

In Case You Lose Heart

John 16:1-33

Introduction

We arrive today, at the final section of Christ's farewell message to His disciples. In a matter of a few hours, Judas will identify the Master with a kiss of deceit. The soldiers will take Him away to a series of mock trials and trumped up charges.

I have discovered, in reading John, chapter 16, over and over, that it is one of the most emotional messages Jesus ever delivered. There are dozens of emotion laden phrases:

- verse 2, "They will make you outcasts . . .",
- verse 6, ". . . sorrow has filled your heart.",
- verse 16, "A little while, and you will no longer behold Me . . .",
- verse 20a, ". . . you will weep and lament . . .",
- verse 20b, ". . . you will be sorrowful . . .",
- verse 21, ". . . travail . . . sorrow . . . anguish . . .", and
- verse 33, ". . . peace . . . tribulation . . . courage . . .".

There is great concern and love in our Lord's heart for His disciples. If you have any doubt of His concern, all you need to do is read why Jesus was saying all the things He had said, beginning in chapter 14, and would yet say, in this chapter.

Look back to chapter 14, as Jesus began to deliver His final words to them before going to the cross. Verse 1,

Let not your heart be troubled . . .

This literally means, "Stop being troubled."

The word "troubled" refers to a heart that is stirred up, restless, anxious, and fearful.

So, Jesus begins His last speech, that covers chapters 14 through 16 of John's gospel, by saying, "I don't want your hearts to be disturbed; to be filled with anxiety and fear."

He closes His message to them in chapter 16, verse 33, saying,

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

These are strange words to say, while at the same time, religious leaders are huddled in closed door meetings, guards are gathering their swords, and Judas is bargaining for the price of his own soul.

Now, chapter 16 is an interesting chapter for, in it, the Lord seems to summarize and repeat several of the themes that He has already referred to. He is like a preacher who, just before finishing his sermon, says, "Now let's review the main points before closing."

Christ's Final Message Is Summarized

There are five main points in all.

Point #1 – Persecution is guaranteed!

1. Point number one is that persecution is guaranteed!

Let us pick up our study at John, chapter 16, verse 1.

These things I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling.

Stop here and notice that the Lord slips in another purpose statement for His message to them. He says, ". . . I have spoken to you, that you may be kept from stumbling."

In other words, to be forewarned, is to be forearmed.

The word translated "stumble," or "offense," is the Greek word "skandalon". It is a word that means, "that which causes offense or a scandal". It refers to a person whose faith is crushed; a person who has been misled and mishandled and their future growth in Christ is handicapped.

Jesus Christ is concerned that His disciples would not be misled by their own misconceptions.

And again, Jesus never hides from his disciples the sight of a their own personal cross. You would think that Jesus could have recruited many more

disciples by saying, “Listen, you follow Me and you will have it made.”

Oh no. Jesus says, in chapter 16, verse 1, in effect, “I don’t want you to stumble because you have been uniformed or misinformed.”

Continue to verse 2.

They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.

“I can offer you nothing but blood, sweat, and tears. Do you still want to be my disciple?! Because, if you want to follow Me in the trenches and serve Me in the harvest fields and on the battlefields, you will experience these things. I don’t want you to be misled! If you never want to be exposed to pain, sorrow, and the weight of a rugged cross, don’t sign up.”

Look at the first part of verse 2, where Jesus says they will experience being outcasts and ostracized from the synagogue.

Now today, we would say, “Big deal, I can’t go to church services anymore.”

But, for the Jew to be excommunicated from the synagogue was to be denied exposure to spiritual things. It was more than just worship, it included even the reading of Scripture. The only Scripture that could be found and heard was in the synagogue. They did not have a personal copy of a New American Standard, or for the less spiritual, a New International Version!

The synagogue was the primary place of teaching. The scriptures were explained and, in fact, it became the place where children received an elementary education. So, to be barred from the synagogue was to be barred from exposure to the Word of God, as well as a chance for a formal education.

