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Sermon Summary #19

Enjoying the Joy that Lasts Forever John 16:16-24

I despise the term, *Indian-giver*. If you look it up in Webster's Dictionary it is defined as "a person who gives something to another and then takes it back." I was happy to discover that the Concise Oxford English Dictionary doesn't even include a listing for the term. I don't know where it came from or when it was first coined, but it is derogatory of Native Americans and perhaps even racist. It suggests that an "Indian" is by nature the sort of individual who cannot be trusted when he gives you something because he is just as likely to take it away without cause or justification. So let's dispense with the term altogether.

That being said, there are, sadly, far too many people in our world of every race who cannot be trusted in the giving of a gift or the making of a promise. This tendency is not unique to any particular ethnicity or age group. It is found in varying degrees among all people. And it is an especially painful reality. Few things hurt more than to have your dreams awakened or your expectations elevated, only to have it all come crashing down when someone who promised you something withdraws it or takes it back, often at the most inopportune moment.

Or it may be that they don't so much "take back" what they first gave as it is that they make a promise or a guarantee about the abiding reality of something, only then to discover that whatever you were counting on has disintegrated or ceased to work or is irreparably broken or quite literally disappears. We've all encountered this in life. It may have been a person's pledge to you that no matter what may come they would always be there for you. Then it turns out that when you needed them most, they were nowhere to be found. Or it may have been the warranty on an automobile or some other product you purchased, assuring you that if something broke down the seller would immediately fix it or provide you with a comparable substitute. Of course, when it did break down they directed your attention to the fine print which released them from all responsibility or liability. Illustrations like this could be cited almost without end.

I say all this to highlight the magnificence of what Jesus said to his disciple in the upper room, a promise he made to them and, I believe, to all his followers throughout the ages, even down to the present day. It's in John 16:22. "So also you have sorrow now," said Jesus, "but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and ***no one will take your joy from you.***" No one will take your joy from you! What an incredible promise. But is it true? Or is the "joy" that Jesus imparts to those who know and love him a fleeting feeling that disappears as soon as times get tough? Is it really true, genuinely and sincerely true, that the "joy" that Jesus brings to the human heart is ours forever, no matter what we may face in life? Yes!

But to better understand what Jesus meant by this, we need to step back a bit and set the context for his words.

An Unusual Dialogue

John 16:16-19 records for us a strange interaction that took place between Jesus and his disciples in the upper room. Jesus said to them in v. 16, “A little while, and you will see me no longer, and again a little while, and you will see me.” This was confusing to the disciples. They had no idea what he meant by this (v. 18b). In spite of the numerous occasions when Jesus spoke to them with absolute clarity about what was to occur, the disciples still have not grasped what is entailed by the idea of a Messiah who would be crucified, would rise from the dead, would depart from them by ascending into heaven and then send to them “another Helper” (the Holy Spirit) who would carry on the ministry that Jesus began.

If it wasn’t obvious to them, it should be to us that Jesus was referring to his death and resurrection. When he told them that in a little while “you will see me no longer” he had in mind his impending arrest, trial, and crucifixion. He was about to die. He would be buried and laid in a tomb. They would no longer “see” him. That is clear enough. And when Jesus then said, “again a little while, and you will see me” he surely has in view his resurrection from the dead and his appearance to them prior to his ascension into heaven. It is our Lord’s way of assuring his followers that although he will for a short time be separated from them, it will only be “a little while.” To be precise, it will only be three days. He will then rise from the dead and they will once again “see” him.

This is what led Jesus to say in v. 20, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.” When Jesus is horribly scourged and nailed to a cross, the disciples will indeed “weep and lament.” It will be a time of unimaginable grief for them as their friend and Lord is so violently and viciously taken from them and subjected to the most horrific form of execution known to the ancient world.

They will “weep” not only for themselves but also for him. That he should be made to suffer such agony will cause indescribable sorrow in their souls. That one who was altogether perfect and loving and patient and truthful and kind should be treated with such contempt and sadistic cruelty is rightly the cause of intense sorrow and lament.

On the other hand, ***“the world will rejoice”*** (v. 20). By the “world” Jesus has in mind not just the Roman political machine, together with its military. This is more than simply the religious leaders of Israel who will rejoice that this troublemaker who claimed to be the Messiah is finally out of their way. This is inclusive of the “world” of unbelievers, both Jewish and Gentile, who were made to feel increasingly uncomfortable by the mere presence of Jesus on the earth.

