

## Overcoming the World

John 16:16-33

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<sup>16</sup> “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.” <sup>17</sup> 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’?” <sup>18</sup> So they were saying, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We do not know what he is talking about.” <sup>19</sup> 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’?” <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

<sup>25</sup> “I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. <sup>26</sup> In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; <sup>27</sup> for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. <sup>28</sup> I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.” <sup>29</sup> His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech!” <sup>30</sup> Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” <sup>31</sup> Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe?” <sup>32</sup> Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. <sup>33</sup> 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” (John 16:16-33 ESV).

Do you remember the last time that you were disoriented?

From a physical standpoint, my worst experience with being disoriented is connected to a ride called the “Twirl-a-Whirl.” The memory was so traumatic that I remember the name of the ride, and I can picture this nasty beast in my mind. The seats—for four people—were in the shape of a small cup. In the middle was a steering wheel device to make the cup turn. And as the ride began, every cup rotated in a big circle. The steering wheel allowed the riders to spin the cup even faster.

I believe that I was trying to be “the fun dad” at an amusement park with our twins. Sarah stayed behind with Jeremiah, who was a baby at the time. As the ride continued to twirl, Sarah kept asking me, “Mark, are you okay?” Apparently, the shade of my face turned more and more green with each turn of the ride. By the time the ride was over, everything was spinning. Nothing was stable, including my stomach.

I spent the rest of the day disoriented. I was barely functional because I could not regain my balance or settle my nausea. It was awful.

To be disoriented is to lose one’s way or to be confused because of the removal of something that serves to guide you.

Getting nauseous on the Twirl-a-Whirl is one thing. But we also experience disorientation in other, more serious, areas. You may have heard me say that grief is not tame. Sorrow is disorienting. It can wear you out with sadness, making you wonder who you really are. Conflict is disorienting, wrestling with how this could happen and what to do about it. For that matter, suffering of any kind is disorienting. It removes the things that we need or things that help us navigate the world in which we live.

### **Disoriented Disciples**

Our text today is the conclusion of what’s often called the upper room discourse. It’s the final instruction that Jesus gives his disciples before he leaves them. While they shared the Passover meal together, the disciples learned that one of them would betray Jesus, and they kept hearing Jesus talk about leaving them. You can imagine how disorienting this news would have been to them.

Unfortunately, this would only be the beginning. Jesus knew that the future was going to involve disorienting difficulties for the disciples. So, he seeks to prepare them so that they will not be surprised and so that they’ll have hope.

Jesus saves some of his most important instructions for his final words. It seems that he intends to help them understand what to expect and how to navigate a broken world.

If you are a Christian, I think what follows in this text is really helpful. You may find yourself in a disorienting season. This text will help you know how to think about the season that you’re in, and it will also provide hope. And if you’re not a Christian, this passage will help you understand how Christianity as a belief system changes how a person perseveres through difficulties. I hope this sermon motivates you to consider turning from your sins and following Jesus today.

### **Two Truths for Overcoming**

Let’s look at two truths for overcoming the world and notice how they are rooted in the life and victory of Jesus.

#### **1. Sorrow Will Turn to Joy (vv. 16-24)**

Once again, Jesus tells the disciples some troubling news mixed with assurance: “A little while and you will see me no longer; and again a little while and you will see me” (16:16). Previously, Jesus told the

disciples that he was leaving them but that he was going to prepare a place for them (14:1-3). He's preparing them for what is to come, and he's trying to give them hope. Jesus wants the disciples to know how to think about what is going to happen.

But you can imagine how unsettling this was for any number of reasons. This is not the playbook that they signed up for. Jesus knows that. It's one of the reasons he addresses this issue.

Apparently, the statement by Jesus created some consternation among the disciples. According to verses 17-18, they didn't know what Jesus was talking about. His words left them confused. Previously, Jesus said that he was going "to the one who sent me" (16:5). But now they are also troubled and confused by Jesus's statement: "a little while." They mention this phrase specifically.

