

# **Easter 2013**

## **Unspeakable Joy \* John 16:16-24**

### **Introduction**

All right, thank you worship team, choir, and orchestra. Wasn't it great to have them leading us in worship this morning? And guess what? They are going to come back for more in just a little bit. But right now we are going to continue to worship by opening up God's Word together. So, if you have a Bible please take it and turn with me to John 16. If you don't happen to have a Bible, that's ok, feel free to grab one from under the pew in front of you or look on with one of your neighbors. And by the way, if you don't have a Bible of your own feel free to take one home with you today. Just consider it our gift to you here on Easter Sunday morning.

Now, if you are a guest today, let me once again say welcome and make you aware that for the last four months here at Harmony we have been in a wonderful study in the Gospel of Matthew. And we would love to have you join us in the weeks ahead as we continue to learn what Jesus has to say about topics such as marriage, divorce, sex, possessions, and conflict management, just to name a few. However, today in celebration of the resurrection we are going to look at a passage from one of the other gospels, specifically John 16:16-22. And while you are turning there, let me set the context for you just a little bit.

Jesus and His 12 disciples have gathered for what would be their final meal together before His death. This meal would kick off the events of what we know as Easter weekend, what would be a very turbulent 72 hours for the disciples. In the next three days these men would experience unspeakable emotions. They would have incredible lows and incredible highs. They would experience both immense pain and immense joy. And so in preparation for what they were about to face, Jesus has this to say to them in verses 16-22 of John 16:

*"A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." 17 So some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" 18 So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about." 19 Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, '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, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. 21 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 into the world. 22 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 16:16-22 (ESV)*

Now, this morning I want to get to the bottom line very quickly. Those who know me know that's pretty much the kind of guy I am. I am not much for small talk. I usually just want to know the bottom line. Last week after all the tests on my little girl at the University of Iowa the doctors were going over the results and explaining all the problems with her heart and going on and on and so I finally said, just tell me the bottom line, what is all of this going to mean? Well, here is the bottom line for today. And it is very simple. I want us all to leave with one phrase from Jesus pulsating through our hearts and minds. It is the phrase at the end of verse 22. Look at it with me: "no one will take your joy from you." Do you see it? "No one will take your joy from you." Today, I want you to leave knowing without a shadow of a doubt that you have this joy and no one can take from you. I'd like to modify this phrase slightly to make it personal and say it this way: "no one can take my joy from me." In fact, why don't we say it together? Everyone: "no one can take my joy from me." Now, I don't if you really felt this or not. And I certainly don't know whether you meant it or not. But I do hope that you will both feel it and mean it when you leave this room today, and you will feel it and mean it for the rest of your lives. Wherever you find yourself this morning; in pain, deeply hurting, angry, questioning, far from God, not

sure what this is all about. Wherever you are at, when you leave today I want you to have a joy that no one can take from you. That's the bottom line for today.

Now, if this is going to happen, there are three important things we need to see in this passage, three things that Jesus is trying to get across to His disciples and three things He wants to get across to us as well.

First, Jesus wants the disciples to understand that they are going to experience pain. Jesus uses the word sorrow in some form seven times in verses 20-22, so it is pretty clear that He wants His disciples to understand there are difficult days ahead. He wants them to know that pain is on the way. Specifically, it will be the pain of watching Him die the bloodiest, most brutal death the world has ever known. And I think here on Easter Sunday morning we have to make sure that we don't forget this. You know, today is a day of celebration. It's a day when we dress up in nice clothes and spend time with family and have Easter Egg Hunts and sing songs of celebration. And all of this is well and good. But we can't forget that without the pain of the cross all of this is meaningless. Without Good Friday, there is no Easter Sunday. Without the cross, there is no resurrection. Without the unspeakable pain of Calvary, there is no unspeakable joy of the empty tomb. So, let me ask this morning, are you thankful for the cross? Are you thankful that Jesus took your punishment? Are you thankful that through His stripes you have been healed? As I said a minute ago, this message is about joy – but that joy comes from remembering what Christ has suffered for us.

