



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 16: 16-24

Spring 2023

"Sorrow To Joy"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. It's good to be with all of you and to be able to look at this great text of Scripture that we will consider this morning, John chapter 16, verses 16 through 24. We are in what is called 'the upper room discourse', or 'the farewell discourse'. The Lord is giving final words to His disciples and counseling them on things they need to be prepared for—the difficult times that will be ahead of them. So we begin with verse 16 of chapter 16.

¹⁶ "A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me." ¹⁷ *Some* of His disciples then said to one another, "What is this thing He is telling 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'?" ¹⁸ So they were saying, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is talking about." ¹⁹ Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me'? ²⁰ Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. ²¹ Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into

the world. ²² Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one *will* take your joy away from you.

²³ In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. ²⁴ Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.

John 16: 16-24

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, what a privilege it is to be together again on this LORD'S day, this Sunday morning and do what You have instructed us to do: To gather together, to sit under the teaching ministry of the Word of God, which is that which gives us change in our life, that which gives us greater clarity on life, that which causes us to know You better and better and in so doing grow in grace and knowledge. And so, LORD, we pray for that.

Jesus would pray in chapter 17, 'Sanctify them with the truth; Your Word is truth', (vs17). And so we pray, LORD, You would sanctify us this morning and make us more and more like Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, that we would shine brightly in this age in which we live, this generation which in so many ways has turned its back on You and Your truth. May we reflect that truth in the things we say, in the things we do, and how we respond and react to the difficulties of life. And that's the kind of thing we study this morning in this great text where the Lord gives instruction to His disciples about what's coming—difficulty. And we will all experience that. And the way we're prepared for that is through Your Word; and so, LORD, we pray that You would prepare us for that.

Our people here have suffered difficulties, and we pray for them. And LORD, we will have baptisms this morning and we pray You'd bless those, and bless that time. What a blessing it is to see the fruit of Your Spirit, the Holy Spirit working in the lives of

young people, and may this be a time of great rejoicing. We get to celebrate the Lord's Supper and remember His death for us—and then the baptism of three young people. So we look for You to bless in the hour that comes; and bless us now as we sing our final hymn and pray that You would prepare our hearts for that, for the time together in Your Word. Build us up in the faith. To Your glory, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) Roger Angell was a writer and editor for *The New Yorker*. He may be best known for his books on baseball. In a letter to a friend, he wrote this about the sport, "I think fans still don't have any notion of how hard big league baseball really is—how the season gets to you. Other sports beat you up. This one happens every day and it grinds you down. It is by far the hardest sport to play at a high level."

So it's a game—it's also a grind. And that, I think, is a fair description of the Christian life when it's lived at a high level. Paul described it in sports terms: Running, wrestling, boxing. It's a joyful life, the only truly joyful life. It's a meaningful life; it's the full life. It's the abundant life—the truly good life. We are saved from eternal doom forever. We are children and sons of God now. There's no greater blessing.

But we live in a lost world—and there's the rub; that's the problem. The world doesn't hate us—it hates Christ, and the Light, and the Gospel of grace alone. If we stay away from that, the world's fine with us. But when we shine as lights the world will oppose us—fiercely. And since the Christian life, like baseball, happens every day it can begin to grind a saint down. After all, we are just dust.

It seems the Lord's disciples didn't have any notion of that; of how hard their lives would be as apostles. And so the Lord spent time in the upper room on this subject of what life would be like; and the sorrow that they would have. At the end of chapter 16, He told them, "In the world you have tribulation..." (vs33). And that would begin very soon, sooner than they knew. Soldiers would come in a few hours; they would arrest Christ; the Jews would try Him; the Romans would crucify Him—and He would be buried.

A storm was coming—and He now prepares them for it. He said, "A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me." (vs16). The Lord's words, "a little while", are a reference to His burial. Now there have been different interpretations of that. People have taken that differently, as say, a reference to the period between His ascension and the second coming; or the period before Pentecost. But I think it is better to understand the words, "a little while", as a reference to the time between the Lord's death and resurrection.