Remember, they have no idea about what is to come for Jesus. We have the benefit of knowing about his death and resurrection. But the disciples had no idea about this. It was not a part of their thinking or what they anticipated. At this moment, they have no idea that Jesus will die and that when he does, they'll think all is lost only to be blown away by the resurrection of Jesus. They will be filled with fear, doubt, and despair, but only for a little while.

That's why Jesus goes deeper with them in verse 19. The disciple (every disciple) needs to understand this "little while" principle. Maybe you need to be reminded about it. The concept is familiar but easy to forget in the moment—especially if your "little while" feels like a "long while."

Verse 20 is the signature verse in this passage. It highlights the great contrast for those who follow Jesus. The circumstances of history and the emotional posture of the world are often heading a different direction than the disciples of Jesus. That's part of the reason being a follower of Jesus can be a bit disorienting at times. How you think and what you hope in can be so different than the world's system that you might often feel like you are crazy. Look at Jesus's words:

*<sup>20</sup> "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" (John 16:20).*

Notice that the world will be rejoicing while they will be lamenting. Of course, Jesus has the crucifixion in mind. There would be very different perspectives on the crucifixion between the disciples and the world. The vast majority of people saw Jesus as just another prophet who went too far. They were glad the "rabble-rouser" from Nazareth would no longer create any trouble. But the disciples witnessed the death of their leader, their friend, and someone who they thought was going to be the King of Israel. For a little while, they saw the crucifixion as a disaster.

But wait until resurrection Sunday! How things will change! Their sorrow is going to turn into joy! And this transformation becomes central to Christianity. Good Friday leads to resurrection Sunday. This contrast will not only be part of the resurrection story; it will shape how the disciples live.

It should shape how you live if you are a Christian.

To be sure his disciples get this point –about sorrow turning to joy– Jesus illustrates it with the anguish of labor and the birth of a baby (v. 21). This would have been a familiar metaphor from the Old Testament about the anguish of anticipating the Messiah (see Isaiah 66:7-14). But it also would be a practical illustration that they could relate to. I’m sure you can as well.

Women giving birth experience pain. The sorrow is intense. Sometimes a mother giving birth can even say things that she will later renounce as “the pain talking.” But when the baby arrives, the anguish is eclipsed by the joy of the new life. The disciples surely understood this illustration, but he makes the point clear in verse 22: “So also you will have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”

Jesus is talking about the emotional swing that will take place with the resurrection. They will think that all is lost. But when they see Jesus alive, nothing will be able to stop them. Their joy will be deeply rooted in the new life of Jesus.

And the key aspect of their joy will be their new relationship with the Father. Jesus told them, “no one comes to the Father, but through me” (John 14:6). Now it’s true. That’s what verses 24 is talking about.

Do you see what Jesus is doing here? He’s helping the disciples understand a fundamental concept of discipleship: through Jesus, sorrow will turn to joy. This is critical to understand when disorienting moments or seasons come. Being a Christian means regularly living with sorrow, waiting for the joy to come. Disciples believe that sorrow will turn to joy.

Now we’ll unpack this further at the end. But let’s see what else is here.

## **2. Trouble Will Turn to Triumph (vv. 25-33)**

The first truth related to the emotional posture of the disciples. They needed to understand that discipleship would regularly involve the swing between sorrow and joy. But they also needed to know the plan of God. If the first point related to their emotional state, this second point connects to the objective reality of history. This section helps us to understand what is really happening –what is true.

Disciples are more than just optimistic, cheery-hearted people. Followers of Jesus know that trouble and sorrow will come. But they also know where it leads. How do they know this? Because of texts like these.

In verses 25-28, Jesus plainly tells the disciples that he is leaving. He is going back to the Father. This has been the plan from the very beginning. And it is now about to be fulfilled. However, Jesus also tells them that his departure signals a new kind of relationship between them and the Father.

