

## Indestructible Joy

<sup>16</sup> “A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.” <sup>17</sup> Then *some* of His disciples said among themselves, “What is this that He says to us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’?” <sup>18</sup> They said therefore, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is saying.” <sup>19</sup> Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, “Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’?” <sup>20</sup> 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 into joy. <sup>21</sup> A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. <sup>22</sup> Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. <sup>23</sup> “And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. <sup>24</sup> Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. <sup>25</sup> “These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. <sup>26</sup> In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; <sup>27</sup> for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. <sup>28</sup> I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father.” <sup>29</sup> His disciples said to Him, “See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! <sup>30</sup> Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.” <sup>31</sup> Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? <sup>32</sup> Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. <sup>33</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:16–33)

Charles Spurgeon was once teaching a class of preachers the importance of making your facial expression harmonize with what you are teaching about.

“When you speak of Heaven,” he said, “let your face light up, let it be irradiated with a heavenly gleam, let your eyes shine with reflected glory. But when you speak of Hell—well, then your ordinary face will do.”

Spurgeon was being witty, but it's worth asking what our ordinary face communicates to the world about our faith. When you watch advertisements, the actors and models are almost always smiling, to show you the great enjoyment they have in that product or service. It would be a strange thing to see actors or models with a product and looking gloomy, dour, or unhappy. No, the joy communicates the value of what is supposedly being offered. Joy is not simply an add-on to the Christian life. Joy is the very mood of true Christianity. G. K. Chesterton said, “Joy is the gigantic secret of the Christian.”

And joy is the great theme of this last section of John 16, as Jesus is saying goodbye to His disciples.

If you're like me, you don't like goodbyes. Goodbyes and farewells are usually filled with tears and sorrow. We don't associate joy with parting. So, it's rather surprising that at the end of Jesus's Farewell sermon to His disciples, He speaks so much about joy. In fact, Jesus, uses the word joy, rejoice, cheer seven times in this closing section. It's as if He wants them to understand that this parting is not the usual kind. This farewell should have a deep joy that overwhelms the sadness.

Jesus is speaking in the eve of His crucifixion, but He wants these men to know that without His parting, they could not have the larger, greater joy He promises. He could stay with them, and not go to Calvary, but then they would be choosing a smaller joy which would actually wither and die. To have the larger, greater joy, they need to accept that He has to go, has to accomplish redemption, in order for there to be indestructible joy.

The joys that Jesus describes here were not just limited to the eleven men gathered there in the Upper Room. These continue to be joys for Christians in every age, in every place. We who live in

the time of Jesus' absence from Earth, with His presence here in the indwelling Word and Spirit, we can have the same kinds of joy that Jesus expects from His followers.

Each of the joys mentioned here follow a kind of logical, chronological sequence. First, Jesus rises from the dead, alive, restored. Then Jesus ascends to become our High Priest, giving us status and access in the very throne room of Heaven. And then we believe Jesus will return as conquering king to subdue the whole earth and make it new again. He rises, ascends and returns, and with each of those stages Christians should rejoice.

## I. Rejoice in the Reality of Resurrection

<sup>16</sup> "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." <sup>17</sup> Then *some* of His disciples said among themselves, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" <sup>18</sup> They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying."

As Jesus bring this discourse to a close, He makes a kind of summary conclusion. Shortly, you will not see me, and shortly after that, you will see me. For us, with the advantage of knowing the whole Gospel account, we can sense what Jesus is saying. He is talking about the events of the next few days.

But the disciples are confused. They ask each other, but they seem to be too shy to ask Jesus directly.

So, Jesus kindly asks if they are confused. He knows they are, and so He then elaborates.

<sup>19</sup> Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'?" <sup>20</sup> 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 into **joy**. <sup>21</sup> A woman, when she is in labour, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for **joy** that a human being has been born into the world. <sup>22</sup> Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will **rejoice**, and your **joy** no one will take from you.

He says in verse 20 that the disciples are about to weep and lament, because Jesus will be taken from them, while the world will rejoice. But then, they will again see Jesus, and their sorrow will be turned to joy.

Jesus gives them an image, a figure to understand this. A woman in labour is experiencing terrible pain. She suffers, and weep tears of pain. But when the suffering is over, the baby is born, and her tears turn to joy. Her anguish is forgotten; her child is born.

In the same way, Jesus says the disciples are like that woman. They are already experiencing the labour-pains of sorrow, about Jesus leaving them, because He has told them. And that sorrow is about to deepen as Jesus will be betrayed, arrested, tried, beaten, and crucified. Jesus will be taken from them completely through death. Their hearts will be broken.

But, as He told them several times before, He would rise from the dead on the third day. On Sunday, Jesus will rise, and they will see Him again. Sunday will be like the birth that follows the pain of labour. And all the devastating sorrow of Thursday, Friday and Saturday will wash away with the glory of Resurrection Sunday.

Jesus promises they will have sorrow, but the sorrow will turn into a joy, and joy of a particular kind. Jesus says, "and your **joy** no one will take from you." This is indestructible joy, permanent joy, joy

that cannot be tampered with, stolen, diminished, squelched by others. This is joy so deep, so complete, so full that outward circumstances cannot shake it.

