

The Community Faces Pain and Joy

God's Word:

John 16:16-24: 20:11-18

Key Verse:

“A little while and you will no longer behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.”

-- John 16:16

Breaking It Down:

In chapters 13-16 of the gospel of John, Jesus' earthly ministry is drawing to an end and He is speaking to His disciples in private. He is providing them final instructions about the ministry they will have once He is gone. He is also preparing them for His impending departure from His life on earth.

That departure is one He knows will cause them great pain. It will be painful not only because they are fond of Him and have come to depend on Him, but also because of the way He will *initially* depart from them. He knows that his arrest and crucifixion will cause them great fear and sadness. But He compares what is to come to childbirth. He speaks of the intense pain a mother endures when the time arrives for her baby's birth. And he notes that it is followed by what some might call a form of "amnesia" when the mother's physical pain is forgotten because of the great joy she feels as she holds that newborn baby in her arms.



Jesus tells His closest followers that they will first grieve mightily as the world is rejoicing at His death and apparent defeat, but that their sorrow will turn to joy, a joy that no one can take away. (John 16:20 and 22)

In this week's passages, Jesus does not provide a detailed description of what is to come but we know that His pending departure includes His painful and humiliating death by crucifixion. Our second passage, John 20:11-18, reveals the joy He foretold in His conversation with His disciples.

There we see the joy of Mary Magdalene when she realizes the Savior's body has not been stolen but that He has risen from the dead and lives again. Her joy compels her to spread the Good News to her fellow followers.

Living It:

For decades, a man named Paul Harvey had a radio program called, "The Rest of the Story." His broadcast was never over until he had provided a surprise ending to his tale.

Likewise, the story of Jesus' life on earth wasn't over until it's surprising – yet foretold – ending. And that ending wasn't the crucifixion.

The disciples grieved mightily at His brutal death, and if God had ended Jesus' story there, all believers would forever be left to grieve and, as Paul wrote in I Corinthians 15, our faith would be in "vain" (verse 14) and we would be people to be "pitied" (verse 19).

But the story didn't end there. Jesus rose from the grave after three days and three nights just as He said He would. That fact prompted joy among His followers then living and among all followers ever since. As the hymn says, "We serve a risen Savior."

Jesus told His followers that after their sorrow they would have a joy that no one could take away. (John 16:20) That joy came from Jesus' resurrection, the knowledge that through Him we too can have eternal life, and that Jesus--who ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9)--will one day return for His people.

Jesus' words about a joy that could not be taken away held true for His first disciples. Their joy and faith were unshaken after His resurrection. They served Him until their deaths, most of which came because they refused to deny their faith.



What about our faith? Is our joy unshakeable? Are we living day to day as people of joy? Are we people looking joyfully to Christ's soon return for His people?

We will have pain and tribulation in this life and we should rally around one another at these times, but we should be a community of people filled with rejoicing for we serve a Savior who has overcome the world and has prepared a place for us to one day dwell with Him. (John 14:2-3)

Understanding It:

1. To what was Jesus referring in John 16:16 when He told His disciples that in a little while they would no longer behold Him and that later they would see Him again?
 2. In John 16:20, why does Jesus say that the world would be rejoicing while His followers would be sorrowful?
 3. What turns the disciples' sorrow into joy?
 4. Jesus is no longer walking on earth in His physical form so how can we see Him today and rejoice in His presence?
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Doing It:

Start this week focusing on the joy of your salvation. I Thessalonians, the same book that vividly describes the moment Christ returns for His people (I Thes. 4:16-17) gives us three commands that can help us. Practice the instructions of I Thessalonians 5:16-18.

Verse 16: Rejoice always.

Verse 17: Pray without ceasing.

Verse 18: In everything give thanks.

