

## Sermon – 18/06/2006 am

### Sorrow Will Turn to Joy

Study Text: John 16:16-24

Two of the few words I know in French are *au revoir* and *adieu*. I was taught that the first is a simple ‘goodbye’ or ‘see you again soon’, while the latter, *adieu*, and is a lengthier or even permanent goodbye. How was Jesus to say goodbye to his disciples? Within a few hours he would be dead and buried. He might well say *adieu* or farewell. Yet within a few more hours – on the third day to be precise – he would be alive again and they would see him.

We might sympathise with Jesus as spoke his final words to his disciples and said goodbye to them. How could he get them to understand that he was going to die and then rise from the dead? We might also sympathise with the disciples as they struggled to comprehend what Jesus was telling them.

#### A Little While

Back in chapters 13 and 14, Peter, Thomas and Philip all questioned Jesus about his going away. Then they listened silently while Jesus went on to tell them about sending the Holy Spirit and about coming persecution. But when Jesus returns to the subject of going away they start asking one another ‘what is Jesus talking about’. Maybe they were embarrassed to keep asking Jesus what he meant. Jesus however, knew that they wanted to ask him what he meant in saying *a little while and you will not see me; and again a little while and you will see me* (16:19).

The first ‘little while’ was the time leading up to his death and burial. Within a few hours Jesus would be on the Cross and then before the Sabbath (Saturday) he would be taken down and his corpse placed in a tomb. Normally we do not see people after they are buried; hence *you will not see me*.

The disciples were not aware that Jesus’ death was imminent. Still they would have expected that when Jesus did die they would not see him again. If Jesus had said ‘I am going to die soon and you will see me no more’ they would have understood. They would have mourned his death but they would have understood. But Jesus did not leave the matter there.

*Again a little while and you will see me*. The day after the Sabbath there was no corpse in the tomb. Jesus had risen from the dead. *He is not here he is risen* said the angel. The disciples and many others saw Jesus alive after he was crucified and buried. They saw him with their physical eyes, they saw him as a physical person (Luke 24:39). He talked with them and ate with them.

After seven weeks they saw him taken up into heaven. They no longer saw Jesus with their physical eyes, but after Pentecost they saw him even larger than life as it were. They knew Jesus was alive and that he had now come upon them in the Holy Spirit just as he promised. *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you* (14:18).

Jesus will of course return again *in like manner as you saw him go* (i.e. physically – Acts 1:11) and every eye shall see him. But to conclude, as some scholars do, that the *little while* till the disciples see him again refers to the hundreds of years (now 2000 years) until the parousia is stretching this text. Not that Jesus was silent about his second coming (see 14:3) but his primary focus in this discourse was on his going away and the contingent coming of the Holy Spirit.

## Sorrow to Joy

*Most assuredly I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy* (16:20). This was a solemn declaration by Jesus.

At the instigation of the Jews, the Romans had Jesus crucified. They mocked Jesus as he was led to Calvary and as he hung on the Cross. When he was dead they were pleased with their effort and rejoiced. They had eliminated the righteous One whom they hated. Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants in the vineyard was proved right (Luke 20). The wicked men thought the inheritance would be theirs and rejoiced – but not for long.

On the other hand, for the disciples the hours after the death of Jesus were very dark hours. They wept and mourned the death of their beloved teacher and Lord (Mark 16:10). They huddled together behind locked doors for fear of the Jews.

But then the tables were turned. Jesus rose from the dead. The Jews were shaken when his body could not be found and attempted a cover up. The disciples saw the risen Jesus. Initially they were amazed and even afraid, yet soon they were rejoicing. They returned to Jerusalem with great joy after Jesus was taken up into heaven and stayed in the temple worshipping and praising God (Luke 24:52). Their sorrow turned to joy just as Jesus said.

