

The Disciples Grief Turned to Joy Or, Where Were You When the Other Shoe Dropped?

What kind of a sub-title is this? Well, taking from an old saying I'd like to apply this next passage to our every day life. When disaster strikes how should we react as believers? Should we keep a "still upper lip" as the British are so fond of saying? At the other of the spectrum should we whine all the way to our pastors? The disciples were going through a terrible time with one bit of bad news after another to the point that they were just numb - paralyzed with grief. Let's take a look at our passage and draw an important lesson from it.

John 16:19 - 20. **Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'?"²⁰ I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.¹**

Passage overview. What was different with this passage and ch 14? The disciples were full of questions than - what changed? One bit of disturbing news upon another was being heaped on them as a result they were beginning to experience great turmoil in their hearts. The disciples continued in greater intensity in this emotional turmoil.² Jesus must first lead them out of their agitated state so that He can continue with His comforting counseling. They have relied heavily on His Presence for guidance and teaching. We must remember that they had effectively rejected the apostate Jewish religion - a religion that had pervaded their lives from childhood. They were in untraveled territory and needed their Master very much. Jesus telling them that He was going away was a tremendous shock to them.

Certainly Jesus' promise in [14:18](#) was very appropriate: He had been like a big brother to them - a not uncommon experience of the day with relatively high mortality rate of parents, especially older men marrying younger women, necessitating the elder members of a family's siblings taking on the role of parent / provider. Jesus Himself had assumed this role more or less, especially with regard to His mother when He gave John the responsibility of caring for His mother.³ So we see this role played out in this passage where He has used several graphic aids to reassure the disciples that even though He would no longer be with them physically and even though they would appear to fail Him miserably during and just after the trial and crucifixion, He was never going to

¹ Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

² Ch 14:1 gk = *tarassō* to be agitated or stirred up with dread or fear. Ch 16:6 filled completely [perfect tense of orig. word for "filled"] with emotional pain gk = *lupo*. See comments in [previous lesson](#), page 2 par. 1.

³ For a look into this very tender moment between His Mother and John see [John 19:26, 27](#).

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leave them nor stop loving them. Indeed, because He was going to assume His ascension role at the right hand of the Father, a much closer intimacy would be possible.⁴

This intimacy was to be made possible by the ministry of the Holy Spirit in a Counselor role - much in the same way as Jesus had assumed during His ministry while on earth. They were going to be placed in a new relationship with the Heavenly Father. The disciples were going to be privileged, as are all believers, to enter the very throne room of the Heavenly Father - and that confidently as **beloved children** (again, read context with [Heb 4:16](#)). So we have this scene of emotions run amok with fear, impending doom, uncertainty - you name it - they had completely lost their confidence in the direction they thought they were going. But Jesus there to reassure them that they were not going to be abandoned even though they were going to abandon Him in their grief and fear.

How Grief Will Turn to Joy.

²⁰I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. John 16:20, NIV.

This is the most visceral of grief. The two words, “weep” an “mourn” were used in biblical times in association with practice of a funeral. There was no clear teaching from Jewish tradition about one’s destiny after death⁵ there was some teaching in the Old Testament regarding the afterlife. Job referred to the resurrection in [Job 19:25 - 27](#) where he expresses faith in his Redeemer who lives and that he would see Him after the destruction of his body with a resurrected body - with his own eyes. Some sects, specifically the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection at all ([Matt 22:33](#)) - so the death of a loved one was truly tragic. We need to go back to the times and be aware that the surety of an afterlife was not a part of Jewish life as it became later in the church age. This is what made the message of the early church so dynamic (considering also the power of the Holy Spirit in evangelistic work). The preaching of the coming of the resurrected Christ was truly a very exciting, if not newsworthy report.

But now - the disciples were trapped in the traditions of the apostate judaistic religion and they were evidencing their hopelessness before Christ. Consider the disciples on the way to Emmaus ([Luke 24:13 - 33](#)). Their discouragement was completely overwhelming - there was no remote possibility of Jesus’ what was in their minds His mission - even though there was a report that He *had* been seen. I’ll try to bring up an important point to be considered regarding this narrative later. I’m going to return to the latter part of this passage later but I want to jump ahead and cover some points in the following verses.

⁴ Please review [Heb 4:14 - 16](#); also, read [Heb 2:9 - 18](#).

⁵ See the account of the beggar Lazarus and the rich man, [Luke 16:19 - 31](#).

The Illustration of the Pain of Childbirth.

²¹A woman, when she gives birth to a child, has grief (anguish, agony) because her time has come. But when she has delivered the child, she no longer remembers her pain (trouble, anguish) because she is so glad that a man (a child, a human being) has been born into the world. ²²So for the present you are also in sorrow (in distress and depressed); but I will see you again and [then] your hearts will rejoice, and no one can take from you your joy (gladness, delight). Amplified.⁶

We had the imagery of the funeral of the dead in verse 20 and now we go the other end of life's spectrum - birth. The Amplified translates this passage best. The word "grief" is the same original as found in verse 6 (grief, [NIV](#); sorrow, [KJV](#), [NASB](#)).⁷ I must say this: without the comforting work of the Holy Spirit along with the word of God, the believer will find himself in the same difficulty! We just cannot pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps out of our grief. I know I am anticipating another part of this lesson but it will bear repeating. Too much of this "tough stuff" is going on in church life today where believers through sheer emotional detachment gut it through sorrow. Some believers may be able to pull it off, at least on the outside but others who are emotionally vulnerable like your's truly, may not be able. The common ground for grieving believers is found in [2 Corinthians 1:3 - 7](#) where we go to our Father in our grief *and* we share our grief with other believers who may have experienced the same sorrow. Forgive me for anticipating our lesson. Let's return to the flow of the lesson.

