

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 17 April 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Sorrow Turned into Joy

John 16:16-22

A few years ago, I received a phone call from my parents; and they had an unusual story to tell me about an old friend of our family. Apparently, our friend had been away from the house for a day or so; and while he was away, an acquaintance of his was doing some kind of repair or maintenance work on a vehicle on his property. However, while the man was working on his vehicle, he had a heart attack, and passed away. A neighbour saw the man's legs under the vehicle; and he assumed that it was our friend who was under the vehicle. When this neighbour saw that the man was not moving, he assumed that our friend was dead, or that he might be having a medical emergency; and he called an ambulance. Well, before long, the word got out to his children that their dad had passed away. Needless to say, they were all heartbroken, and they all rushed to the house, and phoned their mom—only to find out that their dad was still very much alive! Their hearts were saddened, of course, over the man who had died that day; but can you imagine the joy that they had when they realised that their dad was alive! In an instant, their sorrow turned to joy!

So it was for Jesus' disciples on the morning of His resurrection 2,000 years ago—except that their Master was not merely *reported* to have died: He *really did* die. For three horrible days, it seemed that all their hopes had been crushed. The one whom they had loved so much, and on whom they had cast their hope for eternity, was dead. But then, Jesus appeared to them in His resurrected body; and their sorrow was instantly turned to joy! Yet, none of this should have come as a surprise to them. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus had told them exactly what would happen. He told them that great sorrow was about to befall them; but He also told them that very soon, their sorrow would be turned into joy.

Two thousand years later, Jesus is *still* turning people's sorrow into joy; and it is still for the *very same reason*. It is *because Jesus arose from the grave* that we can have joy. Without the resurrection, we would have no hope. Without the resurrection, we would be ***“of all men most miserable.”*** But because Jesus is *alive*, death is a defeated foe; and we will live forever with Christ.

The title of this message is ***Sorrow Turned into Joy***.

Read John 16:16-22.

As Jesus and his eleven true disciples made their way from the Upper room to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus promised them two things. First of all...

I. Jesus promised the disciples that they would have sorrow.

In **verse 16**, Christ made a statement that completely baffled the disciples. He said, ***“A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.”*** Now, this statement shouldn't have been so confusing to them. Christ had told them repeatedly that very soon He would be slain by the chief priests and elders of Israel, and

would be buried, and would rise again three days later. For example, when they were at Caesarea Philippi months before His crucifixion, Jesus had told them, ***“The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day.”*** That very evening, Jesus had told them that very soon, He would return to His Father’s house in Heaven. In light of all that Jesus had told them, they should have easily understood what Jesus was saying. They should have understood that in a ***“little while”*** Jesus would be killed, and that they wouldn’t see Him, because His body would be in the grave. Yet, in another ***“little while”*** (three days later), they would see Him again, because He would rise again. Then, shortly afterward, He would return to His Father in Heaven.

The disciples shouldn’t have been confused by any of these things that Jesus was saying; nevertheless, they were. What they *should* have done was simply to *ask* Christ what He meant. They desired to ask Him; yet, they didn’t. Instead, they asked *each other* what they thought Jesus meant. **(Read verses 17-19 again.)** Was it wrong for the disciples to ask each other what Christ meant? No, not necessarily. The Bible says that ***“iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend”*** (Proverbs 27:17). In other words, believers should “sharpen” each other spiritually by sharing with each other what they have learned from the Scriptures. This should be a regular practice for *all* of us! However, even godly friends often do not have the answer. Certainly, none of the disciples had the answer to this saying. The Person to whom the disciples *should* have gone for the answer was Christ!

Why *didn’t* the disciples ask Jesus what He meant, even though they desired to do so? It might have been a combination of reasons. For one thing, **their hearts were filled with grief.** Jesus Himself had just pointed out that the reason why none of them had asked Him where He was going was that their hearts were filled with grief. **(Read John 16:5-6 again.)**

Probably another reason why the disciples didn’t ask Jesus what He meant was that **they were afraid to ask Him.** They ***“feared”*** to ask Christ what He meant, because they were afraid that what they *thought* He meant was, indeed, what He meant! Let’s take a look at one of these instances when they were afraid to ask Christ what He meant.

Read Luke 9:44-45.

The disciples were *afraid* to ask Jesus what He meant by that statement, ***“The Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.”*** For the same reason, they were now afraid to ask Jesus what He meant when He said, ***“A little while, and ye shall not see me.”*** They sensed that Jesus was talking about that “death and resurrection” subject again; and it made them sad and afraid. They wanted to believe that Jesus was speaking figuratively, and not literally; yet, something deep inside told them that He really was going to die. They didn’t want to believe this; and they recoiled from it.

