

November 2, 2025 by Steve Brandon

## Sorrow Turned into Joy

### John 16:16-24



1. A Little While (verses 16-19)
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Let me show you a picture.



This is a picture of Carissa, my daughter, moments after giving birth to their second child.

I love this picture because it shows the intensity of birth. She is still in the hospital, as you can see the nurse who is there attending to something on her chin or on her neck. If you look closely, you can identify another hand of a nurse in gloves in the lower left, tugging at the blanket. You can see her husband, Caleb, with her in a moment of happiness, leaning over the hospital bed, leaning into all that just took place, joyful that all has gone well, and his wife and his daughter are breathing and doing well. You can see the top part of her daughter's head. You know that she has been placed upon Carissa's chest, as they often do with newborns, providing skin-to-skin contact, fostering early bonding between mother and child. You can especially see the joy on Carissa's face. You can't quite tell whether she is jubilant with joy, or whether she is crying with joy. We don't quite know exactly why, whether all has gone well, or she is finally done with the pain of childbirth.

It's one of my favorite pictures of my children. It so captures the moment of childbirth.

What makes the picture so good is that we all know what came before this. Oh, we don't know the details, but we know in general.

We know of the first three months of pregnancy, how they are often filled with morning sickness, nausea and fatigue. as hormones surge and emotions swing. Though outwardly, nothing has changed, the little life is already growing within, causing the parents to think much about the change taking place in the near future.

We know the second trimester, When sickness starts to lift, and what was hidden begins to show. It's often the most enjoyable stage of

pregnancy, with energy that returns. The baby starts to move, and the pregnancy begins to feel real.

We know of the final trimester, when the mother feels the weight of what she's carrying. When sleep is harder and movement is slower. and the parents know that at any moment the child may come.

Then comes the labor, when the contractions grow steadily stronger and closer together. leading to intense pain with intervals of rest. this may last for an hour or for 10 hours. It's not pleasant. Mothers will often scream because of the pain and anguish of the labor. At the end comes the urge to push, the baby crowns and out she comes! The baby's first cry fills the room with tears of joy, where exhaustion meets the deepest sense of love and fulfillment.

That's what the picture shows. It's the joy of answered prayers over months, and the whirlwind of new beginnings.

This picture is the picture of our text this morning, when the sorrow of the labor turns into the joy of the birth. So, if you haven't opened your Bibles, I invite you to open now to John, chapter 16. We will be looking at verses 16-24. The title of my message this morning is "Sorrow Turned into Joy." Let's read our text.

John 16:16-24

[Jesus said], "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me." 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'?" So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about." 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'? 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 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. 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. In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Here's my first point:

### **1. A Little While (verses 16-19)**

This is the phrase that Jesus uses to describe the time frame of what will take place over the next few days. Jesus says (in verse 16),

John 16:16

"A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me."

Now, we know what Jesus was talking about. We have been looking at the upper room discourse for several months now. In almost every sermon, I have been setting the context for you: Jesus is soon to be betrayed by Judas. Peter will deny him. Jesus will be placed on trial, and be put to death upon the cross as a criminal. But his death, will be in our place, for those who believe in him. But soon after this, Jesus will rise from the dead!

The entire context of his final words that come in John 13-17, are all about preparing his disciples for these things. So that when these things take place, the disciples will be ready. Over and over again, Jesus says thing like, "Let not your hearts be troubled" (John 14:1). "Let not your hearts be troubled" (John 14:27).

He assured them of his presence and peace. "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18). "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (John 14:27).

He tried to prepare them for what would take place. "I have told you before it takes place, so that when it takes place you may believe" (John 14:29). "I have said all these things to you to keep you from falling away" (John 16:1).

He tells them of how much better it is for them that he leaves. "Because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart? Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you" (John 16:6-7).

We have been hearing this for months now, as we have combed through this final discourse of Jesus to his disciples, preparing them for his departure. So, when Jesus something like "A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me," we understand, because, we have been dwelling long of the words of Jesus. and because we know of what will be taking place. But not so the disciples. When they heard Jesus talking about "a little while this" and "a little while that" they were genuinely confused. You can see their confusion in verse 17,

John 16:17-18

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'?" So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about."