The pain of the disciples was devastating. Jesus knew that and He kept going back and forth from His teaching on the counseling ministry of the Holy Spirit and these images such as this one of childbirth. Do you know what Jesus was doing here? Look quickly at Peter's bravado in [13:37, 38](#). Peter was completely deluded. Given his own resources he denied that he was associated with Christ. After he realized his offence, he fled the presence of Christ. Peter was hiding behind a wall of self-sufficiency that later betrayed him. Jesus was bringing the disciples face to face with this pride of sufficiency and telling them that they would, indeed, experience terrible grief, but that resources *beyond* themselves would turn their grief to joy. But they needed to be transparent with themselves and those around them *and* Christ in order to have this joy.

The illustration of childbirth illustrates this grief to joy transition so well. Holman makes an excellent point. It is not a merely matter of joy following grief, as though one "gets over" it and gets happy again. No. In the case of childbirth, the grief [of giving

⁶ "Scripture quotations taken from the Amplified Bible." (www.Lockman.org)

⁷ See my previous lesson: "[The Work of the Holy Spirit](#)," page 2 par. 1.

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birth] also gives joy or as Holman says "...the cause of pain becomes the cause of joy."⁸ The Christian experience of grief is vastly different from the grief of the world. The Christian is in the Hand of God ([Ecclesiastes 9:1](#)) in the case of both the good and the bad experiences of life. The difference is the sovereign hand of God is on the believer and now we learn from Paul and other passages that this God is our loving Heavenly Father, to whom we are to go in our grief. Let's take another look at 2 Corinthians 1:3 - 7, ([NIV](#)). Notice that our Heavenly Father is the God of all compassion *and* comfort. This dual reference of attribute to our Heavenly Father is remarkable. Whereas before we might be tempted to be fearful of admitting our grief to the Father, here Paul is saying that *by the Father's attributes of compassion and comforting* we can be confident of His merciful attention to our troubles. Troubles? The original depicts our old adage of being between a rock and a hard place - literally! *Greek = Thlipei* - Classical gk = to crush, squeeze. LXX uses this word to depict childbirth [Gen 3:16-19](#); anguish [Job 15:24](#); the Hebrews affliction [Exod 4:31](#) (context); David's distress [Psalm 118:5](#). The Great Tribulation is associated with this word. Paul was referring to the believer being in a "pile of trouble." The strong point here is that we have two resources in our grief - our compassionate Heavenly Father *and* each other along with the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Paul's passage is rich with imagery. **"For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ."** My emphasis. The original for "abound" depicts an overflowing fountain. When I was a teen living with my father, we did not have running water (nor regular toilet facilities). Our water source came from a never ending flowing of very a tasty spring. It came out of a pipe that in turn came out of a small spring house. There was no spigot - no faucet - it just kept running and running - non-stop. That is the cycle depicted here. The sufferings in our Christian experience abound *toward*⁹ us but just as sure, our consolation abounds, overflows *through*¹⁰ Christ.

Our Loving Heavenly Father Provides for Us in Our Grief.

²²So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. ²³In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ²⁴Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

The disciples were going to lose their beloved Master for a time. But it was going to be temporary. The disciples were going to see Jesus after the resurrection and then after the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, at the birth of the church. Let's go back to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. After the "funeral dirge" of their complaint with

⁸ [HOLLMAN NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY, John](#). Page 302.

⁹ *Gk = eis*.

¹⁰ *gk = dia*, through instrumentality of Christ.

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Jesus, He began to share the messianic passages with them and taught fervently the fact that He *had* to suffer - He had to die for the sins of the world but that He was to be resurrected on the third day. The result of this ministry, which I add was aided by the power of the Holy Spirit, was that their hearts burned with encouragement within them. Herein are the keys to this joy. Let me try to put it this way. The joy of Jesus in our grief comes in this way:

- By knowing the word of God (Jesus) and making application of the word ([John 14:16, 17; 15:26](#)).
- By the comforting ministry of the Holy Spirit in fellowship in His teaching ministry ([John 14:16 - 21; 15:9 - 11](#)).
- By going to our loving Heavenly Father, being completely transparent with Him in our needs ([John 16:22 - 24; 2 Corinthians 1:3 - 7](#)).
- By sharing our burdens with each other so that we might enter into an uplifting ministry with each other (See 2 Cor. Above passage).

Verse 23 and 24 introduces the important point that we have direct access into the very presence of our Heavenly Father. The writer of Hebrews also makes the point that we to enter boldly into the Father's presence - only because of our relationship of love with the Lord ([ch 14:23](#)). The imagery of 14:23 is that of the intimacy not unlike that which Abraham had with the Lord in [Genesis 18](#) where there was a sumptuous dinner and intimate conversation. Only this intimacy is forever with the believer.

The Danger of Arrogance Because of Our Intimate Relationship with the Lord.

[John 16:25 - 33](#). I find this passage a little puzzling - that the disciples should switch from great emotional turmoil to what appears to be great confidence but I think the key is to look at the Lord's response to their statement - and it serves as a warning to us as we discover the Lord's will in our lives. When they the effectively say "Oh yeah, now we understand - OK Lord we're all set now! His response was:

³¹"Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? ³²Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

This seems to be a warning to me not to get too cocky in our assessment of our "answers to our prayers" especially regarding our deliverance from difficulty. Be thankful for what we have received from the Lord's hand and move on to the next experience the Lord offers us remembering our frame. This whole Christian experience with Him is an on-going one.