

We're all familiar with the phrase, "in a little while;" we use it frequently in a number of settings. For example, a parent such as myself, might ask his teenaged son or daughter the following question: "When are you going to clean your room?" And they might reply, "In a little while."

But it goes both ways though, doesn't it? My daughter might ask, "Dad, when are you going to paint my bedroom?" "In a little while." In my experience, it's much easier to offer this response than it is to receive it.

Full disclosure...I'm not naturally patient. I don't like waiting in lines, waiting for packages to arrive, or, waiting for something unpleasant to be over. Last March, not many of us could have predicted the place we find ourselves in today. The initial Covid restrictions were something we put up with, thinking they would only be in place for a little while; nearly one year later, we're still in the same predicament.

*When can we take off our masks, or invite people over, or gather in church again? In a little while?*

This morning, to help my teaching to be a bit more interactive, I'm going to ask a few discussion questions and invite you to press pause on the video feed. If you are with others at the moment, discuss among yourselves; if you are by yourself, write an answer in your journal, or if you're comfortable, speak your answer out loud to God.

**Q:** Here's the first question: *In what situations do you find it most difficult to wait, and why?*

If you have a Bible with you, I want to encourage you to turn to John 16:16-24.

**16** Jesus went on to say, "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me." **17** At this, some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?" **18** They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying."

**19** Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'?" **20** Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. **21** A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. **22** So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

**23** In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my

name. **24** *Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.*

The text I've just read captures a part of the larger conversation that took place the night Jesus was arrested. They were all in an Upper Room, enjoying a meal, when Jesus told the disciples He was leaving. Vs. 16 is a veiled way of describing what would transpire in the following three days. *"In a little while you will see me no more (death and burial), and then after a little while you will see me (resurrection)."*

The disciples didn't understand and they began to talk amongst themselves about what Jesus meant might have meant. When Jesus saw their confusion He spoke, but He didn't answer their questions, at least not directly; He spoke instead to their need.<sup>1</sup>

*What was their need?* They needed reassurance that they would see Him again, that whatever painful waiting they might endure, it wouldn't be forever, and, it would be worth the wait.

Vs. 20, *"Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices."* This statement accurately depicts what took place. The chief priests, Pharisees, and Roman

overlords saw Jesus as a threat to be eliminated. With His death, they assumed that all talk about Messiahs and overthrowing Rome would stop. With His death, the priests and Pharisees wouldn't have to compete with Jesus' miracles or teaching any longer; they would command the people's attention once more. And so, when Jesus died, they all celebrated; it was the disciples who mourned.

But...no one, not even the disciples, knew what would come next. Jesus said, *"You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy."* When Jesus was raised from the dead, their lowest low was became the highest high; grief turned into joy.

To drive this point home, Jesus used the analogy of a woman in labour. Let me say first that Jesus is in no way minimizing the pain that women experience in childbirth; it's real and intense. When a baby—the size of a watermelon—has to be pushed through a much smaller opening, it's going to hurt...a lot!

When some guys get together, they swap sports injury stories, sparing none of the gruesome details. But I've been in circles where I've heard mothers swapping labour and delivery stories: *You think your delivery was bad? I was in labour for 72 hours, and my baby came out sideways!*" I'm only slightly exaggerating.

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel According to John*, 625.

Here's the question, *why would any woman willingly choose pregnancy, knowing the pain that awaits them?* Are they simply tougher than men? Probably, but I haven't met a woman yet who chose pregnancy to prove how tough she was. Most pregnant women don't fixate on the pain of delivery; they are focussed on what comes next: new life, a daughter, or a son, to love.

Jesus was making the following point: a woman's pain in childbirth is temporary, *and*, soon forgotten in the joy of holding her child.

When Jesus died, the disciples were confused, afraid, and in pain, but their temporary grief was swallowed up by joy when He was raised from the dead. Seeing Jesus again was unbelievable and amazing, no doubt, but their amazement and joy only grew when they came to understand what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

The prophet Isaiah writes, *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all...He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed."*<sup>2</sup>

Forgiveness and reconciliation, salvation, healing, and restoration; this is what was birthed on the cross and in the tomb. His pain brought about our joy.

I want to camp here for a moment, moving from explanation to application. Our situation is clearly different from that of the first disciples. Jesus isn't springing a surprise "leaving" on any of us; we all know about His death and resurrection. *So how do His words to them, speak to our situation today?*

Dealing with grief, persevering through pain, is a part of the human condition. Try though we might, we cannot avoid these realities. Jesus said, *"in a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me."*

Throughout history, **this** is the promise all Christians cling to; in a little while, Jesus will return and we will see Him. The reality is that all of us find ourselves in situations where we have to wait, and sometimes, the waiting involves both pain and loss. What might seem like *"a little while"* to you, might feel like an eternity to me. This is especially true when it comes to persevering through pain.

