

John 16:17-24 **“Eternal Joy”**
4th Sunday in Lent **March 6, 2005** **Pastor Jon Bergemann**

Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Amen. The Word of God for our consideration this morning is found in John chapter 16 (read text). In the name of Jesus, who gives us joy now and forever, dear brothers and sisters in Christ.

Do you ever notice how quickly our happiness can turn into sadness in life? How quickly our joy can turn into grief?

I recently read a story about a guy from Indiana who had been the big winner in the lottery. He had won something like \$45 million dollars. Can you imagine how exciting that must have been? Can you imagine the celebration? And it sounded like the guy had his head on his shoulders, too, because he set up some sort of corporation, involving about 16 of his relatives, so that they could share in the winnings. It seemed as if earthly happiness was his! But then? Just a couple of months after all this took place, he was driving home, got into a car accident, and died. So much for the earthly happiness.

How quickly our mood in life can change. How fleeting our happiness often is. We finally get that new house . . . but then find out we need to repair a basement that leaks. We finally get that new car . . . but then get into a fender bender. We finally get a vacation . . . but then we get sick. We finally feel good about things at work or school . . . but then an unexpected challenge arises. The list could go on. There are so many things in life that seem to rob us of our happiness so quickly.

It was no different for Jesus' disciples. They had followed Jesus for about 3 years. They had seen him gain tremendous popularity with many of the people. They had seen him do miracles. They had even seen him ride into Jerusalem a few days earlier with throngs of people screaming his praises. And now they were joining him for a great supper on Thursday evening – the Passover meal – a very special meal (think of our Thanksgiving meals or Christmas meals for a little of the feeling of this meal). Things seemed to be so good. They seemed to be so happy. But all of that was about to change.

As they're eating this meal, Jesus gives them the frank news of verse 20, **“I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices.”** Why would they weep and mourn? Because, as he had told them during other portions of the meal, he was about to be handed over to a mob who wanted to kill him, and then they would crucify him. Whoa! Could you imagine the emotions of the disciples?! It would be as if, during the middle of your Thanksgiving or Christmas meal, a member of your family said, “I’m about to be arrested for a crime I didn’t commit. In fact, they should be here in about an hour or two. And by this time tomorrow, I’ll be put on the electric chair and killed.” You would probably drop your fork in your mashed potatoes upon hearing that news! You would probably be shocked. Your happiness would most likely turn to grief in a hurry.

It’s no different with these disciples. Their leader, Jesus, was about to be arrested. They would see him beaten, flogged, whipped, spit upon, and finally crucified. It would all happen so quickly. They, who had been so happy to start the week, would find themselves in the depth of depression. And as the enemies of Jesus rejoiced, they would weep and mourn. Their happiness would be ripped away from them as they saw their Savior die, and realized that their sin had put him there. How quickly life can change.

But let’s ask ourselves a question: How do we feel as we stand next to them and see Jesus on that cross? We often wear crosses. We might have a few of them that decorate our homes. We have one on the altar just in back of me. But do we realize what a cross was originally? It was a place of execution! It was a place of intense suffering. It was the ancient world’s equivalent of an electric chair! It was the place that Jesus, the sinless Son of God, experienced the punishment of hell for you and me and the whole world. It was the place that he paid the punishment for all of our laziness and selfishness. For all of our complaining and bitterness. For all of our arrogance. For all of our lust and anger. Yes, for all of our secret and shameful sins. Jesus, who had not sinned, died on the cross for us.

So how do we feel as we stand with those disciples and look at the cross? We might indeed cringe as we see the nails go into Jesus' hands. We might indeed drop our heads in guilt and shame, knowing that it was our sin that put him there. We might indeed grieve and mourn . . .

And then we might indeed lift up our heads. And open our eyes. And let a smile beam from our faces. And jump up and down. And shout "Hallelujah!" Why?

Look at what Jesus has to say to us in the second half of verse 20, **"You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy."**

What's he saying? He's saying that as we stare at the cross, and as we realize that it was our sin that put him there, our grief will turn into joy. Yes, the very thing that causes the disciples and us sorrow – the cross, will cause us joy. The death of Jesus, which we mourn, will be the very thing that causes us the greatest joy we could ever have! Why?

Let your eyes drift to verse 22. Jesus says, **"Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy."** Why does the cross give us joy? Because it was not the final defeat of Jesus, but rather the place where he defeated sin and hell for us once and for all. It was not his final resting place, but rather the final place where he would put to rest all of our sin and guilt, all of our sorrow and shame. How so?

Because he rose again from the dead 3 days later. Because he appeared to those disciples and they saw him again, just as he promised. And because now he appears to you and me as well. He speaks to our guilty and scared hearts in his Word, and says, "Let your guilt be gone. I paid for it at the cross! You are forgiven! No one can take that away from you." And he says to us, "I will lead you and guide you through all the pain of this life. I will do whatever is best for you. I even died on a cross for you! No one can take that away from you!" Indeed, no one can take away what Jesus did for us on the cross. Or, as we just heard him say, **"no one will take away your joy."**

Listen to that again. Jesus says to you, **"no one will take away your joy."** You can have joy now, and forever. Do you believe it?

"I'd like to," you might say, "but I still live in a world that disappoints me. I live in a world that frightens me. The future seems uncertain. The present often feels unfair. It's pretty hard to be happy in the midst of all the problems and pressures I face! There seems to be so many things that take away my happiness!"

How true. How often our happiness changes. How quickly are emotions fluctuate. How many things in the course of the day can break into our happiness and inject us with a twinge of guilt or fear.

So how can we always have joy? Is Jesus lying here?

No. Realize that there is a BIG difference between happiness and joy. Happiness is an emotion that can change quickly with the events of our life. I get the job promotion, I'm happy. I get laid off, I'm sad. I lose 5 pounds, I'm happy. I gain 10 pounds, I'm sad. Our happiness comes and goes, but our joy remains. Why?

Because joy is more than an emotion. It's a knowledge, resting on firm facts, of what God has done for us. It's the knowledge that rests on the fact that he has died for us. On the fact that he has risen for us. On the fact that he loves us and forgives us. On the fact that he will take us to be in heaven forever with him. And guess what? Those facts can't be changed! They remain, no matter what happens in life.

Which means what? When the devil tries to destroy you with guilt, and stick in your face all of your failures and faults, you can respond bluntly and boldly, "So what? Jesus died and rose. He forgives me. I'm beautiful in his sight. Nothing can take that away from me. I rejoice!"

When you wrestle with relationships, when you are hurt by others, when your heart is broken, when you are cheated or abused and the devil tries to rub it in your face and drag you into depression, you can respond, "So what? Jesus died and rose for me. He is with me forever. He loves me perfectly. Nothing can take that away from me. I rejoice!"

When you face an uncertain future, and the devil tries to wreak havoc in your life with worry, you can respond, "So what? Jesus has promised me that I will live forever in heaven. That forever of paradise is a lot longer than the problems of now. Nothing can take that away from me. I rejoice!"

Yes, whether you face guilt or grief, a broken heart or a bruised ego, sleepless nights or suffering filled days, devastation or death, temptations or taxes . . . SO WHAT! Your Jesus is with you. Rejoice! Your Jesus will strengthen you. Rejoice! Your Jesus will take you to be with him forever in heaven. Rejoice! Nothing, not even hell itself, can take that away from you! Rejoice! Amen.



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