

**Reading:** John 16:16-33

**Theme:** Prayer and joy.

This morning we are returning to our studies in the upper room events in John 16 after briefly considering the theme of Christian joy which arose from the passage. We noted v16 was a pivotal verse linking what was said about the person and the work of the Holy Spirit, the situation the disciples would find themselves in. We noted the difference 2 “little whiles” would make - referring to the events of Jesus’ death and suffering and the disciples’ sorrow then, but also His resurrection, ascension and His sending the Holy Spirit to apply His completed work of salvation in a way never possible before.

Their sorrow would be changed to joy and there would be a dramatic change in the lives and experiences of these disciples. Even though they would grieve and hurt as the world would rejoice while Christ appeared defeated, dead and buried. Yet Jesus promised to see them again and they would have a joy that no one could take away - which is a huge thing to say, but the disciples saw and experienced it as true in their own lives. This joy is also for us as it is the inheritance and birthright of every believer. Yet it can have its flow and ebb as we’ve seen, but it is ours and we do a disservice to our glorious Saviour if we fail to delight in such joy for all He achieved in and for us.

This morning we move on to look at v23-24 - “In that day” i.e. when Christ had ascended after His resurrection and poured out on His people the Holy Spirit. This verse places these events in the post-Pentecost era for the disciples and

therefore for ourselves. These verses are relevant to us and I hope we will recognise this as we look at them. Let's note 3 things:

### **1. No questions.**

Jesus says in that day they will no longer ask Him anything. To begin to grasp what is being said here, we need to go back to v19 to see that the same verb "to ask" (ερωταω) is used there and the start of v23. This can be translated "enquire" or "ask a question", or "ask about". Yet a different word is used in v23b and v24 [2x] (αιτεω) - the force is "asking for" or "requesting".

We are to recognise this is connected with v19, where the disciples had been questioning, enquiring, seeking answers as to what Jesus meant by things He said. They did not understand, had imperfect knowledge about what He meant by "a little while" and "Because I'm going to the Father" which were things concerning His work of salvation.

They had an ignorance concerning the things of redemption, of the great plan and work of salvation which God was working out and was going to fulfil. They wanted to enquire, ask of Jesus and Jesus knew this (v19). Here Jesus makes a reference to their lack of understanding and knowledge of the things of the work He would accomplish. He tells them that in that coming day, they would have no need to enquire, to have questions, for with the coming of the Spirit, they as the apostles, would understand most clearly what Jesus did and accomplished in His life, death and resurrection.

Then there would be no more questions concerning “*Who will be the greatest?*” Or “*When will the kingdom be restored to Israel?*” Or “*What shall this man do?*” There would be no more discussion as to what Jesus meant when He said or did so-and-so. For in the light of Christ’s resurrection, when the risen and ascended Saviour poured out the Holy Spirit, then these disciples would understand the whys and wherefores of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. They would know why Jesus had to die, why this was advantageous to the Church, to all nations, they would see it was good for them and Him to return to the Father, indeed they would recognise He had returned to the Father. Then they would understand as to how they would know the way to the Father!

The necessary, mysterious and obscure matters would be made plain to them. Through them this deposit of truth has been passed down to us. Not all we pryingly want to know, but all necessary for faith and life has been passed down to us and our same Saviour-given-Holy Spirit will help us understand and apply it right. We have the Spirit of truth to guide us into all truth according to His word. The word of God is changeless, relevant and true. We proclaim a contemporary message for our generation as we proclaim the unchanging truth of God’s word presented in an up-to-date manner and language.

I for one am so glad of the Holy Spirit’s help and work. Often difficult passages are chewed over and make no sense and then they do through the work of the Holy Spirit helping

me, helping others to understand and explain these things. So, in that day, the disciples would not have to ask of these things which, at the time of Jesus speaking, seemed so dark and mysterious to them. Moving on we see:

## **2. Answered prayer.**

In the dispensation of the Holy Spirit – post-Pentecost, the disciples would receive answers from the Father to the requests, the petitions, the things they asked for in the name of Jesus. The Lord Jesus declares this with a solemn oath, declaration - *“I tell you the truth”, “Verily, verily”, “Truly, truly”, “I most solemnly assure you”*. Here Jesus says something so amazing and staggering, that He reinforces its enormity, as if He’s saying *“Yes, it really is right what you heard!”*

We can so easily have a small, limited view of prayer and fail to realise the enormous, the staggering privilege we have - *“my Father will give **you** whatever you ask in **my** name.”* God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, will hear and answer our prayer. The God of all Creation will listen to and answer the prayers of little specks of dust like us! Jesus is not giving us liberty to boss God the Father about; to make it a demand and supply situation - we demand and He supplies! That is an obnoxious, a vile thought. Here in v23-24, the Lord Jesus reminds the disciples of the amazing privilege and honour of prayer. They had already been told of it in 14:13-14; 15:7 &16.

