

**Reading:** John 16:16-24

**Theme:** A little while and a little while?

We move into a new section in Chapter 16. In v5-15 we saw of Jesus' teaching on the mission of the Holy Spirit in the world and Church. Now in v16-33 we will see **the prospect of joy beyond the trouble of this world** i.e. we can know joy even in a world that is opposed to God and His people.

The NIV divides the chapter rather awkwardly, with v16 in the previous section. I understand this, as it is a transitional verse - for it closes the section v4b-16 about Jesus' departure and the coming of the Spirit. Then it introduces the next section where the disciples show their confusion and Jesus speaks more of His departure and of their grief which will be turned into joy.

The section v16 to 24 is not an easy one to grasp, or to try and preach from! J C Ryle starts his comments on this section with words of "encouragement"! *"Not all Christ sayings were understood by His disciples. We are told this distinctly in this passage... None ever spoke so plainly as Jesus. None were so thoroughly accustomed to His style of teaching as the Apostles. Yet even the Apostles did not always take in their Master's words. Surely we have no right to be surprised if we cannot interpret Christ's words"*

In preparing to preach on this section, I found it stimulating, yet perplexing; a joy, yet a problem! It was like a locked door to try to get to understand what the Lord Jesus says in v17-24; then I remembered what John Bunyan wrote and painted as a word picture in Pilgrim's Progress – that there was a golden key near a locked door that would open it! To my mind, at least, v16 was the key to help me have an understanding of v17-24. This transitional verse seemed to be the key - tying together the

teaching of the Holy Spirit to the disciples' grief being turned into joy. There is a close relationship between the two as they are linked by Jesus' going away and returning to them.

The question is which return does it speak of? Is it quite simply His resurrection after His death and departure and that's it? Maybe it is His return at the end of time after He had ascended into heaven? Or is it His return in the ministry of the Holy Spirit? I hope and pray my thoughts will prove useful as we look at this section. We will note 2 things this morning:

### **1. Two little whiles.** (v16)

Many commentators say v16 is an enigmatical saying! An enigma, an enigmatical saying is a puzzle, a riddle, something not readily understood and I for one can say Amen to that! Here the Lord Jesus speaks this puzzling saying "*A little while and you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.*" KJV includes "*Because I go to the Father.*"

The word translated "*a little while*" is the word we get our English word "micron" from - "little". When it is used of time, it means the briefest period - a "little while" a short period, not an extended period. Amazingly it is the word that is often used in the NT of the return of Christ - to emphasise that in God's view and timing it is only a little while, even if in mankind's reckoning it is a long time coming.

Yet Jesus contrasts them not seeing Him with seeing Him after these 2 little whiles. In the Greek in v16 two totally different words are used for the word translated "see". The first word (θεωρεω) could be translated "behold" as in NASB. It carries the force of looking at, to be a spectator, to consider, survey, study or to examine. It is not usually used of someone being an

indifferent spectator, but could be used of a football fan going to watch, to see their favourite team and they are keenly interested spectators. The 2<sup>nd</sup> word used in v16 (οπτανομαι or οπτομαι) is one we get words such as optic, optician, ophthalmology. It is to do with seeing, recognising, perceiving, to become acquainted with by experience - as in “*Oh, I see now!*” It is the same word root that Jesus used in 14:9 “*anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*”.

Jesus says that in a short time they would no longer be able to gaze on, survey, study, look at Him as they had been previously doing. He knows His physical earthly existence would end - both His ‘normal’ physical life and in a short time, His physical existence on earth would end, then His disciples would no longer behold Him, spectate Him. He had told them of this in speaking of His going to the Father.

Even when Jesus went to His Father and they could not behold, spectate Him; they would be able to see, perceive, recognise Him in their lives, the Church, and the world. How? The Holy Spirit was sent to take the things of Christ and make them known to them - just as if Jesus was there, continuing to teach and instruct them. By the Holy Spirit’s presence and work the disciples would discern, perceive, see and recognise the Saviour who had sent Him.

Jesus had already hinted at something of this back in 14:19 with the words in NIV “*Before long*” literally = “*yet a little while*” = the same word as here in 16:16. How were the disciples to see Christ, but the world could not? John 14:15-18 underlines to us that it is by the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Here in v16, we have the same context - teaching on the person and work of the Holy Spirit and then “a little while” not beholding Jesus, but “a little while” and they would see Him. *[In 14:19 the word translated both times as ‘see’ is θεωρεω: to behold, consider, spectate and the Holy Spirit causes believers to consider Him who the world will dismiss and forget]*

Jesus in v16 is speaking of His going to the Father - by the cross, resurrection, ascension and that they would not be able to spectate, see, behold survey Him. Yet in a little while, He would send the Holy Spirit in His fullness and Christ, the things of Christ would be seen, perceived and recognised.