Brethren, I believe that there is something we can learn from this. Many times we, too, are afraid to ask God about what a particular Scripture means, because that Scripture appears to require something of us that we don’t think we could ever have the faith to perform. Sometimes we are so filled with grief on account of heartaches or trials that we are going through, that we don’t feel as though we even have the strength to talk to God about it. Is it

understandable that we would experience grief and fear? Absolutely. However, should grief and fear keep us from talking to the Lord about it? No. The Bible says, ***“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”***

Now, let’s see what Jesus had to say about what would happen during the next ***“little while.”*** (Read **John 16:19-20** again.) The three days that Christ was in the tomb were days of rejoicing for Jesus’ enemies; and at the same time, they were days of tremendous emotional trauma for the disciples. They were paralyzed with grief and fear. They thought it was all over. Their hopes were crushed. On the morning of Christ’s resurrection, two of Jesus’ disciples from the town of Emmaus, who still didn’t believe that Jesus was risen, mournfully said, ***“We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.”*** You may be sure that Peter wasn’t the only disciple who ***“wept bitterly”*** during those three days. *All of them* had failed their Lord, and had abandoned Him; and worst of all, they couldn’t see any hope in sight. For the disciples, those three days were unspeakably dark, horrible, and calamitous.

Now, in order to forewarn them of what was coming, Jesus used a powerful analogy. Let’s read **verses 20-22** again. (Read **verses 20-22**.) Think of this! Jesus compared the pain and sorrow that the disciples would experience during His three days in the grave to the pain and sorrow that a woman has when she is giving birth to a child. You mums out there can relate to this. Labour is a relatively brief period of time; but it seems like an eternity, doesn’t it? It is intensely painful—so much so, that the pain is practically all you can think about. *That* is how deep the disciples’ mental and emotional sorrow was during those three days.

This is a powerful analogy. Yet, its meaning goes even deeper. You see, throughout Scripture, the “woman in travail” analogy is used to describe the anguish that the nation of Israel (and the whole world) will go through during the future seven-year Tribulation period. In **Isaiah 26**, for example, we find a prophecy of the Tribulation. Isaiah says that during the Tribulation, the believing Jews will cry, ***“Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O LORD. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen.”*** In **Jeremiah 30**, Jeremiah describes this terrible time as ***“the time of Jacob’s trouble,”*** when every man will be pale, like a woman in travail; and in **Matthew 24**, Jesus described the early days of the Tribulation as the ***“beginning of sorrows.”***

Read Jeremiah 30:5-7.

Read Matthew 24:3-8.

That word ***“sorrows”*** in **Matthew 24:8** is translated from the Greek word *odinon*; and it literally means “birth pangs.” Jesus is saying that the judgments He had just mentioned were only the ***“beginning”*** of birth pangs. As horrific as the wars, famines, pestilences (pandemics) and earthquakes will be during the first half of the Tribulation, they will seem like mere “Braxton Hicks” contractions compared to the judgments that will come in the last half of the Tribulation!

In **Revelation 6**, we read about the earliest part of the Tribulation period (probably the first year or two); and we read that during that time, there will be an unspeakably bloody, global war. On the heels of that war, there will be global economic collapse, combined with famine; and it will be so bad, that a day's work will earn a man nothing more than a loaf of bread. Then will come a time when *one fourth* of humanity is wiped out by warfare, starvation, disease, and wild animals. As cities are depopulated, wild animals will take over. It can't get any worse than that, you say? Guess again. These things will be merely the "warm up." It will be merely the "*beginning* of birth pangs." By the end of the Tribulation, when Christ returns to earth to set up His Kingdom, only a small fraction of earth's population will still be alive.

The seven-year Tribulation period will be brief; but it will be intensely painful and agonising. Those who believe on Christ during that time will have to go through this terrible time, right along with the wicked. As the seven years wear on, and as the return of Christ draws closer, God's judgments upon mankind will become increasingly severe. The glorious return of Christ will be so close; yet, to the saved people who will be living on earth during that time, it will seem far away, on account of the sorrow that they are going through. In **Isaiah 59**, we are told that the remnant of believers during the Tribulation will say, "***Judgment is far from us, neither doth justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noon day as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men. We roar all like bears, and mourn sore like doves; we look for judgment, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us.***" Are these depressing words actually the words of saved people? Yes! These people will have the same hope of salvation that we have; but because of the horrible persecution and anguish that these believers will be going through, "salvation" (in the sense of *deliverance from their enemies*) will seem very far off from them.

