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.”

What did Jesus mean by “a little while”?

Biblical commentators are not in agreement on this passage. The question is what does “a little while” refer to? **First**, Jesus says “A little while, and you

³ Frederic Louis Godet says here “Where for us all is clear, for them all was mysterious. If Jesus wishes to found the Messianic kingdom, why go away? If He does not wish it, why return?” John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 12-21* (Chicago, IL.; Moody Publishers, 2008), pg. 216

will not see me.” Does Jesus mean they won’t see Him when He dies on the cross or He ascends into heaven? **Second**, Jesus says “and again a little while, and you will see me.” Does Jesus mean they will see Him at the resurrection or in the person of the Holy Spirit after He ascends?

My best guess is that Jesus is speaking about both. I think there is an **immediate** and **less-than-immediate** interpretation of Jesus’ words (or a near and far interpretation). The **immediate interpretation** is that Jesus is using the language of “a little while” to speak of His death (the first *little while*) and resurrection (the second *little while*). ‘I’m going to the cross to die, and *you will not see me*. But I’m going to rise again from the dead, and *you will see me again*.’ **v.20** supports this view, Jesus says “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 Jesus died, all the disciples were overcome with grief (Mark 16:10⁴), but the world rejoiced (Luke 23:35-36⁵). Later, when Jesus rose from the dead, all the disciple’s sorrow turned into joy (Matthew 28:8⁶). So the immediate interpretation of v.16 is that first *little while* speaks of Jesus’ death, and the second *little while* speaks of Jesus’ resurrection.

But I believe that there is a **less-than-immediate** interpretation as well. In this understanding, Jesus uses the language of “a little while” to speak of His ascension (the first *little while*), and of His sending the Holy Spirit (the second *little while*). Jesus has been preparing the disciples not only for His death, but for His departure from this world as well (John 14:3⁷). But this departure does not mean the death of their joy. **v.22** promises a permanent joy—“no one will take your joy from you.” We shouldn’t supposed that the disciples became sorrowful again when Jesus left.

⁴ “[Mary Magdalene] went and told those who had been with him, *as they mourned and wept*.”

⁵ “the rulers scoffed at him...and the soldiers also mocked.”

⁶ “so they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.”

⁷ “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”

So then the issue in this interpretation, is that if Jesus means His ascension at the first part v.16, what does He mean when He says ? “and again a little while, and you will see me.” How did the disciples—how do we—see Jesus if He has already ascended into heaven? Through the person of the Holy Spirit. That’s what Jesus meant when He told them at the great commission “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)⁸ How will He be with us until the end of the age? Through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of Christ” (Romans 8:9). Through the Holy Spirit, we see Christ. **2 Corinthians 3:18** “And we all, with unveiled face, *beholding the glory of the Lord*, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. *For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*”

Both of these interpretations—the immediate and the less-than-immediate—make most sense of the text to me. Holding both helps us to understand how this was good news for the disciples and for us. Dear congregation, your joy in this life doesn’t depend on seeing the physical Christ. But it does depend on seeing Christ. If you don’t see Christ, your sorrow will not turn to joy (v.20). And that is why Jesus sent you the Holy Spirit—so that you will see Jesus.⁹

⁸ John 14:23 Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

⁹ “All our sermons and your prayers are evidences to you that Christ’s heart is still the same toward sinners as ever, for the Spirit that assists in all these works comes in His name and in His stead, and works all by commission from Him. Do none of you feel your hearts moved in the preaching of these things, at this and other times? Who is it that moves you? It is the Spirit, who speaks in Christ’s name from heaven, even as He Himself is said to “speak from heaven” (Heb. 12:25). When you pray, it is the Spirit who incites your prayers and makes intercession for you in your own hearts (Romans 8:26)—intercession that is the evidence and echo of Christ’s intercession in heaven. The Spirit prays in you because Christ prays for you... He also follows us to the sacrament, and in that mirror shows us Christ’s smiling on us, and through His face, His heart. Having thus received a sight of Him, we go away rejoicing that we saw our Savior that day.” *A Habitual Sight of Him: The Christ-Centered Piety of Thomas Goodwin*, Ed. Joel R. Beeke & Mark Jones, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), pg. 53-54

II. The Parable of Joy

Child birth: a horrifying joy

Jesus gives us a parable or analogy so that the weight of His words will not be missed. He says in v.21 “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.”