Faith in God doesn't protect us experiencing from pain; what faith does is give us perspective. We come to see that because God is utterly good, He's not the cause of our

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<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 53:6, 5.

pain. We live in a sin-stained world, where greed, anger, and arrogance perpetuate a cycle of people constantly hurting people. And as messed up as our lives may be, as messed up as the world may be; faith reminds us that this condition is temporary.

Psalm 30:5 says, *"Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning."*<sup>3</sup> This is a promise for today, and, a promise for tomorrow. As strong as your grief might feel right now, in this moment, it can be turned into joy. God can bring about this transformation, it might take time, it will take our willingness, but He can do it.

Like a mother in childbirth, looking forward to holding her child, faith looks forward to the time when Jesus will mend all that is broken. And so we trust Him in the present even as we fix our eyes on what is to come.

If you attended our drive-in service last week, you've already heard me say this but it bears repeating. The Apostle Peter wrote a letter to a church that had been scattered because of persecution; pressure and pain was a constant in their lives. These were people, who like us, had not seen Jesus firsthand.

In 1 Peter 1:8-9 we read, *"Though you have not seen [Jesus],*

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<sup>3</sup> NLT.

<sup>4</sup> Morris, 626-627.

*you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls."*

Pain is real, but so too is joy. Leon Morris writes, "[when we] come to know the significance of the cross [we are] possessed by a deep-seated joy, a joy independent of the world. The world did not give it and the world cannot take it away."<sup>4</sup>

**Q:** Before I move on, let me encourage you to pause the video feed and engage the following questions: **(a)** *Where is God asking you to persevere?* **(b)** *What pain are you experiencing as you wait?* **(c)** *How have you experienced God's strength, or joy, while persevering?*

**Vs. 23-24:** In the time remaining, let's turn our attention to final two verses of our text. Jesus said, *"In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."*

The words *"in that day,"* mirror the earlier words, *"in a little while;"* it's another veiled reference to life after Jesus'

resurrection. For starters, the disciples would have a new kind of relationship with Him, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus begins by saying, *"In that day you will no longer ask Me anything."* They had been following Jesus for three years, constantly asking questions; why would that change post-resurrection?

As I explained last week, Jesus' role as an itinerant Rabbi was coming to an end, and the role of Rabbi—or Teacher—would be handed over to the indwelling Holy Spirit. John 14, 15, and 16 describe the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Truth; the Spirit will be at work from within, reminding them of all that Jesus said.

This new relationship with God would also extend to the arena of prayer. Jesus' work on the cross would secure forgiveness from sin and reconciliation to God; this becomes the foundation for prayer. We pray in the name of Jesus, with confidence, knowing that God loves us, hears us, and stands ready to respond.

*"Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete."* Simply adding, "in Jesus' name" to the end of every prayer doesn't force God to give us what we want. To pray "in Jesus' name" is to pray for things that are in alignment with His character, purpose, and activity.

Jesus is the Doctor of our souls; He sees us and knows us. At times, in His infinite wisdom and mercy, He doesn't give us what we ask for, He gives what will align us to God's plan and purpose.

And as Jesus makes plain, here in John 16, prayer is about much more than "asking," it's about an encounter, or communion, with God; prayer draws us into God's presence, and in His presence there is fullness of joy.<sup>5</sup>

In just a moment we're going to gather around the Lord's Table together, but first, please pray with me.

### **The Lord's Supper**

Through this meal we celebrate the victory won by Jesus. Sin, death, and the devil have been defeated; the battle continues, but victory is sure. For this reason, in both the place of abundance, and, in the desert valley, we choose to be people of joy. We look forward to the day when Jesus returns for us, and we surrender to the Spirit's work among us so that when Jesus does return, He will find us ready, waiting, and radiant.

In the mean time, we come to this holy meal with both need and expectation. He is the Host of this meal and it is His joy to meet us where we are and supply us with mercy,

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<sup>5</sup> Psalm 16:11.

forgiveness, peace, and strength. This is not a table for those who are self-reliant and full; Jesus is here to meet with those who know they are empty without Him.

On the night Jesus was betrayed He took bread and when He had given thanks for it, He broke it and said, *This is my body which is for you*. In the same way, after supper, He took a cup saying, *This cup in the new covenant in my blood*.

On the cross, Christ's body was broken and His blood was shed that we might be forgiven, mended, and reconciled to the Father. Let us eat and drink together in thanksgiving.

At this time, please join our team in singing a final song of response.

### **Worship**

### **Benediction**

As we conclude, receive a final blessing, taken from Romans 12:12. My dear people, may you be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer; the Lord be with you and those you love.