But for us, we don't quite see the confusion, because, we know the answer to the riddle. A little while, and you will see me no longer, because Jesus will die upon the cross and be buried in the tomb. And again in a little while, and you will see me, because Jesus will rise from the dead, and appear to these same disciples. But it wasn't so easy for the disciples.

Consider a riddle that you don't quite know, Like, "What is so fragile, that even saying it breaks it?" The answer is "Silence." Knowing the answer makes the riddle clear. Or how about this riddle: "What is measured in moments, but lasts forever?" the answer is "A memory." You can think again about the question and see how it all makes sense. Here are two more. "What is always ahead of you, but is never seen?" Answer, "the future." "I flee the sky when night is near, But chase the dark and reappear." The answer: "The Sun." After you hear these riddles, they make sense. But before knowing the answer, they are a bit puzzling.

This is how the disciples heard these words of Jesus. They heard these words as a riddle. That's why the disciples later said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech!" (John 16:25). Jesus knew their confusion. We read in verse 19,

John 16:19

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'?"

Jesus, then explains in verse 20.

John 16:20

"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."

This is my second point:

## 2. A Little Weeping (verse 20)

Jesus acknowledges that all is not going to be well and easy. The disciples will face some sorrow. They will lose their friend to death. Anytime that you lose a loved one, there is sorrow.

This is especially true because of the way in which the disciples lost Jesus. Do you remember the disciples on the road to Emmaus? Their hopes were dashed! They had "hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21). Yet, he died. Surely, to these disciples, it all appeared so sudden.

Sure, Jesus had told them before entering Jerusalem that "the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise. But they did not understand the saying, and were afraid to ask him" (Mark 9:31-32). But only a few days earlier, the crowds in Jerusalem had received Jesus as their king! "They took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Jesus, crying out 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!'" (John 12:13). The disciples couldn't imagine that within a few days, Jesus could be gone. During that time, as Jesus was in the tomb, surely, they wept in sorrow.

Yet, the world would not weep. They would rejoice. Jesus said that this would be so:

John 16:20

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.

This is the reality of any victory. There are always a winner and a loser. The contrast could not have been made more clear to me that watching the last outs of the World Series game that ended last night. It was game seven between the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Toronto Blue Jays. After seven innings, the Blue Jays were winning 4-2. All they needed was six outs, and they would become World Series Champions. It was so close for the Blue Jays! But in the top of the eighth, Max Muncy hits a home run to bring the score to 4-3, when it stood going into the top of the ninth. All the Blue Jays needed was three outs! Then Miguel Rojas hits a home run to tie the game at 4-4.

In the bottom of the ninth, all the Blue Jays needed was run. With one out and the bases loaded, Isiah Kiner-Falefa was forced out at the plate. With two outs and the bases still loaded, Andy Pages runs over his teammate, Kiké Hernandez, in deep left field to make an amazing catch to send the game into extra innings. Neither team scored in the 10th.

Then, in the 11th, Los Angeles Dodger catcher Will Smith hits a home run to put the Dodgers ahead 5-4. In the bottom of the 11th, the Blue Jays loaded the bases with one out, but an inning-ending double play sealed the deal. The Dodgers are world champs!

The celebration for the Dodgers began! And the anguish for the Blue Jays was evident on the faces of players and fans. But this is the reality of any victory. There are always winners and losers.

John 16:20

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.

Then comes the twist, for which there is no athletic comparison. Jesus says,

John 16:20

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

There is no way that the sorrow of the Blue Jays would turn into joy at this moment. But that's what Jesus says will take place with the disciples. Their sorrow will turn into joy. It's not that their sorrow will be followed by joy, as if the Blue Jays win the World Series next year. Then the Blue Jays will be joyful next November.

That's not what Jesus says. He says, "your sorrow will be turned into joy." You can easily translate this, "your sorrow will become joy." It's that the very thing that caused them sorrow is the very thing that causes you joy. That's the illustration of verse 21, where we see,

## 3. A Living Illustration (verse 21)

John 16:21

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.

This is the picture that I began my message with, the birth of my daughter's child.

Note here how appropriate the illustration is. The very thing that caused her the anguish, is the very thing that gives her joy! The child was in the womb, and coming out was anguish. Yet, once the baby is delivered, the baby becomes the source of such joy for years to come.

This is perfect analogy for what Jesus is telling his disciples! "The very thing that will cause you anguish, my leaving and my death, are the very things that will turn your sorrow into joy. My cross will become for you the source of life!"