Here, this privilege of asking the Father directly for things, is most clearly placed as post-Pentecost. Until then, they

were really asking Jesus to ask. They asked Him of and for so much. Their understanding of prayer was governed by their religious upbringing and culture in OT ways - a high priest, a priest, sacrifices, going through rituals and ceremonies. Yet in the work Jesus would accomplish, suddenly their access to God was going to be the direct access to God the Father through Jesus the Son by the Spirit and there was no need to go through any priest, rite, ritual or ceremony. For then every believer would have access directly to the Father, to have the Father's ear in, by and through the Person and accomplished work of the Lord Jesus. It means we have boldness to go to the throne of grace and to find mercy and grace to help us in time of need!

Our prayers are not only heard in Jesus' name, but so are the answers given and they are not dependent on who we are or what we do, but on who Jesus is and what He has done. At the end of v23 the Greek can be taken as "*in my name He will give it you*". The "in my name" is relevant to both the asking for and the giving of. This does not mean we can ask for anything and everything and we get it! It is asked in Jesus' name - in accordance with His Being, holy character and purposes and so it excludes all that is evil, wrong or harmful. Prayer is not first of all asking, but dwelling waiting on God and Christ and then asking things that please Him, for we are ask for right and God glorifying things. This is the effect of asking anything in Christ's name - it is for His glory, for His interests in this world and for the good of His people - which would include ourselves and yet that good, is the good He knows is truly good for us.

Up until then, that privilege hadn't been fully given to the disciples, but post-Pentecost they would know this fully and be able to pray remarkably - we find this is the case as we read the book of Acts.

This same privilege is ours and yet few of us in our day and age, really know the secret of prayer, of a close intimate prayer life. Many of us say our prayers, but so few of us know the reality of this prayer life which some Christians have known e.g. George Muller. The potential is there - are we willing to get really serious with God in prayer? Now moving on we see:

### **3. Joy being made full.**

Christian joy is more than a notion, as we've seen, it can be developed and maintained. Personally, I like to be in the know about situations, things I'm involved in or trying to do, or organising or helping in. I'm happier if I know. I like to be able to ask questions and get answers so that if I need something, I can get ready as far as possible the things I will need.

Here in these verses, we see Jesus has been speaking of the things that would further the inward experimental and experiential realisation of the joy He had previously mentioned - the disciples would have fullness of knowledge and answers to prayer, they would ask and receive and this would fill up, complete their joy. JC Ryle wrote *"This sentence means 'from henceforth begin the practice of asking everything in My name and through My mediation.*

*Ask fully and confidently, and you shall receive fully and abundantly. So asking, you shall find the joy and comfort in your own souls enlarged and filled up'."*

Possessing, having the knowledge of God's will and ways would enable the disciples to pray correctly in Jesus' name and know this increasingly sweet joy. They would see their situation, know God's will, call on Him and their answered prayers would cause their joy to again fill up, bubble up within them, grant them peace and joy in believing in serving their God and Saviour.

In our lives, we will not have the immediate knowledge of the apostles, we have not been eyewitnesses of the Lord Jesus' actual life and ministry to contemplate, but we have the word of God to read, learn and apply. As we do so we are to seek the help of the Holy Spirit to guide and teach us God's ways. This coupled with an ever growing and developing prayer life are a great means of developing, increasing, deepening and heightening our joy. Thomas Watson wrote "*Prayer is the key to heaven's treasures of mercy!*" As we have constant fellowship with our God in Christ Jesus, as we pray in accordance to His revealed will in His word and see those prayers answered, we will have our joy filled up, increased and developed.

In our lives, to be prayerless can be to be joyless. Even if we say we have nothing to pray about, **then** we have every reason to thank God - in prayer, worship and praise; in thanking Him for no pressing needs for ourself, family, church and nation; for peace and prosperity, for love and

health. We are not to see prayer as “*God bless and the needs are...*” Prayer is much more diverse and richer than that! Prayer, serious, planned times of prayer, are to begin with God and His priorities - His honour and glory, His kingdom, His will and all this before we even think of petitions for others or ourselves.

In our knowledge, hopefully a growing and developing knowledge of God, we should go confidently and boldly to His throne of grace in prayer, asking for things in Jesus’ name and as we see such things answered, this should not only increase our confidence in God, but also have our joy increasing, filled, completed and we will be ready again to seek Him in prayer and to rejoice in such a God as our God and Saviour.

These 2 verses cover much for us to think about and develop. I hope and pray the things I have shared will make some sense and would encourage us on in seeking the things of God in His word, seeking Him in prayer and that He would lead us to an ever growing and developing joy of our salvation in our lives as a Holy Spirit takes and applies such things to us.