The “world” rejoices when Jesus is disposed of because he had exposed their sin. He had uncovered their guilt. They were uncomfortable by his presence. His very life was a daily rebuke of their idolatry and immorality. They were quite literally thrilled that Jesus would be humiliated and executed and removed from their midst.

As he said in John 7:7, the “world . . . hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.” The words of Jesus, together with his deeds of kindness and mercy and power and authority, served to pull back the veil on the religious hypocrisy of the Pharisees. His call for repentance and acknowledgment of his identity as Messiah put the entire populace on notice that they could no longer appeal to ignorance. Their responsibility to bow in humble submission to the authority of the true and only Lord of the universe was made crystal clear. And they hated him for it. People who have become comfortable living in the darkness are enraged at anyone who dares to turn on the light.

But we must also understand that by the “world” Jesus is talking no less about *Satan and the demonic hosts*. As I mentioned to you last week, in 1 John 5:18 the apostle declares that this entire “world” that rejoices over the death of Jesus “lies in the power of the evil one.” Satan and his demons stupidly and sinfully thought that by stirring Judas Iscariot to betray him and by moving Herod and Pilate to crucify him they could finally be rid of Jesus.

But herein is the great and glorious irony of the crucifixion. Let’s step out of John’s gospel for a moment and look at what Paul says in Colossians 2:13-15 –

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Col. 2:13-15).

What an incredibly encouraging passage this is! “He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (Col. 2:15). Let’s unpack it, word by word.

We should begin by determining who the “He” is of v. 15 that is responsible for this remarkable triumph. Is the subject of this “disarming” God the Father or our Lord Jesus Christ or perhaps, in some sense, both of them? In vv. 13-14 God the Father was clearly the subject of the saving action described and many think it likely that such is the case here again in v. 15.

The terminology Paul employed: “disarm” or “strip away,” “publicly display,” as well as “triumph over” is violent. Most are agreed, therefore, that the “rulers and authorities” are fallen angelic hosts, whom we know as the devil and his demons. In fact, the terms Paul uses to describe them (“rulers and authorities”) are standard vocabulary in the New Testament for demonic beings (see Eph. 1:20-21; 3:10; 6:10ff.; Romans 8:38).

What precisely, then, is meant in saying that God “disarmed” the demonic hosts. The only other place in the New Testament where this verb is used is in Colossians 3:9 where Paul describes Christians as those who have “put off” the old self, which is to say, they have “laid aside” or “stripped themselves” of the old self as if it were a garment to be discarded.

Paul's point is that whereas the powers of evil constantly attacked our Lord, assailing him throughout the course of his earthly ministry, by means of his atoning death Jesus "stripped" them from himself much as one would disrobe and cast aside an old and filthy garment.

More than that, God has "put them to open shame" or "made a public spectacle" of them. This is a bit unusual, insofar as we humans cannot "see" or "witness" such an exposure of these spiritual beings. In what sense, then, were they put to "open shame" or made a "public spectacle" of?

There are two ways of answering this question. On the one hand, Paul may be referring to a display or spectacle "visible" only to the spiritual realm itself. In other words, it is before both the holy angels as well as the unholy, fallen hosts that this triumph was made known. In Ephesians 3:10 Paul says that it is through the church that the wisdom of God is being "made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." Clearly, it is important to God's purposes that the demonic realm "see" or be aware of his wisdom as it is revealed in the salvation and ministry of the church on earth. Perhaps, then, the disrobing or disarming of the demonic hosts is made "public" to the unseen world of angels and demons alike as part of God's design to glorify himself in the salvation of sinners.

On the other hand, we may be guilty of pressing Paul's language beyond its proper bounds. It would seem he is making use of a common image in his day to make a theological point. In other words, our problem may be that we are expecting some literal manifestation of a truth that is described in obviously metaphorical terms. Let me explain.

The verse actually says that he "put them to open shame, BY TRIUMPHING OVER THEM in him." In other words, the way in which the rulers and authorities were put to open shame was by being subject to the "triumphal procession" of God in Christ. The word translated "triumphing" (used elsewhere in the New Testament only in 2 Corinthians 2:14) was descriptive of a Roman general parading his captives behind him as the spoil and booty of war, all of which was designed to humiliate them and bring public attention to their subjugation.

Thus, Paul's point here may simply be that God's defeat of the demonic hosts is like that of an earthly military commander's triumph over and public display of his enemies. We are not to look for some specific time or event or way in which this "open shame" of the demonic hosts was made known or visible. Rather, we are to rest assured and rejoice in the promise that our spiritual enemies were as thoroughly defeated and stripped of their dignity and power as were those physical enemies who unsuccessfully opposed and were eventually conquered by a Roman general and his army.