If the *again a little while and you will see me* refers to the second coming of Jesus, as some suggest, then the sorrow will not turn to joy until this time comes. Sorrow will continue for the disciples of Jesus until his parousia! While Paul does say that *we ourselves groan within ourselves eagerly awaiting the adoption, the redemption of our bodies* (Romans 8:23) he also said *rejoice in the Lord always* (Philippians 4:4). The joy of the Lord is something his disciples can know before he returns. Jesus in fact emphasises this joy later in this passage.

The second *little while* is that during which Jesus is in the grave. After his resurrection they would see Jesus again over a period extending through his ascension to his second coming. This is the period known as the 'last days', the period during which Jesus is alive and at the Right Hand of the Father in heaven.

## Woman in labour

Jesus, the master teacher, perseveres in helping his disciples to understand what he was saying. These things are foundational. The disciples must understand that Jesus had to die and rise again. John himself comments later when he saw the empty tomb – *as yet they did not understand the Scripture that he (Jesus) must rise again from the dead* (20:9). Much of the teaching in this passage is repetition, but Jesus adds this analogy to help them understand.

To give birth, a woman has to endure agonising labour pains. She may suffer such pain and anguish for hours. It is unavoidable pain, but it is pain that is quickly forgotten when her baby is placed in her arms. The anguish turns to joy when the child is born into the world.

Jesus used this analogy to describe what would happen to his disciples in a little while. They would weep in anguish when he was taken from them, but that weeping would turn to joy when they saw him alive again. This was not the joy of a child being born but the joy of death defeated. *Because I live you also will live* said Jesus (14:19).

What causes the most grief and pain in this world? Women may say it is the pain of childbirth. But for women and men, for all human beings, the loss of a loved one through death brings much grief. Death causes the most grief and suffering in this world. Many want to deny this and have a 'celebration' or 'party' rather than a 'funeral' but the reality remains as does the grief. Life has become so superficial to many.

But there was nothing superficial about the death or the resurrection of Jesus. There was no illusion, for he was seen by many people over many days. And those who believed in him were prepared to die for this truth, the truth that Jesus is alive. Jesus told his disciples they would rejoice in a little while for they would see him alive again.

You will have joy that *no one will take from you* (16:22). Even more painful than giving birth is the pain of having a child taken from you. Some doctor may think that a stillborn baby is just a lump of tissue to be thrown out, but the mother will cry out for her baby. She will grieve for her baby that is taken from her. Her joy will turn to sorrow.

How wonderful that no one can take away the joy that you have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because he lives you also live, and nothing in this world can take away that life that Jesus gave you; it is eternal life. *For we know that nothing shall separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8:39).

## Prayer

As he continued to focus on his going away Jesus spoke to his disciples about prayer. There would be some changes in how they related to him and to the Father. Jesus would no longer be there beside them. He would be at the Right Hand of the Father in heaven. *Until now you have asked nothing in my name* said Jesus (16:24). He taught them to pray our 'Father in heaven' but not to pray in the name of Jesus.

The disciples thought Jesus' going away would be a disadvantage. But it would be their advantage, not only because the Holy Spirit would come but because Jesus would be in heaven interceding for them. By his death Jesus opened the way for us to enter in the Holiest, to come before God with our prayers (Hebrews 10:19f). He is the great high priest who presented his own blood as a propitiation for our sins.

You will *ask the Father in my name*. Jesus gave them a solemn assurance that whatever they asked the Father in his name the Father would give them. What an amazing promise! He repeats it in the next verse (also in 14:14, and 15:16). *Ask and you will receive that you joy may be full* (16:24). Is your joy full? Do you pray to the Father in the name of Jesus?

What does the name of Jesus mean? It is not just a matter of using this name as some sort of magic of course. It means that God the Son died for you on the Cross. He shed his blood for the forgiveness of your sins. He rose from the dead and returned to heaven, and he will come back to this world one day. To pray in the name of Jesus means to believe this truth. It means to pray in faith, believing that God is able to do even more than you can ask or think (Galatians 3:20).

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