Here is the first reason for indestructible joy: the reality of resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus is a source of inextinguishable joy for a Christian. It is that elixir that turns all sorrows to the gold of joy.

Our joy in God is not a wishful thinking; it is not a sentimental religious hopefulness. Christianity rises or falls on the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus staked His credibility on the resurrection. Jesus said it would be the ultimate sign of whether He was who He said He was. Paul said that if the resurrection did not happen, then we are still in our sins, there is no life after death, our loved ones have perished forever, and we are of all people in the world the most to be pitied. We are the most miserable people of all, treating this world as if it is not our home when there is no home to come, if the resurrection did not occur.

If the resurrection did not occur, then the New Testament was written by false witnesses. It means the Old Testament missed its deadlines for when Messiah was supposed to come, which was while the Second Temple was still standing, and 476 years after the time of Nehemiah. There is a lot of riding on the Resurrection.

Some historians have called the life, death, and burial of Jesus one of the most attested and documented events in history. No serious scholar doubts that Jesus lived, died, and then was buried in Jerusalem. Beyond that, no serious scholar, including atheists and sceptics, doubt that the tomb was found to be empty on Sunday morning. What's also undeniable is that eyewitnesses claimed to have seen Him on Sunday, and in the days that followed, and that they wrote down their experiences. These eyewitnesses went on to be willing to die for what they believed, which is not usually what deceivers and people foisting a hoax on the world do. Instead, the church began, in Israel, meeting on Sunday, baptising and celebrating the Lord's Supper, and then spreading to the rest of the world in just decades.

If you have come to know Jesus as Lord and Saviour, no one can take your joy in His living, resurrected Person. You know it because what was factual and true in history has been shown to the eyes of your heart by the Spirit of God using the Word of God. This is why Peter opens his letter with joy; <sup>3</sup> Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (1 Peter 1:3)

No dead religion for me. No mere morality. No trying to climb up to Heaven by my own efforts. No delusional spirituality. He's alive, and my joy is indestructible. Joy in the reality of resurrection.

Jesus continues to explain why the best is yet to come.

## **II. Rejoice in Assured Access to God**

<sup>23</sup> "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. <sup>24</sup> Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your **joy** may be full. <sup>2</sup>

In verse 23, Jesus says, on that day, which we know will be Easter Sunday, they won't be confused anymore. They won't be asking Jesus what He means by His parables, or by the image of the Vine, or the image of a woman in childbirth. They'll understand, because they'll see.

But, on the topic of asking, Jesus shifts from asking for information to asking for anything in prayer. He says, if believers ask the Father for something according to the authority of Jesus, they will receive it. Up to this point, the disciples haven't begun praying in Jesus's name. But now it is

time they do so. If they do so, their prayers will be answered and their joy will be full. Why will they be able to ask in Jesus' name? Because once risen, Jesus ascends to Heaven, and stands as the High Priest, as the mediator between God and Man, the God-Man Himself. The name of Jesus will now stand as a human name in Heaven, representing full access to God.

Once the work of atonement is accomplished, the disciples won't have to hear parables about the Father or ask Jesus to represent them to the Father. Instead, because of their faith in Christ, and because of the Spirit of Christ who will come in to dwell, they will be able to speak directly to God.

<sup>5</sup> "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. <sup>26</sup> In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; <sup>27</sup> for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God.

The work of the cross will make these realities plain and known. With Jesus as the Resurrected and Ascended High Priest, believers are now able to speak to the Father as Father, to ask and receive, to learn and understand directly. The veil of the Temple is torn, and access to God is granted. Why, because of the great summary verse of verse 28:

<sup>28</sup> I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father."

Here is the second reason for indestructible joy: assured access to the Father.

Think of what a precious truth this is. All world religions have sought access to God, or the gods they worship. And almost without exception, they have had priests, prophets, shamans, sangomas, medicine men, to represent them. To enter the terrifying world of spirits, to speak directly with supernatural powers, most have looked to mediators to be the go-between, to provide diplomacy between themselves and the spirit-world.

But even in the true, revealed religion of the one true God, Israel did not have immediate and unhindered access to God. God dwelt among them, but with a series of barriers. In both the Tabernacle and the Temple, you had the outer barrier. Enter there and you were in the courtyard, where you could present a sacrifice with the priests at the bronze altar. But then there was another barrier, to enter the actual Temple or Tabernacle structure. And only the Levitical priests could enter there, and light the menorah, change the bread on the table of shewbread, and offer incense on the altar of incense. But then there was still another barrier, the thick curtain veiling the Holy of Holies, where dwelt the Ark of the Covenant. The Mercy Seat on the Ark was considered to be the very throne of God, the place where the Shekinah glory would dwell. And only once a year, could one man, the High Priest, descended directly from Aaron, enter that place, and only after following a very elaborate ritual of cleansing. There he would make atonement for Israel, once a year on the Day of Atonement.