Child birth is a horrifying joy. There is perhaps no greater example of extreme dread and extreme delight mixed together in one event than in the birth of a child. The curse of **Genesis 3:16** hangs over every would be mom. God said to Eve “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.” Jon Hunter Spence who wrote the book *Becoming Jane Austen* came to the “conclusion that one of the reason’s Jane Austen might not have married when she did have the opportunity [was because] she watched her very dear nieces and friends die in childbirth! And it was like a death sentence: You get married and you will have children. You have children and you will die. It was a terrifying world.”¹⁰ That was fairly common back then. One historical novelist has said of that time period “Men die in battle; women die in childbirth.”¹¹

The cause of grief is the cause of joy

But that is why this analogy is so appropriate. When Jesus goes away to His death, the disciples were going to weep and mourn like they never have before. Just as the pain of a woman’s labor is the greatest pain in her life. **Yet that pain contains within itself the very occasion for joy.** The pain of childbirth turns into the pleasure of a child. The sorrow of losing Jesus on the cross becomes the very ground for gaining Jesus for all eternity. Jesus is saying

¹⁰ — Stephenie Meyer, *The Twilight Saga: The Official Illustrated Guide*
<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/childbirth>

¹¹ — Philippa Gregory, *The Red Queen* <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/childbirth>

that the very same event that *caused* their sorrow—the cross—would be the *cause* of their joy. Not two events—but one event.

But we need to ask: why did they have great sorrow *mainly*? What was it about Jesus' death that struck the deepest blow? **They realized that their own sin was the chief reason Jesus went to the cross.** The disciples didn't see the cross coming. They thought that the Messiah would simply set up His earthly kingdom and bring all the good people—like themselves—into it. They didn't see the *need* for His death. They thought they were pretty good people. When Jesus went to the cross for them, they truly felt sorrow for the first time in their lives.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted

Dear congregation, the joy of belonging to Jesus Christ doesn't come *except* through the sorrow of seeing your own sin. Jesus said "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." (**Matthew 5:4**) What does Jesus mean by *mourn* here? What do true believers *mourn* over? At least three things:¹²

1) True believers mourn over their spiritual poverty.

The disciples mourned deeply because they came face to face with how bankrupt they were. Walking with Jesus for three years, did not make them spiritually rich within themselves. They were just as spiritually poor as everyone else. This caused them to mourn. It doesn't matter how long you have walked with Jesus—that does not make you any more qualified to be saved than anyone else. One of the signs that you are a Pharisee is if you see everyone else's spiritual poverty as worse than your own.¹³ When you come to grips with the fact that you are most spiritually poor person that you know, you will mourn.

¹² Adapted from R.W. Glenn's *Crucifying Morality: The Gospel of the Beatitudes*, (Wapwallopen, PA.; Shepherd Press, 2013), pg. 37-38

¹³ Even when Paul spoke of His own labors He said "it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." (1 Cor. 15:10) Likewise when Peter and John healed the lame beggar, Peter said "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?" (Acts 3:12)

2) True believers mourn their own sin.

Whenever you sin, you are seeking to live outside of God's presence. Every sin say "God, I'm independent, I don't need you to make me happy." Or else, as R.W. Glenn has said "sin...wants to make you better than other people—your race, your religion, your enlightened non-racism, your suffering, your powers of intelligence, your relative lack of overtly sinful behavior, your religious activism. You name it: you can feel superior because of it and think even God should be impressed."¹⁴ Dear congregation, how can you ever act like you are better than your neighbor, when Christ had to die for *you*? The "best saint" in heaven required the same amount of Christ's blood as the "worst sinner." You ought to mourn that you are the worst sinner that you know.

3) True believers mourn over what their sin did to Jesus Christ

You often feel how sin affects you personally—when others sin against you; or you feel and suffer under the effects of your own sin. But consider how your sin grieves God. Jesus had to *die* for your sin. Not sin in general, but *your* sin. The chief victim of your sin is *not* other people, but Jesus Christ. Perhaps you are trivial about sin, because you fail to see that Jesus suffered most for it. **Zechariah 12:10** says "they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn."

But your sorrow will turn into joy

Why did Jesus tell the disciples that they would "weep and lament" in v. 20? Why did He tell they will be sorrowful? And how can He say "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted?" (**Matthew 5:4**) Because when the disciples saw what Jesus willingly endured for them, they were hit with sorrow and then exceeding joy. That's why Jesus uses this analogy of a mother giving birth. She experiences no greater pain in life than when she gives birth.