Don Moen wrote some beautiful lyrics that bring this to life.

O mighty cross,  
Love lifted high  
The Lord of life  
raised there to die

His sacrifice  
on Calvary  
Has made the mighty cross  
a tree of life to me<sup>[1]</sup>

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross at Calvary, is the very thing that made that cross, a tree of life for us! This is what Paul wrote in Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.'" In dying upon the cross, Jesus was cursed, but he took the curse of sin for us! Do you see how the anguish of the cross, that which causes sorrow, is actually the very thing that gives us joy?

We see this again in Ephesians 1:7, "In him we have redemption through his blood." That is, we are redeemed by the blood he shed on the cross. His sufferings became the means through which we are forgiven. The sorrow the disciples experienced of Jesus dying upon the cross, has become their joy!

The death of Jesus is our life! Peter caught this in his first epistle, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). Healing for our souls has come through the wounds of Jesus. It is "by his wounds" that we are healed.

The wounds upon the cross caused the disciples to sorrow. But these very wounds are the reason they rejoiced later. Do you remember

when Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection?

John 20:19-20

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

The wounds were the very reason for the joy of the disciples! Yes, Jesus died! But Jesus was raised from the dead! His resurrection is our hope and our joy!

Now, I need to address something in verse 21. Jesus says, "When she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world." I think that you mothers can attest that you remember the anguish. But when you look at your five year-old, the labor pangs are a distant memory, are they not?

And for us, we never forget the death pangs that Jesus suffered upon the cross, which brought sorrow to the disciples. But the joy, and lasting results of the resurrection, make any sorrow that we have over the death of Jesus, seem small in comparison with the life we gain. To the disciples, Jesus said, "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" (verse 22). This is my fourth point:

#### **4. A Lasting Joy (verse 22)**

The resurrection of Jesus, brought joy to the hearts of the disciples. When they saw his wounds, "they were glad." That's the same Greek word here in verse 22 when it says that the disciples were "joyful!"

Jesus says here in verse 22 that their joy would be permanent. "No one will take your joy from you." That's is, your joy will be lasting joy.

This is joy that conquers when others would be led to sorrow.

I like to listen to podcasts of those who have deconstructed from the faith. That is, those who have been in the church, raised in the church, perhaps, experienced the church, confessed their faith in Jesus, been baptized, been involved in the life of the church. And then, they have come to the place where they no longer believe. They have stopped reading their Bibles. They have rejected the gospel. They have stopped going to church. They have no need for the church.

I like to listen to these stories, not because I'm tempted to leave the church or the gospel in any way, but because I like to hear what brought them on their journey to reject the faith and leave the church. I'm encouraged every time that their experience with Jesus and the church is not my experience. I like to reflect upon Rock Valley Bible Church, and just compare our church to the churches they left.

Now, certainly, every story is different, and there are many reasons why people leave the church and reject the gospel. Often it begins with some sort of church hurt, where the church failed to be everything that they had hoped for it to be for them. But one of the common characteristics that I often hear is how oppressive they found the church to be. With all of the rules and regulations, the church became a burden for them, where they found themselves conforming to a culture of external norms, without finding their genuine joy in Jesus and in the community of the people of God.

I often hear how much of their religion was eternal, seeking to live by appeasing everyone else. Rather than finding their joy in Jesus, and letting Christ lead them in how to live for him, finding the commandments of God to be live-giving, rather than burdensome.

I find that most of those who have deconstructed their faith knew very little about 1 John 5:3. "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome." I find that most of those who have deconstructed their faith knew very little about the experience of John 15:11, where Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Coming down to it, I do believe that the lack of their joy in the Lord is often the core of their disappointment in the church.

As I think about Rock Valley Bible Church, there is nothing that I would like to instill in each one of you, more than a joy in the Lord. It is no accident that our mission statement has this element of joy in it. We exist "To enjoy his grace, and to extend his glory." We want to enjoy Jesus. We want to enjoy the gospel of grace, that we are not justified before God by our works, but that we are justified before God by his grace through faith in Jesus. Let us rejoice in God!

This is what Jesus promised his disciples. "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" (verse 22). That is, though thick and thin, through trials and tribulations, through temptations and snares, through disappointments and despair, Jesus will preserve our joy.

