**Eternal Joy**

Based on [John 16:16-22](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Jn16.16-22)

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This gospel is words of comfort Jesus speaks to his disciples on the night he would be arrested and taken from them. (1) First he predicts what is going to happen to him…that he will die and be buried, and after a little while rise again. (2) Then he teaches them how they are to evaluate what is happening. Although his death and burial looks bad, it is only temporary; but the joy that will result from it—his resurrection and ours--is eternal.

Jesus tells his disciples that they will not see him for a little while, then they will see him. He is speaking of his burial—when he is out of sight in the tomb--and his resurrection appearances to follow. He “predicts” these things—tells of them beforehand--in order to comfort his disciples and prepare them for what is going to happen. Like a doctor preparing a patient for surgery or new medication, “You may feel a little disoriented or uncomfortable at first—but that’s normal, nothing is going wrong…it’s expected. But after a little while the pain and confusion will pass and you’ll be better off for it.”

On the night before it happens, Jesus prepares his disciples for his death and burial, saying essentially the same thing. “**What’s about to happen…it might shock you at first, but when it happens know that things aren’t falling apart. Things aren’t spinning out of control, and you need not be confused or anxious. My disappearance in death and in the tomb it’s expected. You will not see me for a little while, but this is a good thing. It is part of my Father’s plan to make atonement for you and to make all things new.”**

The providential care of God is our only source of comfort in in this world of sin and tragedy. To know and to be assured that the Creator of heaven and earth is not asleep at the wheel, that the devil cannot outsmart him, that our sin cannot surprise him or make him lose his love for us—this is the is the greatest faith…to trust in God by entrusting our lives to God.

Jesus predicts and prepares them--not only for his suffering and death--but theirs. At the beginning of this chapter 16, Jesus says to them, “**I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away. 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.”**

After he is ascended to the father, and again they will not see him for a little while…the disciples will suffer persecution. And they will be tempted to think, “**Why are we hated for the truth…has Jesus left us forever?**” No, he prepared them for his absence from their sight, and the persecution to come. It will be difficult, but he prepares them by telling them ahead of time what happens, what it all means, and how they are to keep perspective so that they do not give into temptation and fall away.

(2) After Jesus predicts for them what is about to happen, he then tells them how to understand it, and really how they are to understand any cause of sadness and sorrow in this veil of tears. They are to remember that sorrow is only for “a little while”.

God’s People spent a "little while" in captivity in Babylon but were restored to their land in Israel. (Ps. 126. See also Ps. 30:5; Is. 26:20; 54:7; Mt. 5:4; II Cor. 4:16-18. At Lk. 17:22). Lazarus in the parable of Lk. 16 spent a "little while" in the company of dogs but is now in Abraham's bosom. The prisoner spent a "little while" on the cross but is now in Paradise. Paul said: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

“A little while” simply means “not forever”. “A little while” means “temporarily.” Even a thousand years is “a little while” compared to eternity.

So, for those who trust in Jesus Christ, suffering is temporary, but joy is eternal. Someone once described suicide as “a permanent solution to a temporary problem.” They are half-right. Depression, sorrow, sickness, suffering, these things are all temporary problems. But suicide is not a solution to suffering. **Instead, suicide threatens to makes temporary suffering eternal suffering in hell, by having one’s last act on earth a turning away from God.** But one who does not turn to death but to the gospel, can face all trials. We can trust God when he tells us that he will not test us more than we can bear (1 Cor. 10:13). We can rely on his Word that says the present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that awaits those who do not give up (Rom. 8:18; Gal. 6:9). Suicide is a permanent acceptance of a temporary problem. Jesus promises that those who endure to the end will be saved (Matt. 24:13).

This is also sage wisdom for the Christian who knows he will be on his own deathbed someday. **As death draws near, the Christian needs to hear over and over again how death is temporary, but there is joy that is coming when the believer passes from death to life.** Death is only a sleep. Your eyes will close, but they will open again on the last day. And your soul will remain conscious and in paradise with Christ in the meantime. You are given the good news of eternal joy so that you can face death the same way you face bedtime.

It is depressing to hear in the news about the Humboldt Broncos bus crash that killed so many people, mostly young men a couple of weeks ago. In the news, we hear of their death as a tragedy, but there is no comfort given.  **The devil delights in this, not because so many have died, but because their death is proclaimed on TV, Radio and internet without the proclamation of eternal life in Christ.** The gospel is the real news; that is balm to tragedy. It was given to prepare us for it when it happens, to take the blow and not fall away. How many instead blame God for allowing the tragedy, for supposedly not caring enough to stop it?

You see, there is no reason to blame God for this tragedy because He has stopped death---it’s just no one is reporting on that. But the church reports on it, and we are prepared for all death, because we have been given the hope of eternal life, Amen.

Two teachings Jesus gives to his disciples in this gospel, and to us today. First, do not be surprised when sin, death, and the devil cause suffering, persecution, calamity, and distress of nations. Jesus has told us these things will happen, they do not foil God’s plan of salvation, but serve to bring it about. And when they happen, they are signs of what he has foretold.

Second, all suffering and sorrow is only temporary for those who believe. Jesus has ascended to heaven, and for a little while we will not see him. He is coming, and the world will see him again on the last day just as he has said, and the present sufferings are not worth comparing to the joy of that day. “**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. 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**.”