In verse 20 He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy." This scene of the disciples weeping and mourning while the world rejoiced fits with that period of time when the Lord was in the grave. And secondly, the promise that their grief would be 'turned to joy' and they would 'see Him after a little while', fits well with the resurrection.

In chapter 20, Mary is at the tomb and she's weeping. When she saw Him she rejoiced. And later in that chapter, in verse 20, John wrote that the disciples "rejoiced" when they saw the Lord. So the language here, and the circumstances described, seem to agree best with Jesus' death and resurrection, and the sorrow the disciples experienced then.

But I think we can see in their experience an example of our own. We have sorrow as they did. We go through dark valleys. But their sorrow was only for "a little while". And there is a great promise in those words, "a little while" —for the Christian today as for the disciples then, because while sorrow is certain it's only for a period of time. It's not forever. David wrote in Psalm 30, verse 5, "...Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy *comes* in the morning." "In a little while", that's the promise we have today.

So the words, "a little while", are great words. But for the disciples, they were confusing words and they set off a discussion among them; "What is this thing He is telling 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'?" (vs17). They knew He was leaving, but they hadn't figured out the different 'returns' that He was speaking of and would make. He told them that, 'He was going to the Father.' But now He was saying that, 'They would see Him again in a little while.' The goings and comings perplexed them.

The Swiss commentator, Frédéric Godet, gave a helpful explanation of their problem. He wrote, "Where for us, all is clear, for them all was mysterious. If Jesus wished to found the Messianic kingdom, why go away? If He does not wish it, why return?" Well, that was their discussion.

The Lord heard all of this and spoke to them—but He really didn't answer their question, not directly. Instead, He responded to their need. They would learn the meaning of His words soon enough; but what they needed at that moment was preparation for the crisis that they were about to have. They needed some perspective. So the Lord told them of the grief that they would soon have; but then assured them that they would pass through it. He promised them that there was 'joy beyond the sorrow.'

And that's the way it is in the Christian life. As we grow, we meet difficulties: It may be truth that challenges what we believe; it may be a text of Scripture which we find difficult to interpret. Or it may be a prolonged, painful experience that we don't understand. Learning God's Word takes time, it takes effort. Growing in truth and in a mature relationship with the LORD is a long, life-long process.

The most seasoned saints sometimes find themselves in over their heads and feel abandoned by God. David wrote in Psalm 42, "All Your breakers and Your waves have rolled over me." (vs7). The trials come from the world's opposition, but also from physical ailment, or personal loss, or from God's work in our lives—all to refine our faith and bring about maturity. Well, people can become perplexed and they can feel *ground down*.

But there is purpose in all of it. There will always be much to learn. None of us has arrived. And so the Lord never stops teaching us; either through trials or the struggles of life or through study and prayer. Sometimes He does give us the answers to

our questions; but oftentimes He does not, not immediately—or not even in this life. But He gives us encouragement that all will be well. He did that for His disciples in verse 20; "Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy."

Their sorrow was due largely to their ignorance about His death, though not completely. Their grief would be a natural response to the personal loss they would have of the Lord going away, the Lord being crucified. And any one of us would have been grieved if we had witnessed the pain and the shame that the Lord suffered on the cross—especially knowing that it was due to our sin. He suffered because of us.

Still, true as that is, ignorance was the main reason for their sorrow. They had not comprehended the reason for His death—and the necessity of it. And so they were overwhelmed when it happened. We see that on the Emmaus road when the resurrected Jesus walked unrecognized with two grieving disciples, who told Him, "We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel." (Luk 24:21). They didn't realize that He had done that; so He corrected them and said, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" (Luk 24:25).

All of this was foretold in the Old Testament. All through the Old Testament; Psalm 16, and Isaiah 53. And other passages; Psalm 22, Zechariah chapter 13, just to name a few. A few, but certainly enough to say that they should have known. And that's the Lord's rebuke, "O foolish men"; as a result of not knowing the Scriptures, they were unprepared for the cross. As a result, when it happened their hopes were shattered and they wondered if they might not have been part of a losing cause—a lost cause; 'It's all over.'

