September 22, 2019

John 16:16-22

"Whatever"

We're still in the section of John that covers Jesus' final words to his disciples before he goes to the cross. That should help us understand how big chapter 16 is. Jesus is going away. Life is filled with good things and bad things. Jesus is showing us how we can have joy in all things.

Last week, we looked at the first two requirements for real joy:

**First, you have to understand God's process.**

In other words, even when things are bad, when you are confused at the direction your life is going in, God knows more than you do. God is at work in your life. He brings joy out of sorrow.

**Second, you have to understand grief.**

In other words, you're going to experience loss in your life. It's going to feel like the sorrow and sadness are tearing you apart. Just remember, grief is a part a life. You cannot have joy without also having grief.

**Third, there is joy in life through a resurrection transformation.**

In verse 20, Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you…you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy." Notice Jesus doesn't say your grief will be replaced by joy. Your grief will turn to joy. As Psalm 30:5 reminds us, "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning." Grief turns to joy.

Here's something you might want to write down:

**Joy comes not through substitution but through transformation. Joy comes through change…not exchange.**

That simple principle changes how you see things. Think about people who move from job to job, because they can't find satisfaction in their work. Think about people who bounce from relationship to relationship, because they can't find joy and happiness. Listen. If you are at all the kind of person who has to have a new something every few years in order to feel joy in your life, then Jesus' gift of transformation is what you need. No matter how much ***new*** you try to stuff into your life to bring joy, it doesn't last. It fades and withers. It's the world's version of joy…not God's.

Think about the principle so many of us grew up with. **What I really need to be happy is…**Most of us have had that thought bouncing around our wee little brains sometime or another. If I'm not feeling joy in my life, there must be something wrong with my circumstances. So I need to change my circumstances to have joy.

Jesus is saying, no…no…no. Your life doesn't need new circumstances. Your life needs transformation. **That Jesus saves this teaching for his last teaching before going to the cross tells us something about how essential it is.**

Think about it this way. How long had the disciples been following Jesus? For most of those three years, they thought he was going to become king and Messiah of all Israel. They were his inner circle. Then they saw Jesus marched up a hill. They saw him nailed to a cross and killed. It was horrible. It was the worst possible ending to their three years with Jesus. It

was probably the worst thing they had ever been a part of - ever.

But three days later, what had been the worst thing became the best thing. The resurrection was transformation. It was real joy. In one miraculous moment they realized that joy doesn't come through an exchange of circumstances. It comes through a change of heart.

How many times do we expect joy to come through a change of circumstances? Someone once said, "Expectations are nothing more than pre-meditated resentments." We think what we want to happen or plan to happen is going to bring joy into our lives. But here's how Jesus flips that. You see, we're taught that joy comes through an exchange of circumstances. But Jesus says joy is in the transformed heart and mind that we bring to any circumstance. A change of heart is the center of joy. That's joy. It's part of God's process. You will weep. You will mourn. You will grieve. Loss and hardship are real. But they will turn to joy. Tragedies aren't replaced by joy. They turn to joy.

Here's how one man put it:

*The way of substitution for solving problems is the way of immaturity. The way of transformation is the way of faith and maturity. We can't mature emotionally or spiritually if someone is always replacing our broken toys.*

- Warren Wiersbe

That's what we do. When we're broken, we try to fix ourselves with things or relationships or busyness. But Jesus has a new kind of joy for us. He wants to take the tough things that life throws at us and turn them to joy.

Here's Paul's commentary on that:

*I want to know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.*

- Philippians 3:10

As Jesus goes to the cross, he tells his disciples that his suffering will lead to his resurrection, which means sorrow gets transformed into joy.

And so it goes. The resurrection process {transformation} happens over and over and over in our lives. It begins with confusion…what is God doing in my life? Then there comes grief over a loss…if God is going to change me, then I'm going to have to lose some old things. That means even things we don't want to lose. That's where the anger over loss comes in. We want to hang on to everything. But sooner or later, things get lost. That's life. But here's the gospel. God kindly and gently transforms what has been lost into joy.

Here's something to remember:

**Jesus Christ wants you to know his resurrection life in every area of your life.**

Here's how powerful that is. Beginning with verse 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. 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.*

No need for explanation here. At least half of us know what Jesus is talking about. That's the transforming power of joy.

When Jesus talks about joy, he's handing down two universal truths about joy:

1. If it can be taken it isn't joy. Nobody takes away your joy. If you think you've lost something joyful in your life, then you invested in the wrong thing. It wasn't joy to begin with. It was counterfeit. It was a shabby substitution.
2. True joy grows out of Jesus' presence. He says he will see us again and we will rejoice. What happened after the crucifixion? The resurrection. They saw him again. Joy grows out of Jesus' presence in your life.

Make no mistake. If you are putting your hope in the living Christ, then you have a joy that cannot be taken or diminished. When your joy is in the living Christ, that is the foundation that brings joy to everything. Do you see how that works? Instead of expecting things to bring joy to us, our changed hearts means we bring joy with us, wherever we go, whatever happens.

Finally, a word on prayer. That's part of chapter 16. Jesus says:

*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.*

Now, I probably don't have to point out how people misunderstand and even misuse this passage. These verses a ripe for distortion by preachers of a prosperity gospel. "Ask and you will receive." "Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you."

Wow! What does that *whatever* mean? There are a lot of *whatevers* I think I need or want. Our understanding of *whatever* is essential to joy producing prayer.

Simply put, whatever will increase your desire to know Jesus Christ…whatever will lead to sharing in his sufferings, deepening your experience of eternal life with him right now…and whatever will increase the fruit of the Spirit in your life…those are the things to pray for. That is the joy in life.

"That your joy may be full," Jesus says. *That your joy may be full*. We find our joy in seeing God's glory. We find joy in others seeing the manifestation of God's glory in us. When worship is preeminent in our lives, God is glorified. When we are loving and joyful and peaceful and patient and kind and good and faithful and gentle and self-controlled, God is glorified. When we love each other, God is glorified. When we love our community, God is glorified. Those are the *whatevers* we ask God for in Jesus' name. That's joy. There's the joy. Amen? And when we are glad in God's glory, He is glorified all the more.

One final finally, and then I promise, we are done. Having the security of God's peace in your life is essential to transformational joy. As Jesus says in verse 33:

*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.*

What is Jesus saying? Peace is not in your circumstances. Peace is not what happens to you or doesn't happen to you. Peace is in Jesus Christ. Nothing can change that fact. Jesus has overcome the world. Your loss doesn't have the last word. Your depression doesn't have the last word. Natural disaster doesn't have the last word. Illness doesn't have the last word. Disease doesn't have the last word. A broken relationship doesn't have the last word. Jesus Christ has the last word. There is the joy. He has overcome the world. End of story.