But surely the most stunning statement of all is the final phrase of v. 15. It was "in" or "through" or "by" the cross that this victory was achieved. The ESV renders it, "in him," as if referring to Christ. This is certainly possible, but I think it more likely that the antecedent in view is the "cross" of v. 14, to which God is said to have nailed our sins.

Amazing! The very instrument which to all eyes appeared to seal Christ's doom was his tool of triumph! In a marvelous twist of divine irony, the cross, the emblem of disgrace and death by which the demonic hosts thought they had defeated Christ, is turned on them and becomes the instrument of their humiliating demise.

What adds to the irony of this is that back in John 16 we read that the “world” of unbelievers and demonic spirits actually **“rejoiced”** at the death of Jesus. The irony is that by means of the cross, the very instrument which they mistakenly believed had finally and forever put an end to the presence of Jesus, they were themselves defeated and publicly shamed and triumphed over.

The world, says Jesus, will celebrate and rejoice when I die, and you will be sad. But only for a brief moment! Only for a short season! Soon, says Jesus, “I will rise again from the dead as proof that my death has conquered sin and Satan, and on that day you will rejoice. Indeed, ‘your sorrow will turn into joy’” (John 16:20b).

In v. 21 Jesus makes use of an analogy to drive home his point. He compares what is about to happen to him and his disciples with a pregnant woman who is about to give birth. The pain of delivery is intense and brings tears and anguish. But when she finally gives birth to her child, she ceases to weep and rejoices that she has a new baby.

Jesus says that this is what is about to happen to him and his followers. His impending death on the cross feels like a loss that brings sadness and tears, but it will lead to resurrection life and the joy and happiness that is similar to a mother who forgets the agony of childbirth once her newborn son or daughter is placed in her arms.

Thus, when Jesus comes to v. 22 we understand the force of the word **“so”** with which it begins. Just like a woman in labor whose anguish is almost unbearable, the thought of losing me has overwhelmed your hearts. But again, just like that woman whose heart rejoices once the child is safely born, you too will rejoice when you see me again after I am raised from the dead. In that day, at that moment, “your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (v. 22b).

This is precisely what happened. When Jesus appeared to the disciples on Sunday morning we read in John 20:20 that “the disciples were **glad** when they saw the Lord.” It is this “gladness” of heart, this “joy” that Jesus mentions in v. 22, that I want to focus on in the time we have remaining this morning.

Joy in the Last Words of Jesus

The frequency of the word “joy” and the verb to “rejoice” in John 13-17 is something we shouldn’t overlook.

“You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).

“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy” (John 16:20).

“When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born in the world” (John 16:21).

“So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you” (John 16:22).

“Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

“But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13).

Jesus is obviously greatly concerned with our experience of joy. Why? Because *joy is the reason why God created the universe*. Joy is the reason why Jesus endured the shame of the cross (Heb. 12:1-3). Perhaps you’re saying to yourself, “Hold on, Sam. I thought God created the universe so that he might be glorified.” That’s right. He did. But how or in what way is God most glorified? I would argue that he is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. Or to put it in slightly different terms, God is most glorified in us when we are as glad and joyful and delighted in him as it is possible for a human to be.

The primary way that God pursues his own glory and fame is by producing in the hearts of a chosen people a deep, durable delight in who he is. In other words, it is precisely when you and I are fascinated with God above all else, satisfied with God more than with anything this life offers, delighted and excited and captivated and enthralled with

God far beyond any other individual or experience, that he is most glorified and honored by us. And that's just another way of describing or defining the word "joy".

Joy in God matters profoundly because more than any other human response or experience, joy clearly and thoroughly and unmistakably reveals the worth and value and splendor of whatever it is that evokes it. That is why joy or delight is the single most effective means for glorifying and magnifying God.

Deep durable delight in God is how he is most magnified and honored in you. God's fame is made known throughout the earth and his majesty is seen most effectively in you (and all believers) when you are most pleased and satisfied and fascinated and enthralled with the splendor of his beauty that can be seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

When you experience and express joy in God, perhaps in the midst of indescribable suffering or hardship or loss, others stop and ask: "What must this God be like that he is deemed worthy not simply of acknowledgement but delight, not simply recognition but rejoicing?"

"Joy is the clearest witness to the worth of what we enjoy. It is the deepest reverberation in the heart of man of the value of God's glory" (John Piper).

The older I get the less impressed I am by the cultural, economic, financial, and political endeavors of people in our society. It seems that virtually everything in our world has a shelf life. In other words, everything, from the smallest projects to the most massive artifacts of human productivity, is destined to crumble. Everyone, whether Democrat or Republican, will ultimately lose their power and prestige.