I also think it is important to note that Jesus is clear that following Him does not exempt us from pain. I think sometimes we have the idea that, once we follow Jesus, life should become easy. In fact, I remember growing up in church and singing an old hymn entitled *Every Day with Jesus is Sweeter than the Day Before*. Some of you know it. The only problem is, at least in my experience, there are some days that are much more difficult than others. It was actually that way for me this week. I have to tell you as I lay in bed on Monday with a mixture of jet lag and about the worst flu I have ever had I

wasn't singing *Every Day with Jesus is Sweeter than the Day Before*. It was more like please kill me now so I will be out of my misery. Maybe a little exaggeration, but close. Anyways, following Jesus doesn't exempt us from experiencing pain. And Jesus never hid this from His disciples. In fact, notice what He tells them in verse 33:

*In the world you will have tribulation.*

So, one of the things Jesus is trying to do in this passage is prepare His disciples for the pain they are about to experience when He is taken away from them.

However, Jesus also has another purpose in mind. Not only does He want to warn his disciples of impending pain, but He also wants to comfort them in the midst of that pain. Look at the end of verse 20 again:

*You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.*

So, for a little while as He is taken away from them, the disciples will be sorrowful. They will weep and mourn. While the world rejoices, thinking they have won, the disciples will be in agony. But this will last for only a moment, because after another little while, Jesus will be resurrected and their sorrow will turn to joy. Just a few chapters later, in John 20, we see Jesus' prediction come true. John 20:19-20 says this:

*On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 20 After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.*

And we know, as we read the book of Acts that this was a joy that never left them. Not only did it never leave them, but it also transformed them. I find one of the most amazing things in the entire Bible to be the incredible transformation the resurrection brought in the disciples. Pre-resurrection the disciples were a weak, cowardly, confused group of men. But post-

resurrection they are a joyful, courageous, fearless force that absolutely nothing can stop. In fact, I believe this is one of the greatest evidences for the resurrection, the change it produces in the disciples. Let me just pause here and say that this is one of the reasons we need to make a big deal about Good Friday and Easter. The truths we remember and celebrate on these days are transforming truths, and the number one thing a lost and dying world needs from us is to see the transformation in our lives that Good Friday and Easter bring. Are you with me on this?

So, for a little while the disciples will experience pain as they watch Jesus suffer and die. But then very quickly their sorrow will turn to joy when Jesus is resurrected.

In verse 21, Jesus goes on to give an illustration of what this is like. Look at it with me:

*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 into the world. (John 16:21, ESV)*

Now, I have had the privilege of being present for the birth of all four of my biological children. These were four of the greatest experiences of my life. And while I have learned many things from these experiences, there are two that stand out most clearly. One, childbirth is very painful for the mother. Amen ladies? And two, it is amazing how quickly the pain turns to joy once the baby is born.

And Jesus is telling His disciples that this is what His death and resurrection will be like for them. They are going to suffer unspeakable pain, but the result will be unspeakable joy. This leads to the third important thing that we need to see here, which is that the disciples pain will be temporary, but their joy will be eternal.

The phrase "a little while" is used 7 times in verses 16-19, and is key to understanding what Jesus is trying to get across to the disciples. He wants

them to understand that their sorrow over His death will be temporary, but their joy over His resurrection will be eternal. It will be a joy that no one and no thing will be able to take away from them.

And it is absolutely critical that we understand this truth today. You know, we are a diverse group of people that have gathered in this room. There are lots of things that are different about us. But there is at least one thing we have in common. We all hurt. We all face pain. None of us are immune to it. One of the ways I know this is through something we call the prayer sheet here at Harmony. This is a list of many of the current prayer requests in our church body, and it is updated every week. And every week it is jammed absolutely full with the pain and difficulties that our people are going through. And I am quite sure there are twice as many or more requests that aren't even on here. In fact I am sure we all have things that could go on the prayer sheet. But the great thing about Easter, the great thing about the resurrection is that in the midst of our temporary pain Jesus offers an eternity of joy. He offers us the opportunity to look at our pain and our hurt and our struggles and say, "they can't take my joy from me."

However, this still leaves us with two critical questions, doesn't it? One, where does this joy come from? And two, how do you get it? Let's look at these one at a time.

