

From Sorrow to Joy

John 16:12-22

Introduction

Jesus said, *“A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me” (John 16:16)*. This was confusing for the disciples. After all, they didn’t understand much of what Jesus said because the Holy Spirit, who enlightens our darkened minds and teaches us, had not yet been given. However, there has also been confusion among church scholars through the years over what this means. Many early church fathers see the second “little while” being the church age, and the “see me again” as the second coming, when our sorrow will be turned to joy. Later scholars say that the second “little while” began with the time Jesus was taken away to be crucified and “seeing Him again” was after the resurrection. We want to compare these two interpretations today.

Church Age / Second Coming

If we say that the second “little while” is the Church Age, we’re saying that the focus is on us. We don’t see Jesus now because He has been taken away, back up to heaven. The world rejoices in His absence. They relish in their sin. The more they can do away with Jesus, the better. And we are sorrowful because we can see the way the world is going, and our only hope for the future is for Christ’s return. Maranatha! Lord, come quickly! Jesus is promising that He will return, and our sorrow will be turned into joy when He does.

Crucifixion / Resurrection

To see this as a prediction of the crucifixion and resurrection makes more sense. We have eight places in Scripture where Jesus predicts His death and resurrection. The world rejoiced at His death as they mocked Him around the cross (read *Luke 23:35-37*). The disciples were sorrowful as they hid in *fear of the Jews (John 20:19)*. Then, when they saw Him, they rejoiced (read *Luke 24:40-41*). But there is a better way to look at this. And that is to realize there is only one correct interpretation of Scripture, but there may be many applications.

Interpretation and Application

When looking for the correct interpretation of a passage of Scripture, it is good to follow the lead of Martin Luther and look for the simplest. If we do that, we can see that He was speaking to His disciples. Therefore, He is obviously talking about what is important to them. What matters to them right now is that He is going to be taken away from them and killed. It will appear as if the world and Satan have won. But, with the resurrection, He will come back to them, turning their sorrow into joy.

Perspective

But from our perspective, this side of the cross, we don’t have the same feelings of loss and sorrow as His disciples had. They were losing their closest Friend and Master. Their world was being turned upside down. And though Jesus told them He was coming back, they just couldn’t shake the sorrow they felt from their loss. Jesus was gone.

Our Loss

Using our interpretation/application method, we can see how this applies to us. Even though we know that the crucified, risen Jesus is Lord of all, this world seems to have won. So, we look forward to the day when He returns, and our sorrow will be turned into joy. But there is a more immanent application than that. Throughout life, we have seasons where Jesus seems far away from us personally, even though He has promised to be *with us always, to the end of the age* (**Matthew 28:20**). Things aren't going our way and prayers seem to bounce back off the ceiling. This is what the apostle Paul is talking about in **2 Timothy 2**, when he says to *be ready in season and out of season* (**2 Timothy 2:4**). We ask with the psalmist, (read **Psalm 13:1-2**). We have experienced loss and God seems far away. Then, God uses something to cause us to see that Jesus is right here. He never left us; and in thanksgiving, our sorrow is turned into joy.

Means of Grace

God has given gifts to us to help us see Jesus when He seems far away. They are Word and Sacrament. When we hear the Word, we are hearing the voice of Jesus. When we receive the bread and wine of Holy Communion, we are receiving the body and blood of Christ; our sins are forgiven, and our faith is strengthened. And once again, with the eyes of faith, we can see that the crucified, risen Jesus is there with us, watching over us and protecting us as our Shepherd. And He turns our sorrow into joy.

ALLELUIA! CHRIST IS RISEN!

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