Also, to be banned from the synagogue was a devastating thing to the social life of a believer. The synagogue was the place of fellowship, friendship, weddings, and village meetings. To be barred meant a person was cut off from all of that. Former friends would shun him, considering him worse than a pagan. He would be exiled from his orthodox family. He would lose his job in the community. He would even be denied the right of an honorable burial.

So, when Jesus told His disciples they were going to be barred from the synagogue, He was telling them,

“You’re about to lose every friend and family member, every advantage, and every economic possibility in the community. You will live alone and die forgotten.”

But that is not all. Look at the last part of verse 2 again.

. . . but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God.

In other words, you will be hunted by those who think that to take your life would be an act of worship and service to God. Saul of Tarsus fulfilled that prophecy within their own lifetime.

Jesus says then, in verse 4a,

But these things I have spoken to you, that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. . . .

“I’m warning you!!! Following Me may cause you to lose heart.”

But Jesus does not stop with what we can expect and what we will experience. He goes on to tell his disciples how we can survive – and survive with the undercurrent of joy.

Point #2 – The Helper is on the way!

2. Point number two is that the Helper is on the way!

I love the way verse 5 begins.

But now, I am going to Him who sent Me . . .

What a wonderful phrase “but now” is. Preceding that little phrase is devastating news of being isolated, ostracized, and hunted.

“But now,” means Jesus is not finished!

There are many verses that are hinged by the word “but” and end with wonderful news.

- Matthew, chapter 19, verse 26b, “. . . With men this is impossible, *but* with God all things are possible.”
- Genesis, chapter 50, verse 20a, Joseph said to his brothers, “And as for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good . . .”.
- I Corinthians, chapter 15, verses 16, 17, and 20, Paul wrote, “For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is

worthless; you are still in your sins. . . . *But* now Christ has been raised from the dead . . .”.

- Romans, chapter 6, verse 23, “For the wages of sin is death, *but* the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What a powerful little conjunction – “but”.

Continue to John, chapter 16, verses 6 and 7.

. . . because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. BUT I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

We have already discussed, in a former session, the ministry of the Holy Spirit as an advantage to the believer. But again, for now, remember that the word “Helper,” in the Greek, is “parakletos”. “Para,” means “beside, alongside”; “kaleo,” means “to call” – and together, this literally means, “He will be called alongside of you.”

Jesus said, “I’m going up and the Spirit is going to come down and indwell you.”

He will, as it were, walk alongside of you.

Chuck Swindoll, commenting on this passage wrote,

This is no shallow sympathy card with rhyming words for grief stricken people. It is eternally more than a “slap on the back” or a quick “cheer up” bit of advice. Our mighty God is called alongside as we suffer! Here is genuine comfort, personal assistance, deep involvement, and infinite understanding.

That is why we read that God is called the, “. . . God of all comfort”, in II Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 3b!

Persecution is guaranteed, *but* the Helper is on the way!

Point #3 – Sorrow is only temporary!

3. Point number three is that sorrow is only temporary!

We are invited into the experience of a labor and delivery room. Notice verses 20 and 21.

Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be

turned to joy. Whenever a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she remembers the anguish no more, for joy that a child has been born into the world.

Now, some of you men, who are a little older, never went into the delivery room. In prior years, you paced the hallway and nervously waited. In my era, you can go in and set up a video camera – which I really question. I mean, who is going to watch the video? I was in the delivery room and I took some pictures of our babies, right after they were born, and I do not even want to look at them now. What would you do with a video? Sit around with your friends, eat popcorn, and say, “Oh, look at that expression on her face – she’s really in pain now. Oooh, did you hear that scream?”

For those of you who have been there, it is traumatic. Our last baby created great pain. My wife was hooked up to the monitors that, through a series of connections, graphed onto computer paper the highs and lows of contractions. Now just relax, I am not going to get graphic! As soon as the lines on that computer readout began to go up – a contraction was under way. I hated to see that squiggly line begin to go up. My wife said some things during those moments – nothing that ruined my future ministry – but, in great pain, I remember her saying to me, “Help me.”

What could I do? I figure the only thing I could have done to help her would have been to hit her over the head with a mallet until it was over.

