
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read John 16.16-22. Jesus has been shocking the apostles with the truths that he is leaving them, they will face persecution as believers, and he will send them the Holy Spirit to empower and enlighten them. Since Jesus has been speaking about his crucifixion and resurrection, that is how we interpret 16.16: by the next evening, Jesus would be dead, and they would no longer see him; less than forty-eight hours later, Jesus would rise from the grave and they would see him again. The Jews counted days differently than we do: Friday [the day of death] was the first day, Saturday [a day in the grave] was the second day, Sunday [the day of resurrection] was the third day; thus we say, “On the third day, he rose again!” John used two different words for “see” in 16.16, but probably this was playful, using the words as synonyms. John did that often; and as Greek became the language of many cultures 300 years earlier, some of the distinctions between similar words were lost. The apostles were confused, frustrated, anxious, fearful about what they were hearing in this long discussion [it started in 13.31!], and all that finally erupted in muttering among themselves. Jesus told them that in his crucifixion the non-believing world would rejoice, while they would weep and mourn. To illustrate how they would feel, he talked about the pain a woman has giving birth, but the joy that results when the baby is born. They would have sorrow in the crucifixion, but that would turn to joy in the resurrection. John had some more fun with words here: “sorrow” [or “sadness” or “grief”] in 16.20 and “pain” [or “distress” or “sorrow”] in 16.21 are the same word in the Greek text, further strengthening the illustration of Jesus: their sorrow is like a birthing mother’s pain: excruciating, but temporary and giving way to great joy.

In the Jewish scriptures of the Old Testament, the suffering and joy of child birth sometimes represents how God’s people in Israel would suffer presently but look forward to the time of salvation from the Messiah [see for example Isaiah 26.16-21]. Also, there was a popular metaphor in Jewish circles of Jesus’ day, that “birth pains of the Messiah” referred to a time of terrible trouble that must precede the Messiah’s deliverance of the nation. This will be true in the Great Tribulation before Jesus returns to judge and set up his kingdom, but even at the time of the apostles, they would bear much pain or trouble after the crucifixion. As Jesus uses the teaching here, they will feel sorrow when he dies, but joy [even amidst the persecution he has described to them] at his resurrection.

Reflect: The resurrection was a cause for joy, but also the crucifixion-resurrection event is the start of the New Covenant era, the end times, in which believers are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Nobody could take away the joy of the apostles or believers today, because it is sourced in Christ and the Holy Spirit [as we have learned in the last couple of weeks]. You will suffer in this life, not just because you struggle with sin and live in a fallen world, but because forces of evil and corrupted people will come against you for aligning yourself with Christ. If you focus on the resurrection of Christ and what it means for you now and in eternity, you will remain joyful. Pray about this now, and plan to reflect a little each day on the hope you have for final deliverance from suffering by Christ.

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read John 16.23-24. As the NASB notes, John used two different words for “ask” in 16.26; this time there might be meaning in the switch. It could mean that in that day [the end times after the resurrection], they would not ask Jesus to clarify anything [now having clarity from his post-resurrection teaching and the Holy Spirit’s teaching], but would be praying requests to God the Father; or it could mean that they would not “request” anything from Jesus, but they could practically “demand” responses from God the Father by praying in Christ’s name. Or it could be that John was just being playful again and using the two words as synonyms. The apostles had not yet prayed for anything in Christ’s name, because he was there with them; but now he was leaving to return to God the Father and would send the Holy Spirit to them, so they should pray in his name [pray his will, under his authority, by his direction, for his glory]. Recall our previous discussions about how faith leads to love leads to obedience leads to pursuit of the gospel mission leads to fervent prayer for success in that mission leads to answered prayer and fruitful results lead to our joy and peace being complete.

Reflect: Do you think if you were experiencing greater persecution and greater spiritual attack that you would pray more fervently in Christ’s name? Do you trust that he would answer your prayers, giving you everything you would need to be sustained and to carry on his work? Why or why not? Should you pray more fervently, expectantly now?