Well, that's the reason the Jewish leaders rejoiced; they were finally finished with this one, this charismatic man who they thought threatened their positions. And Pilate was relieved because a political problem was off his hands. He mocked the Jews, if not Jesus, with the sign that he placed at the top of the cross. The priests hurled insults at Him, and the disciples went into hiding. So we can understand their disappointment

and confusion. It seemed that the enemy had triumphed; the enemy thought that it had triumphed—Satan thought that he had triumphed. So the world rejoiced, and the disciples wept.

But there was ignorance on both sides because what happened was altogether God's plan in the fulfillment of prophecy. The Lord knew that as He forewarned the disciples—and He knew why He came. And so He reassured them that, though in a few hours they would weep, they would pass through that sorrow and they would rejoice. He said, 'Your sorrow will be turned into joy.' (vs20b). Notice, not 'replaced by joy', but 'turned into joy', because that very cause of their sorrow would be the cause of their joy.

And in verse 21, the Lord illustrates that from childbirth, "Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world." The very thing that caused a woman suffering, gives her joy—the son or daughter she bears.

My wife has told me that while labor was long and hard, (and I was no help—both times), the happiest moments of her life came afterward when she had our daughters there with her in the hospital; first one, and then a few years later, another. (Yeah, that's right—not her wedding day, but ... *[Laughter]*) The time with her daughters, (my daughters too), were happy moments.

Well the point is, 'Joy eclipsed the pain.' And it would be the same for the disciples. Christ would come forth, born, (as it were), from the grave: The glorified Savior, who delivered them, (and us), from sin, death, and the devil, to give them life and the Holy Spirit. It would be one of the happiest moments of their life. That's the assurance the Lord gave them; "Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice." (vs22).

Read through the New Testament and you will see that the cross of Christ is never referred to as '*sorrow*'. Now we do see *sorrow* here in this passage, and we see

sorrow in the Gospels, but that is an account of their feelings historically. But after the resurrection the cross is never considered a cause of sorrow, but only a cause of joy.

The apostles gloried in the cross of Christ. Paul boasted in it. The reason he boasted in the cross is obvious: Without it, salvation would be impossible. But by His sacrifice He not only made it possible, He accomplished it. Atonement was made; God's justice was satisfied. Jesus took all of our sins upon Himself—the sins of His people and, (as the prophet Micah put it), cast them all "into the depths of the sea." (Mic 7:19).

Now, that's something to rejoice about. Through His death, He took away all our guilt, made us right with God—and then He came to them again, alive from the dead, resurrected. That's reason to rejoice because they had Him back with them—glorified.

But they would also rejoice because it meant that the Father accepted the Son's sacrifice, and therefore accepted them. When He said, in verse 22, "I will see you again", He knew that He would be resurrected, that His sacrifice would be effective and acceptable to God—and that they would be saved forever.

That's what the cross did. That was the reason Jesus had to leave them in order to save His people. And because He saved them He could say, "I will see you again." There would be reunion.

That's why, again, Paul would say in Galatians chapter 6, verse 14, "May it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." By the grace of God, Saul of Tarsus was snatched from the flames and made into a new person: Into the apostle Paul. The world was crucified to him. It died to him. He understood what John would later write in 1 John chapter 2, verse 17, "The world is passing away, and *a/so* its lusts..." The world right now, as we speak, is fading; it's on the way out. It's a bad investment and it had no more appeal to the apostle Paul than a dead corpse on a cross did.

But, when the world died to Paul, Paul died to the world. It no longer had any use for him. He was something of an alien in the world. It considered him a fool and treated him like refuse—trash. In 1 Corinthians 4 ,verse 13, he wrote of that; "We have become

the scum of the world, the dregs of all things." That was the world's opinion of Paul and the apostles. Still, they didn't abandon the world. By dying to the world's system they became more alive to the world's people and crossed continents and seas, mountains and rivers to bring the lost the Light of the Gospel.

There have been others like that, men of gift and privilege who turned their backs on all that the world could offer in order to follow the way of the cross and bless the world. Men like William Tyndale, a brilliant man whose ambition was to translate the Bible into English so that an English plowboy could know more of the Scriptures than he did. He labored to bring the Word of God to the people of England—but the king didn't want that. The king hated that. So Tyndale was forced to work at it while fleeing his persecutors out of England and across Europe.

