

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

**Theme:** A double contrast.

As we started to look at this section, I said it is not an easy one to grasp or to understand and the key, for me at least, is v16, helping me understand it. Last week we looked at the puzzle, the enigmatical saying in v16 and considered the two little whiles to understand something of what the Lord Jesus was speaking of. We noted the 2 different meanings of the words translated “see”. I said I understood this verse to refer to Jesus physical absence from them - His death, then His resurrection and ascension and then the coming of the Holy Spirit. Then, they no longer observed, studied, beheld Jesus physically, but could perceive, recognise Jesus in His work by and through the Holy Spirit and His work in the world, the Church and His people.

Jesus’ saying in v16, prompted questions among the apostles in v17-18; to which Jesus makes a comment in v19 and basically repeats what He had said in v16. Then in v20ff the Lord Jesus goes on to give some of the consequences of the two little whiles in the lives and experiences of His people, initially these apostles, but subsequently to all believers. Here the Lord Jesus shows His omniscience - His all-knowing, as He deals with the very subject they wondered about, talked about, but He went further and dealt with their fears and concerns for the future too. I have one main point:

### **A double contrast.**

The Lord Jesus starts to unravel this puzzle further to them and does so, not by giving them an outward revelation or understanding of those great events that were soon to take place, events they seem to have no capacity to receive or take

in (v12), but He described the inward impressions, feelings, experiences they would have and would go through. He went on to speak of a double contrast – 1<sup>stly</sup> the contrast between the Church and the world; then 2<sup>ndly</sup> the contrast between the Church’s past sorrows and its future joys.

### **A. The Church’s sorrows and the world’s rejoicing.**

In v20 Jesus makes a solemn statement - “*Verily, verily...*” (KJV) or “*I tell you the truth*” (NIV) - it is something that needed to be noted, heeded and considered. It was most important they listened and listened well. Yes, they may have been struggling, but it was said for their benefit and they should sit up and take notice.

Jesus designed these words for their comfort, consolation and benefit; they needed to listen, consider and understand they were going to have great sorrow and grief, but the world in contrast to them would rejoice. The world, here, in particular represented by the Jewish leadership at that time and all who are against God, would soon rejoice. Why was that? It was because they were going to have Jesus executed, have Him dead, buried and out of the way, never to bother them again. They would rejoice. The mocking of Jesus at the cross was part of their presumptuous rejoicing that they had their enemy pinned exactly where they wanted Him! The Jewish leaders were glad and their attitude may well have been! “*Good riddance to bad rubbish*”

In contrast to their joy and celebration would be the grief, sorrow the disciples would feel and go through. They would grieve and sorrow because they loved Him, because their hopes and dreams would be shattered as they had hoped He

was the One to redeem Israel. They would miss Him in so many ways and would have many fears about what the future would then hold for them. What grief they must have felt - they had left all to follow Him, the One they expected so much from, yet soon He would be dead and sorrow would smash into and over them like many powerful waves.

Many people still rejoice when something happens in a church, or is done by a religious person that brings mocking and shame on Jesus' name and the cause of Jesus. Such events should cause us grief and we should pray for publicly important Christians, for church leaders etc. that they would be kept from falling into sin, especially open sin. We need wisdom, gentleness and grace to deal with such mockers, let alone with those who fall. We are not to be surprised if it occurs and the world parades it across the tabloid headlines or the internet and social media - for it makes them happy, causes them to rejoice as it means they have a further excuse to ignore Jesus some more!

I wonder if anyone listening is ignoring Jesus and His claims? It is possible you may rejoice at every bit of evidence you gather which puts a nail in the coffin of Christ and Christianity. The trouble is that Jesus is not dead and He kicks off the lid that you are trying to nail in place and that may cause you to look for stronger nails, but you do not rejoice that He is still alive!

There is something of the first bit of the double contrast – the Church's, the disciples' sorrow at Jesus' death and the rejoicing of the world. Yet both are temporary states for we see the second contrast:

## **B. The Church's sorrows and future joys.**

The grief of the disciples, of any believer, does not go on forever. The immediate, sharp and bitter grief of Jesus' disciples at His death, did indeed turn into joy and their joy at the resurrection was overwhelming, causing some not to believe He had risen - because of the joy of it! Yet, His physical presence was not constant and He was received into heaven, out of their sight, but they knew an amazing joy on and following on after the day of Pentecost, a joy that would still be in place even after flogging, or scourging (Acts 5:41); or that would cause some to sing in prison after such a flogging (Acts 16:25).

It was an amazing joy and it came, not in place of their sorrow, but came all the sweeter **because** of their sorrow. Jesus does not say "*I will take your grief away and replace it with joy*", but says their grief will **turn to** joy (v20). That which caused their greatest grief - His death, would be the reason for their greatest joy. Yes, His resurrection, but also His ascension, going away to the Father would result in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In the Lord's table we recall and remember His death with true joy and thankfulness because of all it accomplished for us, on our behalf. We remember with sorrow His suffering, pain, agony that our sins caused Him as He was made our substitute in our place, but we rejoice He accomplished salvation for us. That which naturally is a cause of grief is turned into a cause for joy and thankfulness.