Jesus talks about the way the Father loves them and how they are able to make direct appeals to the Father just as Jesus did (vv. 26-27). Jesus is leaving, but it means something amazing for them. The plan of God is unfolding in front of them, and they needed to understand why it was worthwhile.

Unfortunately, the disciples speak. In verses 29-30, they make what seems to be a good statement about their understanding of who Jesus is and where he is going. They tell Jesus that they believe.

But apparently, Jesus knows that they are over-confident. They are talking ahead of their game. Therefore, Jesus rebukes them. In verse 32, he tells them they will all scatter, and they will leave him all alone. When the pressure mounts regarding the arrest of Jesus, all of them will flee.

It would seem that Jesus wants to caution them against being over-confident. It seems that one of the lessons from this text emerges here: the disciples' only hope is not in the strength of their faith, but in understanding the life of Jesus.

No doubt they will need to learn this over and over throughout their lifetime. But Jesus seems to caution them about placing too much hope in what they know about themselves. We cannot anticipate how troubling trouble will be. Discipleship looks like ever-increasing trust in who Jesus is, in what he's done, and in his power— not our own. In fact, the more that we learn about Jesus, the less confidence we will have about ourselves.

Understand me clearly here. I'm not saying that you are less confident or less hopeful as a follower of Christ. The issue is the object. Hardship and trouble reveal that we are not in control. But they also have the potential to point us to Jesus.

I think that's why Jesus says in verse 33: "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace." Did you hear the words "in me"? Joy and peace in trouble do not come from you figuring out what is happening; they come from you resting in what has already happened through Jesus.

That's why Jesus concludes with "In the world, you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (v. 33).

Jesus helps these disciples, and us, to understand that following Jesus involves holding two truths firmly in our minds: (1) there is going to be trouble and (2) Jesus has already won.

Where is the greatest display of this? It is the death and resurrection of Jesus. These are the events that are about to unfold in front of the disciples. And Jesus wants them to understand not only what is going to happen, but also how important it is for their lives.

The next few days in the disciples' lives will become the model for how to think, how to live, and even how to feel as they live after Jesus is gone. Following him is going to be difficult, but it's not impossible. There are going to be days of great sadness, but joy will come as well. They may not understand everything that God is doing, but they can embrace the unfolding plan of God.

"Take heart; Jesus has overcome the world" becomes the theme of how disciples live in the world. Trouble turns to triumph through Jesus.

## A Familiar Theme

Do you know that this idea of sorrow to joy and trouble to triumph, rooted in the plan of God, is all over the Bible?

Let me give you four examples:

**Rehearse** - Take time to remind your heart what is true. Use the Scripture to re-anchor your heart

**Psalm 77** - This lament psalm pours out its sorrows, refuses to stop praying, and asks God some pointed questions (vv. 7-9). But he chooses to remember the works of the Lord (vv. 11-12). He anchors his heart in the Exodus, the moment in Israel's history where God proved his power of deliverance after a long season of waiting.

**Rely** - Embrace the uncertainty while recommitting your heart to what is true

**1 Peter 5:6-11** – Peter calls upon believers to humble themselves under God's mighty hand. He can be trusted! He urges them to be wary of the schemes of the devil, to realize that we will only suffer for a little while (that should sound familiar), and to take hope in the fact that Jesus himself will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

**Rest** – Take comfort

**Romans 8:31-39** – This is a foundational text for being a follower of Jesus. It affirms that God is for us, Jesus died for us, and no suffering can separate us from God's love. Why? Because of the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Do you see the connection between what Jesus is saying and these verses in the old and new testaments? How many of you needed to hear that? How many of you need to be reminded that sorrow will turn to joy, and trouble will turn to triumph?

What do you do when sorrows and trouble come? You rehearse, rely, and rest in two truths:

1. Sorrow will turn to joy
2. Trouble will turn to triumph

In the midst of disorientation, we can find our footing in the promises of Jesus.

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