He was finally caught, imprisoned, and executed. His dying cry was, "LORD, open the king of England's eyes." He was dead to the world, but he loved the people of the world—and he was killed for it. The world rejects the Light. It hates the Light and thinks we, who shine the truth of God's Word out to it, are fools. We are dead to it, (*the world*); we are like foul corpses on a cross to the world.

So, this life is full of trials and sorrow for those who take this life seriously, and who live it at a high level: Who live it by faith and live it to the chief end of man, that is, 'to the glory of God!' The Lord was preparing His disciples for the sorrow that would come in the immediate future, (in just a few hours), when He was arrested and taken from them. But the pattern here would also be true of their lives as apostles—and for the church down through history—and for us today.

But sorrow and tribulation are not all there is; far from it. In verse 22, the Lord promised the disciples joy: "I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one *will* take your joy away from you." That joy is permanent. It's not joy that is dependent upon the world. The world did not give this joy to the disciples—and it cannot take it away from them.

We cannot escape the hardships of this life. The Lord is making that very plain: We can't escape them under any circumstances. We live in a fallen world but that is especially true for the earnest Christian who will have trials and whose faith will be tested. For many Christians, their losses and their griefs are very painful. But they're not without purpose—and they are not permanent; and this is a fact that we take by faith. We don't look at the circumstances and gain that assurance; no, rather we have that assurance by faith in the Word of God.

Example: Hebrews 12, verse 11, states that the trials, the hardships that we have will yield "the peaceful fruit of righteousness." Blessing will come out of that. Now sometimes all we can do is take a promise like that and hold on to it. In spite of the circumstances and what they seem to say to us, we hold on to the promise that the peaceful fruit of righteousness will come from it.

But we're not at all left defenseless against the wolves of the world, or the ravages of time, or the darts of the devil; God has given us prayer as a means to *understanding* and as means to *joy*. "In that day...", Jesus said, (meaning in that day after He had risen from the dead, ascended to heaven, and given the Holy Spirit to the disciples), He says, "...you will not question Me about anything." (vs23). At the beginning of the passage, they were doing that. All through this discourse in the upper room they had been confused—and they were asking Him questions.

But He was telling them here that, 'In the future, that would change.' The Holy Spirit would be their teacher and guide. He would clear up their confusion with the understanding that He, the Holy Spirit would give; and the joy that He would give, (as He does for us), as our teacher and guide. As we study the Bible, He explains and applies it to us.

And then the Lord follows by saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if you *ask* the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full." (vs23-

24). The word that the Lord used in this verse for *ask* means, '*ask for something*', as in 'asking in prayer'.

Now that gives both the conditions for effective prayer and the scope of it. It is, 'ask for anything and ask in Christ's name.' That means a person can only approach God the Father in genuine and effective prayer through God the Son. Christ is the mediator between God and man—He is, 'the go between'. And, 'to pray in His name' means, 'to come to God as one who has identified with Christ.' His *name* represents His person; and to be 'in His name' is to be 'in Him', united to Him, united in Him through faith.

So our access to God is based only on what Christ has done, and *not* on what we have done. Only on who He is, *not* on who we are, in and of ourselves. And further, we can only expect answers to our prayers if we are 'abiding in Him', meaning, 'living in an obedient relationship with Him, living in communion with Him.'

Back in chapter 15, verse 7, the Lord said, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." It's only as the Christian lives in personal communion with the Lord that he or she thinks God's thoughts and wants His will to be done; and then asks for what is appropriate and receives from Him what is good. When we pray according to His will, He hears and He answers.

Now that's what Tyndale did. His dying cry was a prayer, "LORD, open the king of England's eyes." Well, I don't know if the eyes of Henry VIII were opened spiritually, if he was converted, but the Reformation took hold and it spread throughout England and Scotland. That was the real intent of his prayer: To bless the nation through the king—or otherwise. Ultimately his prayer was that He would bless the nation through the translation of the Scriptures, the Word of God.

And God answered that prayer. And He gives big answers. He answers far more than we can, "ask or think", as Paul told the Ephesians, (3:20). And He certainly did that there—and He does that with us.