The Lord Jesus uses the example, the picture, of a woman giving birth - that same awesome event will cause her grief, pain and anguish, and yet also cause her great joy moments

later. It's an excellent picture. Pain, sorrow, grief and yet the same event, would bring abundant joy to these disciples. Yes, the disciples would have a time of sorrow and grief, but they would have joy, not a passing joy, but a joy that no one can take away (v22).

Yes, initially this joy was that of seeing Him after His resurrection. Poor Mary Magdalene was left alone in the garden the 1<sup>st</sup> Easter Sunday morning - sobbing, grieving, confused and then she met, encountered the risen Lord Jesus. It was a different Mary who burst into the room where the disciples were! Easter Sunday evening, they were gathered in a room in confusion and for fear of the Jews and Jesus appears among them and John tells us *"The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord"* (20:20) Dr Luke tells us in 24:41 *"while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement,"*

They knew this immediate joy, but this joy did not disappear, evaporate when Jesus ascended to heaven. Incredibly on and after the day of Pentecost it appears to have deepened, increased, spread abroad. They knew this joy even in many bitter experiences, in suffering, in pain, as well as in success.

This is the same joy that comes down to us in the gospel. It is not the gospel - we do not preach joy, a feelgood factor, a spring in our step. We preach Christ, Him crucified and risen again! We preach the reason for joy - peace with God by being justified by faith in the Lord Jesus. We preach a gospel that has consequences in our lives - whether we have good or bad times. Within the gospel is this loud note of joy, but it is a joy that is real, that is to be known, experienced; it is a joy that is

based on the facts of the gospel and what Jesus has eternally accomplished in our lives. It is the joy of knowing Christ as our Saviour and knowing He is in control of our lives and futures.

I had hoped to look at Christian joy this morning as a distinct and separate topic within this message. I realised I couldn't do so, as time would not allow us to consider it in any great detail, but I feel it would be worthwhile for us all to look at it in more detail.

The apostles were going to experience the sweet, yet powerful fullness of this joy - first of all Jesus' resurrection and then overflowing at Pentecost. They would again behold and later perceive the Lord Jesus. Yet in v22 as Jesus spoke again of their sorrow and grief, He goes on to encouragingly say, not "*you will see Me again*", but "*I will see you again and you will rejoice*". What are we to make of these words? The death of the Lord Jesus separated Him from the disciples and also the disciples from Him. There was a real separation from both sides. **Here we see a glimpse of the love and desire Jesus has for His people** as represented by the disciples. He cares for them all and He went away for their benefit, for their salvation, but it did not mean it was easy for Him to leave them, but He returned to them for a short while.

When a father or mother has to go away on some important business trip, they will miss their partner and children. It is not easy to simply go and leave them alone, but they would have concerns, worries and would long to see them again. Here we have a glimpse of our Saviour's heart - He desired to see the disciples. This again is fulfilled after Pentecost, when

by His Holy Spirit the Lord Jesus is among **all** His people through all ages in a much richer and fuller way than He had been before. There is this seeing, perceiving, knowing of Christ on our part as He sees and knows us - it is a mutual experience - we call it union, communion, fellowship with our Saviour.

As a result of Him seeing His disciples again - literally and through the work and person the Holy Spirit in the apostles and then subsequently in the person and work of the Holy Spirit in all believers, there is this promise of this joy that no one can take away. Part of the completing of that joy is the promise of prayer in Jesus' name (v23-24), but that is for later on in our studies!

This little section from v20 has many wonderful truths in it. Truths that when we think about and apply them, should affect our lives in many ways.

We are to realise our lives will not necessarily be all sunny, happy days. Some people speak of Christianity, the gospel as if it is a divine spiritual happy pill to make us feel good and ward off all harm and problems. Yet we are in a world that is fallen, we are subjected to the effects of the same curse as on all Creation. We still have weak bodies, emotions and minds. Even as believers we can know diseases, even serious diseases affecting ourselves and our loved ones; we are not insulated or isolated from the Covid or any virus. We will be affected by national calamities, by pains, sorrows and bereavements.

Yet in all things, we can know that the joy of the Lord is our strength, for our Saviour will not leave us, abandon us, but care for us and He always knows what we are going through and is able to give more grace in place of grace - as we have need. A little while of suffering and grief, will one day give way to joy inexpressible and full of glory. The greatest joys we know here and now on earth, are nothing to be compared to the fullness of joy and pleasures for evermore that await us at our Saviour's right hand in heaven.

Our Saviour can guarantee us great joy in place of great sorrow; can turn our sorrows into joy in a little while. Yet whatever our lot, we are able to have the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and we will know it is well with our souls.