You and I cannot even begin to imagine the mental anguish that believers who will be living during the Tribulation will have to endure. Yet, Jesus used this very same "***woman in travail***" analogy (which normally is used to describe the Tribulation), to describe the travail that the disciples would go through during those three days when His body would lie in the grave. It would be a time of tremendous pain and anguish for Christ's followers!

However, Jesus also had another promise for them.

II. Jesus promised the disciples that they would experience great joy.

(Read verses 20-22 again.) Jesus promised them that as soon as the sorrow of those three days was over, they would experience great joy—a joy that no man would be able to take away from them. Why? Because their Lord would come back to life, and they would see Him with their own eyes, and would talk with Him once again! Let's see how the disciples reacted when they saw the Lord.

Read Luke 24:1-45.

Just as Jesus had promised, the disciples were filled with great joy when they saw Him again. The Greek word behind "joy" is *chara*, which means "great, exceeding gladness." The

darkness and sorrow of those three days were quickly forgotten when the disciples once again saw their Master, and touched Him, and handled Him, and knew that He really was *alive!*

Now, how can we apply this to our own lives? After all, we aren't the Apostles. We have never had the privilege of seeing Jesus, much less of seeing Him *again*, after His being in the grave. Can *we* know what it is like for sorrow to be turned to ecstatic joy? Yes, we can!

Our sorrow can be turned to joy for the same reason that the disciples' sorrow was turned to joy: namely, **we know that He is risen!** We know that *Jesus lives!* *Because* Jesus lives—*because* He is risen from the dead—we who are saved have the sure hope that *we* will one day be raised from the dead, as well. We do not have to sorrow as the world does when their loved ones die, because we know that a glorious day is coming to us.

In **1 Thessalonians 4**, the Apostle Paul wrote, ***“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.”*** Unlike the lost, who have no assurance of what lies on the other side of death, we who know Christ as Saviour have *sure hope*. Why? Because our Lord is risen. Because *Christ* is risen, *we* will one day rise bodily, in a new, glorious, sinless body, to meet our Saviour. Paul said, ***“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus (those who are now dead) will he bring with him....For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”*** Let's see what else Paul had to say about the resurrection.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12-23.

We who have placed our faith in Christ have never seen Jesus, as the disciples did. Yet, our sorrow can be turned into joy when we think and meditate on the fact that one day, *we will see Him*. Not only will we see Him after death, when our spirits go to Heaven (*if we should die before Christ returns*), but we will see Him on the Resurrection Day *in our new, resurrected bodies*. Job talked about this truth 2,000 years before Christ was born. He knew that even though he would one day die, and his body would be eaten by worms, he would, nonetheless, one day see his Redeemer *in his flesh*. Job was confident of the promise of the resurrection.

Read Job 19:25-27.

Christian, your sorrow *can* be turned to joy, just as it was for Christ's disciples. Now, make no mistake about it: there *will* be sorrow. Christians *are* appointed to go through suffering in this life. When you become a Christian, you are not given a guarantee that your life will be filled with continual happiness every hour of every day, from thereon out. It's quite the contrary. There *are* seasons of distress and grief for believers in Jesus Christ. Yet, through it all, your sorrow can be turned into joy when you remember that **Jesus Christ is risen**, and that one day **you will see Him**.

What are some of the things that can cause sorrow in Christians' lives? One of the main causes of sorrow for Christians is **persecution from the enemies of God**. Christian, *because* you belong to Christ, you are a special target of Satan and his minions. Satan cannot take your soul, because Christ has saved for eternity. However, Satan will do all in his power either to tempt you to fall into sin, so that you will ruin your testimony for Christ; to hurt or kill you through some kind of calamity, so that your mouth will be stopped; or to cause persecution and oppression from unbelievers, so that you will be hindered from spreading the Gospel to others. Of course, if he can intimidate and frighten you into retreating into the corner and being silent about Jesus Christ, that is his greatest desire! Let's see what Peter said about these trials from God's enemies.

Read 1 Peter 1:6-9 and 4:12-13.