It is, 'the God given means', prayer is, for accomplishing His will, gaining wisdom and understanding, and the means to having joy in this life, even in the midst of trials

and trials that we can't understand. That's the reason the Lord gave for praying here; "...ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full." (vs24).

And are you, (I can ask), experiencing this joy that is spoken of here? We all need to ask ourselves that. If not, maybe it's because we're not engaged in a consistent prayer life. I think all of us would agree that that is a discipline of life that's difficult for us. So many times we put it off to the end of the day—or we just find ourselves not praying...and when we do we're tired and.... No, this is an essential thing for us to do.

Throughout the Gospels we see this. We see this in the Lord's life. He was a man of prayer. It occupied a lot of His time in the ministry. 'Given to prayer', He would go off by Himself. He would abandon the crowds that were clamoring for Him to be alone and in prayer for hours with His Father. And it is what He is presently doing for us now in heaven as our great high priest.

Prayer is essential for our relationship with God. Again, we read here that it is God's means for our joy. And we find that in other passages. In 1 Thessalonians 5, verses 16 and 17; there Paul wrote, "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing."

But the ultimate reason for joy, the ground of it, is the central fact of history—the cross; that He died for our sins, and was raised because He gained our justification and salvation. Because of that, every believer is fully forgiven forever and completely accepted by God. We will see Christ, we will be raised from the dead, and we will share in His glory. That's our future—a glorious future.

Back to baseball. In 2010, Mark Newman invited me to the World Series—the Texas Rangers against the San Francisco Giants. I grew up listening to the World Series on the radio, then watching it in black and white, then in color. I'd never been to a game, so this was a thrill to go to the World Series; and as we approached the stadium, I felt the electricity of it.

And we had great seats: Behind home plate, about 20 rows up—great seats! ...Not such a great game. The Giants had a great team; they were leading the series three games to one. This was a crucial game; we lose it, we're out of the series. And...we lost it; we lost the World Series.

When the last batter was at the plate, we knew what was going to happen. We knew the game was essentially over. I think he may have had two strikes on him; and so Mark said, "Let's go. I don't want to see a dog pile on the pitcher's mound." And I said, "No. Let's stay. I want to see the whole thing to the end. This is the World Series." And so we stayed, (he reluctantly). And there was a dog pile on the pitcher's mound; grown men, playing a game, piling on one another like kids.

At that moment the pain and the fatigue from being *ground down* by a long season, playing every day with all of that pain and suffering—was forgotten. It was turned into a frenzy of joy.

That's our future—that's a picture of it. Our trials only prepare us for that. Paul told the Corinthians that, "...momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 17. Someday the struggles will end. We will come to Christ like victorious warriors from a fierce battle and enter glory with Him—forever!

The world can't give that hope—it's only in Christ. He bought us back then; He guides us now; and some day He will bring us into His glorious presence. That's our hope—and it's certain—and that should give us encouragement as we go through the trials of life that we will certainly go through.

But if there's someone here who doesn't know Him, who's not believed in Christ, know that He is our great God and Savior—and He is to be believed on. He is 'very God of very God', who became a man, (one of us), in order to die in our place, bear our guilt, suffer our punishment so that we would escape it. All who believe in Him have done that.

So, if you're here without Him, we encourage you: Come to Him, trust in Him, and when you do, you will receive the forgiveness of sin and life everlasting and the glory to come.

(Closing prayer) Father, we do thank You for the great truths that we have just sung, and the great truths we have read about in the Scriptures. We're secure in You; we're secure in the hand of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He's paid the price for each one of us who have put our faith in Him—so we can never be plucked out of His hand. And some day He will bring us home—and bring us home into glory.

We do suffer difficulties in this life, LORD. It's been described as, 'a veil of tears'. We pass through it; it's a 'dark valley', but we're secure in it nevertheless. And we thank You that You have promised us joy at the end, and even joy in the midst of it. We thank You for Your goodness and Your grace and what You've done for us through Christ. LORD, give us faithfulness to You that we might walk and persevere to Your glory, to the end.

And now, the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

(End of Audio)