The promise of verse 22 is that "no one will take your joy from you." Jesus promised "A Lasting Joy."

Nehemiah exhorted the people of his day, "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). Of anybody, Nehemiah had reason to quit and fail to be joyful. In trying to lead the people to build the wall around Jerusalem, he faced opposition from enemies (Sanballat and Tobiah). He faced discouragement from the people. He faced fatigue and fear and divisions and isolation and dangers and false accusations and apathy from the people. Yet, in all of this, Nehemiah persevered, because his strength was in the joy of the Lord.

As Jesus leaves his disciples, he tells them of how their sorrow will be great, but that sorrow will be turned into joy. And so, church family, let us find our strength in the "Lasting Joy" that Jesus gives.

OK, my last point:

#### **5. A Loving Invitation (verses 23-24)**

It's an invitation to pray. This comes in verses 23-24.

John 16:23-24

In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

Throughout these final words of Jesus to his disciples, we have seen his invitation to pray. "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13-14). "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7). Then here in verses 23-24, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

So question comes: Why with these final words does Jesus emphasize praying? I think the answer is quite simple. Prayer is a way of abiding in Jesus. Abiding in Jesus is the core of how the disciples were to persevere. "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). When Jesus is gone, the key to abiding is prayer.

Here is the great invitation to pray. So, are you praying? James says those difficult words, "You have not because you ask not" (James 4:2). Are you believing your prayers? Now, to be honest, enough of us have had unanswered prayers that many times, it is difficult to believe in

the efficacy of our prayers

The promise of answered prayer in these verses is vast:

John 16:23

Truly, truly, I say to you, *whatever you ask* of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.

"Whatever you ask" will be given to you. Yet, the promise of answered prayer is regulated by the name of Jesus. Jesus said that this is true of whatever you ask "in my name."

Praying in the name of Jesus is not some magical incantation verbalized at the end of every prayer as a sort of "abracadabra," which is going to make every prayer work. This isn't the idea at all.

Praying in the name of Jesus, submits ourselves to his authority, and aligns us to his will. Praying in the name of Jesus is a bit like when Jesus was in Gethsemane and he asked that the cup might pass from him. He said, "Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Matthew 26:39).

Praying "in the name of Jesus" helps us to submit our will to the will of Jesus. It helps us to root our prayers in his purposes, rather than in our own selfish desires. It helps to remind us that we approach the Father not on our own merit, but through the authority and mediatorship of Jesus.

But let the final words in verses 23 and 24 drive us to prayer. Let all of the final words of Jesus (in John 13-17), drive us to prayer, that we might commune with the Lord and abide with him.

The great comfort of praying here is that he would turn his sorrows into joy. I'm sure that there are many sorrows here in our congregation.

The sorrow here is the loss of a loved one that the disciples would experience, as Jesus would soon be put to death. Perhaps some of your sorrows come from the disappointment of unmet expectations. We were hoping for something, but it didn't quite work out and we are filled with sorrow. May that Lord turn this into joy.

Perhaps your sorrow is loneliness or financial hardship or physical illness. Perhaps your sorrow comes from a spiritual drought or doubt, where today you are not as close to the Lord as in times past. Perhaps your sorrow comes from children going astray. Certainly, such sorrow was in the heart of the prodigal father (Luke 15:11-32). Perhaps your sorrow is disunity in the church, where the church isn't all that it should be. Perhaps your sorrow comes from the grief of a missed opportunity of a career change that you never risked. Perhaps your sorrow comes from your struggle with addictions. Perhaps your sorrow comes from unanswered prayers or fear of rejection from others. Perhaps your sorrow comes from confusion.

There are many sorrows in this life. So, when you have sorrows, I would encourage you to pray and trust that the Lord will conform your sorrows and turn them into joys.

This is the message of Jesus as he leaves his disciples, "Your sorrow will be turned into joy." The cross will be the means of bringing you much joy. The Lord brings things into our lives for God's glory and for our good, even though we might not like the particulars. But when we understand that when the difficult things come crashing upon our lives are coming for his glory and our good, it's easier to have joy in these things. We can even come to rejoice in our sorrows.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 2, 2025 by Steve Brandon.

For more information see [www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org](http://www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org).

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[1] <https://www.songlyrics.com/don-moen/o-mighty-cross-lyrics>.