We who are saved often weep and mourn on account of the oppression that we suffer from the ungodly. They merrily joke about their sin, and laugh at God, and mock God's people. Just as the world laughed and mocked while Jesus was suffering on the cross, and rejoiced during the three days when Christ's body was in the tomb, so the world laughs today. The world is still gloating in their wickedness; and they are still mocking God's people. Not only do they laugh: they *persecute*. They do all they can to stop God's people from spreading the Gospel, and to make life for believers in Jesus Christ difficult. Not only do they suppress and shout down the truth of the Gospel, but they often harass, torment, and even kill God's people.

For this reason, God's people often mourn. However, we mourn not only because of what God's enemies do to *us*: we mourn because of how God's enemies treat the *Lord*. Jesus is our dearest Friend; and when people mock, blaspheme, and curse His name, it causes us inner pain. (At least, it *should* cause us pain—if we are walking closely with Him!) We also mourn to think of what the end of the lost will be. We weep at the thought that lost men around us are on their way to an eternity in a lake of fire. David wept for this reason, as well.

Read Psalm 119:134-136.

Why else do Christians mourn? We often weep and mourn because of our own sins, and because of the chastisement that our Father sends us in order to correct us. Remember what Peter did when the cock crowed, and when Christ turned and looked at Him from across the courtyard? He *“wept bitterly.”* King David knew what this was like, too. There was a time in David's life when he suffered a physical illness *specifically* as a punishment for his sin with Bathsheba. Yet, when he got right with the Lord, the Lord graciously healed his body, to an extent; but most importantly, David was able to have *joy* again, because He was once again walking in close fellowship with God.

Read Psalm 32:1-5 and 51:1-12.

Why else do Christians mourn? Oftentimes we mourn because of the trials and heartaches that we go through in this life. We mourn when tragedies and calamities strike—when, for example, our bodies are suddenly wracked with serious illness, or we suffer great personal or financial loss. We mourn when our loved ones die. When our *unsaved* loved ones die, we mourn at the realisation that they are eternally separated from God. Even when our *saved*

loved ones die, we still go through a time of mourning (even though we know we'll see them again in Heaven), simply because we miss them. Oftentimes these kinds of things happen not as a punishment for any specific sin in our lives, but because God is testing and trying us, so that we will rely more on Him. It's simply part of living in a fallen world.

All these things are cause for sorrow in a Christian's life. Oftentimes, the seasons of distress and grief can be intense. Yet, our sorrow *can* be turned into joy. When we turn our eyes to the Lord Jesus Christ, and remember that He is risen from the dead, and that we will one day see our Redeemer in the flesh, our hearts can once again be filled with gladness. Christ gives us a joy that no man can take away. Even *in the midst* of times of sorrow, we can, through it all, have joy, as long as we keep our eyes on our risen and coming Lord. **Philippians 3:20-21** says, "***For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who will change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.***"

Conclusion: Now, perhaps all this talk of "sorrow being turned into joy" seems strange to you. Perhaps deep down inside, you know that you have never experienced true joy in your life—only emptiness and misery. It's not that you don't experience times of fun or enjoyment with family or friends; but the times of fun and enjoyment are like "painkillers." When the fun is over, and you are left alone with your thoughts, that gnawing sense of emptiness returns. Why is that? It's because you have never repented of your sin and placed your trust in Christ to save you. You have not been reconciled to God. You are still *separated* from God, as you have been since the day you entered this world. Though you may "tip your hat" to God by doing religious things, you have no relationship with Him; and you are cut off from the abundant life that He can give you. The Bible puts it this way: "***Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear***" (Isaiah 59:2).

There is only one way to be reconciled to God, and to receive the abundant life that Christ promised: You must repent. This means that you must have a change of mind and heart regarding your sin. You must stop considering yourself to be a "basically good person," and instead admit that your sin has separated you from God, and that you deserve hell. You must admit that there is no good thing that you can do to save yourself. You must believe, in your heart, that Christ paid the full penalty for your sin, in your place. You must place your complete trust in what He did for you. You must turn to Him with a heart of faith and repentance, and ask Him to wash away your sin, and save you. If you will turn to Christ, He *promises* to save you, and to give you a wonderful new life. Though there will be heartaches and sorrows as you walk through this world, you will be able to have true *joy* inside, because you know that your Saviour is living and interceding for you, and that one day you will see Him face to face. Won't you come to Christ today, and be saved?

As we close this morning, I would also address those of you who are saved. Christian, perhaps you are going through a time of sorrow in your life. If so, think on your risen Lord! Take heart in the thought that you will one day see him face to face. In the meantime, take your burdens and cares to Him. Pour them out to Him as you would to your closest friend—because He *is* your dearest Friend! **First Peter 5:7** says, "***Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.***"