I will never forget how helpless I felt and, I know, she felt. Then, our little Charity was born, and in my ecstasy, I took pictures that I do not want to see.

Jesus put the word “sorrow” into these verses and this vivid, traumatic context helps us to understand what He means. Sorrow equals pain combined with total helplessness. He says, “I will turn that into joy.”

How?! Notice verse 22.

Therefore you too now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you.

There are many different suggestions, by good theologians, as to the time that Jesus is referring to in this verse. Is it His resurrection appearances to the disciples? Certainly that caused great joy. Some say it is Pentecost, when the Spirit descends and the

church age is born, that He is referring to. Others say He must be referring to heaven, when we all, forever and uninterrupted, see Him face to face.

I believe all three could have significance. Yet, I find interesting that it is not until we reach the new heaven and the new earth that God forever wipes our sorrow away. Turn to Revelation, chapter 21, verses 1 through 4.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

Joy is a benefit of the Spirit's control; it is one of His fruits. But the absence of sorrow will not occur until we see Jesus. And the Lord is saying, "I'm warning you about this, so that when sorrow comes, you won't say, 'Hey I didn't think this would be part of the plan.'"

Then, He goes on to say, "It's only temporary."

As David wrote, in Psalm, chapter 30, verse 5, ". . . weeping may last for the night, but . . . joy comes in the morning."

I personally believe that joy occurs when we catch fresh glimpses of Christ by faith, and that joy will come, uninterrupted by sorrow, when He wipes our tears away for good.

Point #4 – Prayer is your primary lifeline!

4. Point number four is that prayer is your primary lifeline!

Now, in John, chapters 14 through 16, the principles of prayer have been taught and we have studied them in former sessions. But, in chapter 17, the principles of prayer will be illustrated in the very prayer life of Jesus Christ.

In our passages today, the truth about prayer is taught; in chapter 17, the truth about prayer will be

applied. Here it is heard; later it is observed first hand.

I have had the privilege of studying, one or two Sunday afternoons, with a group of men who have trusted Christ within the last twenty four months. We are studying through the book, *Disciplines of A Godly Man*, by Kent Hughes. Recently, we read and discussed the chapter on the discipline of prayer. I happen to believe Dr. Hughes rightly labels it, "discipline". If it were easy, more of us would pray and we would pray more often.

I also believe that the question today, is not necessarily, "Should I pray?"

I think we are all still convinced we should. I believe the question is, "Why should I pray? What difference does it make?"

Let me read to you ten reasons why we should pray. These were written, originally, by Reuben Torrey – commonly referred to as R. A. Torrey – a former president of Moody Bible Institute, in Chicago. Here are the reasons he wrote, around the turn of the twentieth century, as to why we should pray:

- because there is a devil and prayer is the God-appointed means of resisting him,
- because prayer is God's way for us to obtain what we need from Him,
- because the apostles, whom God set forth to be a pattern for us, considered prayer to be the most important business of their lives,
- because prayer occupied a prominent place and played a very important part in the earthly life of our Lord,
- because prayer is the most important part of the present ministry of our Lord, since He is now interceding for us,
- because prayer is the means God has appointed for our receiving mercy from Him and of obtaining grace to help in time of need,
- because prayer is the means of obtaining the fullness of God's joy,
- because prayer with thanksgiving is the means of obtaining freedom from anxiety and, in anxiety's place, that peace which passes understanding,
- because prayer is the means by which we are to keep watchful and be alert at Christ's return, and

- because prayer is used by God to promote our spiritual growth, bring power into our work, lead others to faith in Christ, and bring all other blessings to Christ's church.

In other words, the question is not "Should we?", but "How can we afford not to?"

Point #5 – Courage will always be needed!

5. Point number five is that courage will always be needed!

Jesus says, in verses 32 through 33a,

Behold, an hour is coming and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. . . ."

Have peace – in your circumstances? No. In your distress and in your tears? No. He says, ". . . in Me you may have peace. . . ."

He is saying, in effect, ". . . in Me and by Me, you will experience peace, assurance, and contentment."