¹⁴ R.W. Glenn, *Crucifying Morality: The Gospel of the Beatitudes*, (Wapwallopen, PA.: Shepherd Press, 2013), pg. 37

But! v.21 “**But** when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remember the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.” Meaning, when Jesus went to the cross—it revealed how damning and destructive sin is (the pain) BUT it revealed in an even greater way how *certain* He loves you (the joy). 1 **John 3:16** “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.”¹⁵ Jesus saw you in all your vileness, in all your self-righteousness, in all your rebellion, and said “I will lay down my life for you, because I love you. I will suffer the damning and destructive effects of your sin, so that you will live and never die.” The cross proves Jesus loves you. The cross proves your pardon is certain. The cross proves that you have been transferred from death to life. The cross proves that you have been received into His everlasting Kingdom, and nobody will ever be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I think that’s why Marilyn responded the way she did this week. Two days before she died, we were singing *Amazing Grace* around her bed side, and she burst out into tears. Marilyn had no energy to lift the spoon up to her mouth, or to suck liquid through a straw. But she had enough energy to weep before her Savior who loved her so much.

III. The Promise of Joy

Where is this happiness found? In Jesus Himself

Look at v.22. The word *So* connects what He says now with His analogy of childbirth. v.22 “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 approximately 24 hours Jesus would be dead. And their sorrow will have reached a depth that would never be matched again. Dear congregation, what do you do with your sorrow? The human heart can endure any sorrow, any pain, any grief, if it has one thing: hope. But if the heart loses hope, all is lost. **Proverbs 13:12** says “Hope deferred makes the heart sick”

¹⁵ NIV

The disciples were going to be bereft of hope when Jesus died. But here Jesus promises the supreme antidote for their grief “but I will see you again.” This the the comfort of comforts: to know that the Lord will be with us. Throughout Scripture, it is *this promise* the gives strength to the weakest hearts.

When Esau sought to kill his brother Jacob. God met Jacob in a dream and said to Him “Behold, *I am with you* and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. *For I will not leave you* until I have done what I have promised you.” (**Genesis 28:15**)¹⁶

When God placed Joshua as the leader over Israel and sent him to defeat a people stronger and more numbers than they, God told him “Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, *for the Lord your God is with you* wherever you go.” (**Joshua 1:9**)

When God sent Gideon who was the least in his family, from the weakest clan in Manasseh to face the mighty Midianites, “the LORD said to him, “*But I will be with you*, and you shall strike the Midianites was one man.” (**Judges 6:16**)

When God sent Jeremiah to preach against Israel and all the nations He told him “Do not be afraid of them, *for I am with you* to deliver you, declares the LORD.” (**Jeremiah 1:8**)

And this is the promise that Jesus gave to His disciples on the eve of His death. “So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice.”

¹⁶ Also see how God comforted Moses before He sent Him against Pharaoh and the most powerful nation on earth: “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.” (Exodus 3:12)

The ingredients of happiness

But Jesus says something more. At the end of v.22, He says “and no one will take your joy from you.” Joy and happiness are very peculiar things. I said earlier that the ancient philosophers before Christ engaged themselves wholly on the question: *what is man’s chief happiness?* Augustine, in his book *The City of God* discovered that in order for man to attain happiness—real happiness—it must include three ingredients. The only way Jesus can say “no one will take your joy from you” is if it includes these three things.

First, true happiness must be *certain*. Any philosophy or theory of truth in this age that doesn’t affirm certain and absolute truth can never deliver true happiness. I shared the gospel with my barber a couple days ago. He’s banking on his good works—his moral performance, hoping that God will let him into heaven. But he had no certainty that God would. I asked him “How can you live like that?” Listen, if you don’t have the certainty Jesus Christ will rescue you from the final wrath to come, then you are to be most pitied (1 Corinthians 15:10) True happiness must rest on absolute certainty. That’s why Jesus can say “No one will take your joy from You” —because I AM your joy—and I AM truth itself.”

Secondly, true happiness must be *everlasting*. If you knew that you would only be happy for the next 30 years, and then after that perfectly miserable forever, you might deceive yourself for a while into being happy. But the closer that time came to expiring, the more dread you would feel. I spoke with one of Marilyn’s hospice providers and she said that she saw many believers die, and said it was beautiful thing. But when atheists die, she said, it was most dread full. They were terrified. Their time had expired, and they knew what lie ahead. Augustine said “[In Christ] we find the only end that is satisfying...for no end can satisfy us, save that which is found in Him who is endless.”¹⁷ “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” (**Psalm**

¹⁷ The Church Fathers—Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 7, Ed. Philip Schaff, (Peabody, MA.,: Hendrickson Publishers, 5th Printing 2012), pg. 388

90:2) True happiness must be everlasting. That’s why Jesus can say “No one will take your joy from You” —because I AM your everlasting joy.