Have we ever considered trying to picture the Apostles on the day before Pentecost and contrasting it with them the day after Pentecost? Just consider the things they’d seen, heard, been involved in, also their realisation of the things of Christ and God, their understandings then of these things! Even the realisation of the presence of the Lord Jesus and His working among them?

We must never separate the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Jesus here shows us His going to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit are part of the same process and are inseparably linked (16:7).

I hope this helps us to understand something of this key, yet transitional v16. Yes, the disciples would in a little while no longer see Jesus as He would be crucified and buried. Yet they would seem Him again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day and then off and on for 40 days. Even though He would be removed from their physical sight at His ascension. Yet, by the coming of the Holy Spirit, after a little while they would see Him. These events are linked

and we are to see the full picture and not try and limit it to the isolated individual parts.

I hope you have followed me and my explanation has not caused more questions - as Jesus' words did to the disciples - as they asked them in v17-18 "*What does He mean...?*"

On Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension He went from outward view and the disciples did not observe Him anymore in His body, but after Pentecost they perceived Him at work in and through the work, person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. Probably our Lord had used this puzzling, enigmatical saying to prompt the questions which the apostles asked, so He could go on and develop the things He has begun - how their grief would be turned into joy.

Rather than going on to consider further things in any detail in this chapter, I want us to pause, step back and to consider:

## **2. Practical implications.**

We are always to look for practical applications from Jesus' teaching. The first thing that struck me was that not everything is Scripture readily understood! I hope you're not feeling too much like that now! Yes, it is well worth digging into God's word, to chew on it, to take the time and make the effort to see what is below the surface. It can be a most profitable exercise.

God's word is not just for ministers, church officers, people with great minds and who love studying the Bible. If we do not understand a thing, then be prepared to do some studying ourselves. Yes, we can ask people questions, but don't simply do that; read, try and work at it ourselves and then share the fruit of our work with others who are more experienced, have been

Christians longer than us - to make sure we have a right understanding. If not, they can guide us to what it is, or what is their understanding at this point of time. Also, it good if we first take time to read, think for ourself as it will be better fixed in our mind! Please be encouraged to read and think first, before asking others whether our thoughts are in line with the Bible, but they will not mind!

Please realise the difference in two little whiles in our own lives. In a little while all could be sadness and sorrow for us, but we do not know what lies ahead for any of us, yet our Lord never leaves it there, because He works all things together for good to those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose and there is always a 2<sup>nd</sup> little while - the apostles were told of this in v20ff - our present sorrows and griefs can give way to joy. This, in God's good pleasure, may occur in this life, but it will most definitely occur in heaven - we will have unceasing joy. Paul could write Romans 8:18 *"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."*

Here in life, we may hurt, grieve, suffer, but in heaven we will see that all the way our Saviour led us; see His grace was sufficient and really how little were our suffering times; also, we will see His care and understanding of us in all our times of suffering and how His grace was there to keep and help us.

We are to note that the Lord again speaks of His going to the Father and its benefits for those disciples. He told His apostles by repeating that which they should have already learned, but in reality, they didn't want to know of, had no great desire of. Our Saviour graciously repeats such and beautifies, covers it with comfort and encouragement. Yes, Jesus was going away, but the

benefits, the blessings of such needed to be recognised - not to them only, but to the whole Church. They freshly saw the Lord's presence in their own lives and experiences in the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the Church.

Such blessings are still for us today. How are we to know, see and perceive the Lord Jesus in our day? By the same Holy Spirit making things of Christ real and known to us - not by observing Jesus physically, but by perceiving Him by faith as we learn of Him in the Bible. We speak of the Lord speaking, moving, His presence, help and working. This is only possible in our lives due to the 2<sup>nd</sup> little while - the Spirit given and making Christ known to believers, the Church and the world.

It is a learning experience which speaks of an expanding perception, knowledge, growing and developing in our lives. We are to be ever-growing in love and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ as we use our Spirit-aided minds, hearts, lives to read and dwell on His word, to come into His presence in prayer, to cultivate and develop our love relationship with our lovely Saviour. As we do such, we can have fresh impressions and senses of His love, to be able to say *"I am Thine and You are mine"* or *"Now I belong to Jesus, Jesus belongs to me, not for the years of time alone, but for eternity."*

This is the personal outworking of the 2<sup>nd</sup> little while experience, as we perceive, recognise the Lord Jesus in the ongoing ministry and work of the Holy Spirit within us, even with all our ups and downs, fears and failings. This work, the 2<sup>nd</sup> little-while-work, will go on until the Lord Jesus comes again and we will see Him, gaze on Him in all His beauties in heaven. We will gaze in an ecstasy on our crucified Saviour and

behold Him, spectate on Him in rapturous, enthusiastic joy, delight and pleasure forevermore.

Until that day may we see, perceive, recognise and know Him closer each day and may He become more and more precious to us all, as He leads us on in every aspect of our lives.