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read John 16.25-33. Believers seek to pray in Christ's name, but we can pray directly to God the Father, who also loves us. Jesus mentioned the parameters of the most miraculous event in history: the Son of God came from God the Father and Heaven to enter our world, our time and space, as the man Jesus; and he left to return to God the Father and Heaven through the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Coming in through birth actually was a humiliation for the divine Son; going out through the culturally shameful crucifixion actually was a glorification. The apostles thought they now understood, but they still did not. They had a good conclusion, that Jesus came from God, but they were basing it on flimsy reasoning, they still had a shallow and uninformed faith. Jesus reacted by telling them that it would not be only Peter who would fail to stand up for Jesus after his arrest, they all would scatter and desert him. Peter would trail along behind after the arrest and John would witness the crucifixion, but none of them would defend Jesus or admit to their association with him. They would really start to grasp what Jesus said in this conversation after the resurrection, when Jesus appeared to them and explained things, and then sent the Spirit to explain further. Jesus has spoken all this to them on this last night of life, so they would have peace; they can have assurance of peace with God, which should lead them to feel peace inside as they walk by the Spirit, experience the fruit of the Spirit, and anticipate the peace that will come in the final deliverance. Even now, while in the world they would have affliction or oppression, they should have courage, for Jesus has overcome the world [1.5]. Scholar D. A. Carson says that our fundamental basis for persevering through our struggles is knowing the victory of Christ, that he has conquered the system of the world, evil, and Satan. We share in his victory by knowing nothing can hurt our relationship with God, our salvation in Christ, our connection through the Holy Spirit, so nothing ultimately can damage us; thus we take heart and experience peace inside.

Reflect: What causes you fear? How can these truths help you have courage or take heart even when you are afraid? Can knowing your eternal destiny is safe and an end to all trouble is coming help you do the right thing even when it will mean suffering now? Can knowing that help you persevere through suffering with hope and faith?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read John 17.1-5. Postures in prayer have meaning. Sometimes we bow down on our knees to show submission and dependence; Jesus looked to Heaven to show confidence in the Father's provision. His hour of glorification had come, so he prayed that God would bring it, that God the Father's will would be done, resulting in glory for the Son and the Father. God the Father's sovereignty was a reason to pray, not a disincentive [Jesus also prayed for the Father's will in Matthew 6.9-10]. As we learned previously in this gospel, God the Father gave the Son of God all authority on earth, so the Son could give life; now Jesus said this is the basis for the Father glorifying the Son so the Son can glorify the Father: only by going to the cross could the Son and Father be glorified by making provision for people to receive deliverance to spiritual life. The Father has always given the Son this authority, it is an eternal decision existing before time and creation began. God's plan for redemption of the world and his people also has eternally existed as a means to bring God glory. The great theme of the Bible is God's glorification; one means of glorifying himself was for God the Father to send the Son to make provision for saving people to represent God here. Jesus speaks here as though it all is finished, reflecting his certainty at how it will all work out.

Reflect: What does your posture in prayer say to God about your attitude? [Hint, if your child adopted that posture while talking with you, what would you infer from it?] Should you adopt a different posture? Have you thought there was no need to pray because God was in control? How does Jesus' view change your thinking? Have you ever thought about the theme of the Bible? Are there other running themes besides God's glory and glorification?

Day 5

Learn & Reflect: Prayerfully read John 17.1-5. What does Jesus say is eternal life? How is that different from what you would have said before reading this? Look at the New Covenant promise in Jeremiah 31.34; is this relational or intellectual? Belief [3.16; 6.40], not just knowledge of facts, brings us to *knowing* God beyond knowing facts about him, to entering into a faith based relationship. Do you feel you have a *relationship* with God, that you *experience* this with him? This is about abundant spiritual life now, not just eternity. We do find joy and peace looking forward to our ultimate deliverance, but we should experience tremendous blessings from walking with God in relationship now, growing in faith, character, and maturity, being empowered to victory over sin and temptation, knowing to do what is right in all situations... and *experiencing God's presence and love*.