First, where does this joy come from? Well, it comes from two things. First and foremost, it comes from the fact that Jesus' resurrection means He will never die again. Yes, Jesus died. Yes, the disciples were temporarily separated from Him. Yes, it was momentarily painful. But after a little while Jesus was restored to them, never to be taken away again.

And there is a key phrase in verse 22 that is easy to miss, but it is absolutely essential to understanding where true joy comes from. Jesus says:

*I will see you again and your heart will rejoice.*

Do you get what this means? It means that true joy comes from being with Jesus. Why would the disciples have pain? Because for a little while they would be separated from Him. And why would they have joy, a joy that could never be taken from them? Because Jesus would be restored to them, never to be taken away again.

And so let me make this as clear as I can. True joy in life comes through only one thing: being with Jesus. It can be found nowhere else. As David says in Psalm 16:

*In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*

Let me just say this. There is no joy in this passage, nor is there any joy in Easter or anywhere else for that matter for those who don't want to be with Jesus. Jesus is the only true joy, the only joy that can never be taken away from you. And He can't be taken away from you because He rose from the grave, never to die again.

However, there is another component to this joy. Joy comes not only from Jesus never being taken away from you, but also from you never being taken away from Him. You see, the resurrection not only means that Jesus will never die again, it also means that those who believe in Him will never die either. You see, when Jesus was raised from the dead, those who believe in Him were raised from the dead as well. Let me take you quickly to another passage in John, this time chapter 11. In John 11 we have the story of the resurrection of Lazarus. Lazarus was a good friend of Jesus who came down with a serious illness and quickly died. And so Jesus travelled to Lazarus' hometown to raise him from the dead. And right before he did so, Jesus said these words to Lazarus' sister Martha:

*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 (ESV)*

Now, at first this might seem confusing; so let me explain what Jesus is saying here. He's saying you can have eternal life by believing in Me. That even though you will die physically one day, you can have eternal life and you can have that eternal life right now through Me. So, the joy that can never be taken away from you comes from the fact that Jesus will never die and neither will you. You will have Him, and He will have you forever.

Now, listen to this carefully. Every single one of us has things in which we find joy: family, money, career, sex, alcohol, drugs, pornography. Whatever it may be. However, none of these things can provide us with joy that will last. This week I read in the Hawkeye about the man who recently won the \$338 million Powerball Lottery in New Jersey. The article said that he felt "pure joy" at winning. Unfortunately, his "pure joy" will likely be more like "fleeting elation" because his winnings will not last. Even if he beats the odds, so to speak, and keeps most of his money until he dies, he won't be able to take it with him. You see, the only way for something to be pure joy is if it is guaranteed to last forever. And the only thing in this world that is guaranteed to last forever is our relationship with Jesus.

This of course, leads us to a final, crucial question. How do you obtain this joy? Well, we have already seen this in John 11. Here it is again:

*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. John 11:25-26 (ESV)*

The way that you obtain this joy is through believing in Jesus. Now, let me be clear about what it means to believe in Jesus. First, it means you believe that Jesus the man is also the Son of God. That He isn't just a good man but that He is also God come in the flesh. In fact, in chapter 20 John says that this is the whole purpose for His gospel:

*But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:31, ESV)*



Second, it means recognizing you are a sinner and Jesus died on the cross to save you from your sin. Romans 6:23 tells us this:

*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23, ESV)*

Third and final, it means you believe the tomb is empty. Romans 10:9 says this:

*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

And if this is you, you can leave here today saying: "nothing can take my joy from me."

So, let me ask today, do you believe in Jesus? Do you believe He is both fully man and fully God? Do you believe that because of your sin you deserve death but Jesus died for you? Do you believe that Jesus, not only died, but also was raised again? If so, there is nothing, absolutely nothing that can take your joy from you. You will have it for all eternity.

I'd like to leave you today by reading the last verse of John 16. If you still have your Bible open, look at it with me. John 16:33:

*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*

Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.

© 2012 by Chris Carr. You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that: (1) you credit the author, (2) any modifications are clearly marked, (3) you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, (4) you include Harmony Bible Church's website address ([www.harmonybiblechurch.org](http://www.harmonybiblechurch.org)) on the copied resource.