Thirdly, true happiness must be ever-increasing. Human beings are made to thirst for more, to hunger for more—more knowledge, more wisdom, more joy. True happiness cannot be static. It must continue to increase and satisfy the hunger of the human soul. This is what Jesus promises: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” (**Matthew 5:6**) David said in **Psalms 16:11** “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are *pleasures forevermore.*” Continued pleasures. Endless pleasures. Increasing pleasures. True happiness must be ever-increasing. That’s why Jesus can say “No one will take your joy from You” —because I AM your ever-increasing pleasure.

Those are the three necessary ingredients of true happiness—it must be certain, it must be everlasting, and it must be ever-increasing. And Jesus offers His disciples, —He offers You, this happiness entirely in Himself. “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.” Jesus is proclaiming Himself to be your joy. Will you take hold of Him? Don’t rest in your soul in the superficial joys of this world. They will not satisfy.

Application

Our Doctrine: The Christian life is sorrowful but always rejoicing

It’s apparent that Jesus places sorrow and joy are set side by side in our passage. And they are set side by side in the Christian life. Augustine said that “Believers are like women in labor.” We are, as Paul said “...as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;” (**2 Cor. 6:10**) And so when Jesus says “No one will take your joy from you,” I don’t want you to fly off to two extremes. Either you expect that because you are a Christian, life will be this sort of grand triumphalism in which nothing but joy is experienced. Or on the other hand, you think that

Jesus is not telling the truth because you do in fact experience severe trial. Both of those extremes would be wrong. You should expect to be, as Paul says “..sorrowful but always rejoicing.” Being in Jesus Christ means that your joy is certain, it is everlasting, and it is ever-increasing AND you will have trouble.

I grew up as a child of the nineties. I listened to 90’s grunge scene—bands like Nirvana, Alice in Chains, Soundgarden, Pearl Jam. Recently, the news came out that Chris Cornell, lead singer of Soundgarden committed suicide. That’s the third lead singer from those bands mentioned that took his own life. I was very sorry to hear of his death.

I started to think about how differently Marilyn’s life ended this week than Cornell’s. Cornell had it all, according to the philosophies of this world. Money, fame, accomplishments. Marilyn had nothing, according to the philosophies of this world—she was a widow who lived in assisted living, on social security, in an obscure town in an obscure state. But oh how their lives ended differently. Though Marilyn’s last days were filled with racking pain, and the last decade of her life was filled with sorrow at the passing of her husband, and failing health, she had Jesus Christ. Jesus was hers. Jesus’ words proved absolutely true for her “No one will take your joy from you.” Jesus Himself was her joy.

Our Duty: [No duty]

There is no duty again in our present passage. Jesus wants you to consider His work, His labor, His performance. And so I want to speak to you if you have never personally trusted in Jesus Christ. Listen, there is nothing hindering you from coming to Him. You don’t have to meet any condition of holiness, or goodness, or sobriety, or right living in order to come to Jesus Christ. You cannot raise any objections against yourself from coming to Jesus. If you are rich or poor, foolish or wise, weak or strong, a great sinner or a religious moralist—nothing disqualifies you from coming to Him. Jesus says “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (**Matthew 11:28-29**)

Jesus is the great need of your life. And you come to Him by faith alone. You can't clean yourself up in order to come to Him. The Scripture says that "one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law." (**Romans 3:28**). To be justified means to have all your sins placed on Jesus Christ, and to have all His righteousness given to you as a free gift. It's yours for the taking if you believe in Him. Rest in Him. If you do that, He promises that "No one will take your joy from you."

Our Delight: Jesus is the marrow of the gospel

We talk about the gospel a lot around here. In our passage this morning, Jesus talks about Himself. Jesus is at the very center of the gospel. The prize of the gospel is Jesus Christ—the God-man, the Bread of Life, the Good Shepherd, the Word-made-flesh, the Light of the World, the Alpha and Omega, the Resurrection and the Life. Jesus is the marrow of the gospel. That's what He's promising to His disciples here. He's not offering them 70 virgins at the time of their death, or their own personal planet, or self-actualization, or nirvana, or reincarnation. He's offering them Himself. That's what He offers you. This is how Paul says it in **Colossians 3:1-4**

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Dear congregation, Christ is your life. Being a believer doesn't mean that you are merely holding onto a proposition about the gospel. Being a believer means that Christ is holding onto you. Jesus is your life. And that is why "No one will take your joy from you."