This was not direct access. And so, when Jesus died, the veil separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the Temple was torn, the meaning was clear: access to God is now open through Jesus His Son.

And sadly, distortions of Christianity have tried to turn back from this assured access and return to mediators. Medieval Christianity began teaching that the dead could pray to God on your behalf. There was a return to Old Testament concepts of priest and sacrifice. And then came the elevation of biblical characters to the status of Redeemers with Jesus. All of this is soiling and distorting and defiling the precious truth of Ephesians 3:12 that in Christ "we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him." That's why Hebrews 4:16 says, "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, <sup>21</sup> and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:19–22)

What does it mean to enter the Holiest? It means we can pray directly to God the Father. We know we are loved and accepted for Christ's sake. I have the joy of acceptance in Heaven.

I always remember when I would sometimes call my father at work. I knew that every time I called him, he would answer and then when I would say it was me, his voice would light up, as if I was the best thing that had happened to his day. I knew I was received, welcomed.

That's your position when you speak to God in Heaven. In Jesus, accepted, received, loved, prized. You have assured access. And how long do we have it? The hymn we sing says it well

Before the throne of God above  
I have a strong and perfect plea  
A great High Priest whose name is love  
Who ever lives and pleads for me  
My name is graven on His hands  
My name is written on His heart  
I know that while in heav'n He stands  
No tongue can bid me thence depart

No one can push me out of Heaven's favours as long as Jesus is there.  
The reality of resurrection is our first indestructible joy. The assurance of access is our second joy.  
He rose, He ascended, and our third joy has to do with His return.

### III. Rejoice in Christ's Completed Conquest

<sup>29</sup> His disciples said to Him, "See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! <sup>30</sup> Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God."

Now that Jesus is no longer using the image of labour and birth, the disciples point out that He is speaking literally and directly. Their faith is obviously tenuous and weak, still in formation.

Jesus accepts their belief, but also prepares them for what is about to happen.

<sup>31</sup> Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? <sup>32</sup> Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. <sup>33</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good **cheer**, I have overcome the world." (John 16:16–33)

The trials of the night are about to cause them to be scattered, to forsake Jesus. They will leave Jesus alone, but Jesus tells them He won't really be alone, for the Father indwells Him.

But once again, Jesus has prepared them ahead of time, so that they can have peace. We saw a few weeks ago that Christian peace is the presence of a Person, proper priorities and prior preparedness. Here is that again: He is assuring them of what they will face, assuring them that in Him, they have peace, in His Person, not in circumstances.

Now again, he contrasts tribulation, trouble, sorrow with cheer and peace. Life in the world brings tribulation, suffering. Be of good cheer – means – be encouraged, be filled with joyful courage for the future. Look at the future not with cowardly dismay, but with joyful boldness, and firmness.

Why should they have this joy for the future? But herein is your joy, says Jesus: I have overcome the world. I have defeated the world. This is the world system that hates Christians, that loves what God hates, that promotes the idols of lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life. The world makes life hard for Christians and threatens our faith, our futures, our very lives.

But Jesus says He has overcome it. The word overcome means to win a victory. And this particular verb is in the perfect tense, which means it is a completed action. As far as Jesus is concerned, there is no pending outcome between Him and the world system. The result is certain and announced in advance. It is a completed conquest.

The world system that inflicts suffering on others, that persecutes Christians, it is a defeated army trying to hang on. It is a condemned building waiting for the bulldozers.

How so? Well, by the very same act that assured our access to the Father, the judgement of Satan and his system was complete. The cross and resurrection vindicated God and condemned forever the accusation of the Deceiver. Paul says in Colossians 2:15 that at the cross, “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”

So, this world system’s days are numbered. It’s on a countdown clock.

<sup>15</sup> Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15)

What is it that robs many a Christian of his joy? Fretting over rejection from the world system. Sadness over not fitting in. Fear of losing out or missing out because you don’t join in with the world. Longing for a world without crime, abuse, oppression, corruption, persecution. Dismay over what our children are exposed to. Grief over what the world considers to be entertainment. Shock at what is normalised. Disgust over what is considered to be an education. Weariness over the rat race, and the never-ending war between races and classes and sexes which is encouraged by the world.

Jesus says, I’ve defeated this world. It is only a matter of time. Those things that grieve a Christian grieve God. So yes, in this world, you will have tribulation, trouble, pain, problems, difficulties. But this will not always be. Live like the troops of the army that will eventually take over. Like the children of the true King who will come and plant His flag on earth’s soil. Live like citizens of a God’s nation, that is coming. As surely as Christ came the first time and rose again, so certainly He will come the second time and rule and reign.

So, before Jesus bows His head in the prayer of John 17, He expects the eleven to be smiling through their tears. He expects their faces to have softened, the eyes to have brightened, and even smiles to have appeared. He will rise again. He will give them access to the Father. He will conquer this world. Raised from the dead. Ascended to be our Priest. Returning as King. Do you know the gigantic secret of the Christian – real joy? Do these three realities cause your heart to leap – resurrection, access, kingdom.