He goes on, in verse 33b,

. . . In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

The words "take courage," could literally be rendered, "take heart". It is interesting that courage is like faith – the key issue is the object of our faith – the object of our courage. Jesus did not say, "Take courage, I know you can do it."

No. He said, "Take courage, I have overcome the world."

In fact, notice the false courage and assurance of the disciples, in verses 29 through 30. This is classic.

His disciples said, "Lo, now You are speaking plainly, and are not using a figure of speech. Now we KNOW that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God."

"Ha! Lord, now we've got it figured out. We now know for sure that You're deity, and that you have everything under control."

In other words, ladies and gentlemen, they expressed courage, they expressed understanding, and assurance. But, in a matter of hours, they would be trembling with fear and in hiding for their very lives.

The moral of the story is – past understanding does not guarantee future understanding; present courage is not good enough for future testing.

The trials of yesterday are different from the trials of today, and the trials of today are different from the challenges of tomorrow! Jesus Christ is in the process of teaching and adapting and developing us to handle today, and we will need to allow Him to continue to do so tomorrow.

At any given moment in the race, every believer can either be an "overcomer," or overcome. Jesus is saying, "I'm telling you, courage will always be needed!"

Application – Surviving With Joy Means . . .

By way of application, let us summarize Jesus' sermon. Surviving with joy means:

- recognizing that sorrow will cause you to stumble, unless viewed as temporary, allowed, and designed for maturity – a mark of a maturing disciple is learning not to judge God finished, until He is finished; in understanding that temporary sorrow turns into permanent joy,
- developing a relationship with the Holy Spirit that is not satisfied unless He is your guide, your teacher, and your companion,
- disciplining your life to include times and seasons of honest prayer that, ultimately, seek His honor and purposes instead of yours, and
- accepting the challenge to acknowledge Christ as, not only ultimately sovereign over the events of the world, but sovereign over the events of your own heart and life.

It does not take courage to believe that God is in control of the world system, but it does take great courage, at times, to believe and act upon the fact that God is in control in your world. If God is big enough to be in control of the whole wide world, don't you think He is big enough to be in control of yours?

Before our children's bedtime, my wife reads to them. Typically this is done in the living room, with our three older children perched around her. One of them is usually stroking her hair – that is their way of getting her to read longer than she normally might. It is a sight I happen to cherish. Lately, she is reading

from the biography of the missionary Adoniram Judson.

And what a sad tale it is, as Adoniram, barely into his work in Burma, was captured and held prisoner under trumped up charges as an English spy. His wife, Anne, faithfully and courageously attempted to have him released through every possible channel.

Adoniram was imprisoned in a tiny cell and forced to stand so others could lie down and sleep. The sun was unbearably hot at times and, since they were never allowed to bathe, the stench was horrible.

One day, the officials decided prison was not enough punishment for this infidel, so they hoisted Judson into the air by his thumbs. Pain filled every fiber of his body. When he returned to his cell, Anne would come and visit. Her message usually included the words, “Hang on, Adoniram, God will give us the victory.”

Week after tortuous week, Anne would come and encourage him as best she could. She would always say the same words, “Hang on, Adoniram, God will give us the victory.”

But then, Adoniram was released to be an interpreter between the English and the Burmese. He was separated from Anne for some time. During that time, no one told him that Anne was dying.

Months later, he was released. He was now a man whose body was so broken that it was a miracle he could even walk. He returned to the place where they had lived. As he slowly limped toward his home, he saw a child sitting in the dirt. She was a little girl so covered with filth that he failed, at first, to recognize her as his own daughter. He went into their simple hut and, squinting through the darkness, he saw her – a bundle of bones and rags lying on a cot, so weak and frail. Hugging his daughter to his chest, he knelt down and wept, calling her name over and over.

The author, Jeremiah, writes,

His hot tears fell on her face and slowly her eyes began to move with recognition. She struggled to speak and then, her last words to him were, “Adoniram, God will give us the victory.”

Today, I want you to hear the words of Jesus saying, “Don’t lose heart – take courage, I have overcome the world.”

Hear the words of Anne Judson saying the same thing, “Hang on, God will give us the victory.”