Life is so fragile. Institutions become obsolete. Investments can disappear. Health deteriorates. Nations rise and nations fall. There simply isn't much in life that is meant for the long haul. Very little is firm and permanent and worthy of our trust. My money can be taken from me. My house can be destroyed by a tornado. The elders of Bridgeway Church can fire me tomorrow. Even my family can decide that they want nothing else to do with me. It makes a person wonder: does anything last forever? Is there anything that carries with it an iron-clad, eternal, unchanging, immutable guarantee? And the answer is Yes.

Jesus says it here in v. 22. My joy in Christ, your joy in Christ, will never be taken away. Is it possible for us to fail to believe in this truth and thus diminish our *experience* of joy? Sure. We do it all the time. Is it possible for us to fall into patterns of sin and to harden our hearts to the work of the Spirit such that our *capacity to enjoy* this joy is undermined? Sure. But the assurance that Jesus here gives us is that this joy is always available and will never be taken away, revoked, rescinded, or ultimately overcome. When we avail ourselves of the many ways that he has provided for awakening and sustaining that joy, it can never be taken from us.

How do we know this is true? On what is this promise based? I think the words of Jesus here in the upper room discourse give us the answer.

The first answer is that our “joy” comes from being united to Jesus, abiding in Jesus, being with Jesus. And the reality of his resurrection from the dead is the assurance that he will never die again; he will never be taken from us; his presence and love and commitment to us is permanent and without end.

Look closely at how Jesus makes the point. He says it in John 16:16b – again in “a little while, and you will see me.” Look also at v. 22 where he assures them that he will “see” them again. Back in John 14:18-19 Jesus said, “I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me.”

The foundation of this abiding joy is the presence of Jesus! They will rejoice because Jesus will be with them. The joy that will never be taken from them is the joy that comes from knowing and seeing and being with Jesus. If your joy is in the physical pleasures of sex or the power that comes with money or the excellence with which you play a particular sport, or the skill with which you fulfill your job, your joy will be short-lived. Jesus is our only full, final, lasting joy.

The joy that comes from knowing Jesus will last forever because Jesus will last forever! He has been raised from the dead. He conquered sin and death. He conquered the grave. It’s as if Jesus says, “As long as I am alive your joy will live. Because I will never die again, your joy will never die or be taken from you.”

But there is yet another reason why we can be assured that this joy will never be taken from us. It is because ***we too will experience resurrection life***. It’s one thing to say that since Jesus has been raised from the dead he will always be present to preserve and uphold joy in the hearts of people. But what if *we* aren’t there? What if *we* die and forever disappear? What good is it to say that this joy will never be taken from us if *we* don’t exist to enjoy it?

But Jesus makes it clear that it is precisely because he will rise from the dead and live forever that we can be assured that we will rise and live forever. Look back with me at John 14:19b. There Jesus said: ***“Because I live, you also will live.”***

Clearly, there are two things that have to be true for the promise of John 16:22 to be real and rock solid. First, the source of our joy must live and last forever. Jesus is that source and he has been raised to live and to last forever. He will never die again or disappear. The second thing that must happen for this promise to be true is that we ourselves live and last forever. And that is precisely what Jesus promised to his followers: because he will live, we also will live!

Jesus said much the same thing to Martha following the death of Lazarus. She was disconsolate at the loss of her brother. So Jesus says to her: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

In saying that Christians will "never die" Jesus isn't ignoring the fact of physical death. He's emphasizing the reality of unending spiritual life in his presence. The joy that you now have through faith in me and delight in me and trust and satisfaction in me won't be interrupted or undermined when you die physically. You will simply pass from life in this world with me into life in the next world with me. But you will always be with me, and for that reason your joy will never be taken from you.

Conclusion

In this you can confidently trust: the joy that Jesus gives to those who know and love him will never be taken from them. It will endure eternally. It will sustain you through the worst that this life can throw in your face. It will uphold you when everything else crumbles and disintegrates. It is the only commodity, if I may be allowed to use that word, that comes with an iron-clad guarantee. It is iron-clad because it is blood bought.

And so I offer to each of you today the joy that never ends, the joy that isn't dependent on physical health or worldly wealth or a faithful spouse or a car that never breaks down or a friend who always keeps his word. What I offer you is the joy that comes from the heart of Jesus himself into the hearts of those who truly know and trust him.

It can be yours today. And once it is truly yours through faith in Jesus, it can never be taken from you.