

John 16:16-33  
1 Samuel 4  
Psalm 78

“From Sorrow to Joy”

September 27, 2020

Those of you who have given birth can testify to the truth of Jesus’ words:  
“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.”  
I’ve had the joy of seeing this seven times.  
But Jesus is talking about something more than childbirth.  
And to understand what Jesus is saying,  
we need to go back to a time when this was not true.  
We need to learn from Phineas’s wife in 1 Samuel 4.

Jesus has told us that his hour has come.  
He is about to endure the suffering of the cross.  
And he has told the disciples that their hour is coming.  
And their hour will be like his hour,  
yet they may take comfort because when their hour comes,  
so also will the Holy Spirit.  
Jesus will be with his people in the midst of their suffering  
by the power of his Spirit.

But that was not true for Phineas’s wife.  
1 Samuel 4 speaks of the death of Israel.  
Israel goes up to battle against the Philistines.  
When they are soundly defeated, the elders of Israel call for the ark of the covenant.  
And the people bring the ark of the covenant of Yahweh Sabaoth—  
The LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim.  
God himself sits upon this ark.  
Surely with his presence, Israel will triumph against their enemies!  
But God has determined to judge Israel for the sins of Hophni and Phineas,  
the sons of Eli the priest.  
1 Samuel 3 tells us how Samuel heard the voice of the LORD,  
declaring the judgment that would fall on the house of Eli.  
And that judgment falls in 4:10-11.  
The Philistines fight bravely, and kill 30,000 Israelites,  
including Hophni and Phineas,  
and capture the ark of God.  
The messenger runs to Shiloh to tell Eli the news.  
Eli hears the message of the defeat of the Israelites, and mourns.  
He hears the news of the death of his two sons, and grieves.  
But when he hears that the ark of the covenant has been captured,

he is stricken—falls over backwards and breaks his neck.  
The death of his sons was bad news—  
but that was only the justice of God against their wickedness—  
but the capture of the ark!  
That signaled the judgment of God against all Israel.  
God's presence had gone out from his people.  
The Spirit of God no longer is with them.  
His daughter-in-law understood this too.  
She was pregnant,  
and when she heard that the ark had been captured  
and the entire priesthood of Israel was dead  
(her husband, brother-in-law, and father-in-law),  
she bowed and gave birth, for her pains came upon her.  
She had sorrow because her hour had come.  
But not hers alone.  
Her pains were the birthpains of Israel.  
She felt in her body the anguish of the nation—  
an anguish Isaiah would later express over the exile:  
“We were pregnant, we writhed, but we have given birth to wind.” (26:18)  
Phineas's wife feels in her body the futility of her labor pains.  
When the women try to comfort her, “do not be afraid, for you have borne a son!”  
She understands better than they that even a son brings no comfort.  
The Comforter has left.

It is as though when you gave birth to your child,  
you heard the news,  
not only that your husband and father-in-law had died,  
but that the Holy Spirit had been recalled to heaven,  
and you were utterly alone.  
And so she names the child “Ichabod.” (No glory)  
Because the glory had departed from Israel.  
The ark of God had been captured—her father-in-law and her husband were dead.  
Any woman would mourn the loss of her family,  
but Phineas's wife understands that her loss is not hers alone.  
And so she says:  
“The glory has departed from Israel,  
for the ark of God has been captured.”

What hope do I have without my God?  
What future does my son have without the presence of the LORD?

And so she died.

Without the presence of God,  
sorrow leads to death.

Our Psalm of response is Psalm 78.

We won't sing all 27 stanzas today!

We'll sing the first four stanzas (which give the reason for the song – to teach the next generation through the examples of their fathers) – and then we'll sing the last six stanzas (22-27).

The middle stanzas retell the story of the Exodus – and the rebellions in the wilderness.

And yet how God was faithful to his promises, and he brought his people into the Promised Land.

But then it retells the story of Phineas's wife...

Sing Psalm 78 – Stanzas 1-4, 22-27

Read John 16

When we return to John 16 we find ourselves in a different world from that of Samuel.

Jesus has told his disciples that when he goes to the Father, he will send the Holy Spirit to be with them.

Indeed, with Jesus at the right hand of the Father, we know that we have full access to God.

We may approach the throne of grace with boldness, because we come in Jesus' name.

Never again *must* we inscribe "Ichabod" over the doors of the church, because the glory will never depart again.

But that doesn't mean that we will never have sorrow.

The difference between us and Phineas's wife is not that she endured pain and agony, and we will not.

No, Jesus makes it clear that we will endure anguish.

The difference is that we never need to lose hope.

## 1. "A Little While" – What It Means to Live in Between "Her Hour" and "That Day" (v16-24)

### a. Sorrow (the Cross) and Joy (the Resurrection) (v16-20)

<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.

Jesus starts by saying, “A little while and you will see me no longer;  
and again a little while and you will see me.”

This causes no small consternation among the disciples.

What does Jesus mean “a little while”?

Verses 20-24 explain it as a contrast between the disciples and the world.

The world will rejoice, but you will weep and lament.

You will think that you are in the place of Phineas’s wife.

You will think that there is no hope.

The great priest will die.

The presence of God on earth will be removed.

After all, Jesus is the Word who became flesh and tabernacled among us.

In the death of Jesus, it will very much feel like the days of Phineas.

You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.

Jesus will do battle against the enemies of God,

and like Hophni and Phineas, he will be struck down.

He will be taken captive, like the ark of the covenant long ago.

And you will think that hope has perished from the earth.

When your hour comes, you will feel like Phineas’s wife,

thinking that she is giving birth for nothing.

And you will declare “Ichabod”—there is no glory.

But take heart.

There is a new birth coming.

(read)

**b. The Analogy of Childbirth (v21-22)**

*<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.*

I remember the little laugh that Ginger gave every time a baby came out!

Don’t take “she no longer remembers the anguish” too literally!

The point is that *compared to the joy of this little child being born* –  
the pains of labor are as nothing.

Paul says the same thing –

“these light momentary afflictions

are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory.”

Labor pains are some of the worst pains most women will ever feel.

But when they consider the fruit – the child – there is no comparison.

In the same way, the sufferings and afflictions that we endure in this life

are not worth comparing with the joy that is set before us.

<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.*

Jesus is speaking first to the disciples about what they will experience in the next few days.  
When he dies, they will endure the anguish and sorrow of being alone.  
But then he will be raised from the dead, and they will see him again and rejoice.  
And no one will take that joy away!

But Jesus' language suggests that he is also speaking to us as well.  
Because he speaks of their joy in terms of communion with the Father.  
(23-24)

**c. Ask the Father in My Name, and You Will Receive (v23-24)**

<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.*

Because Jesus has been raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father,  
we may ask the Father for whatever we wish, in Jesus' name.

“In that day”

in what day?

In the day that “I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice,  
and no one will take your joy from you.”

For the disciples, “that day” was Resurrection Sunday.

That was the day in which their joy was made full.

From that day on, no one could take away their joy.

That is the day in which we will not ask anything of Jesus.

Why will we ask nothing of Jesus?

Because we can ask the Father.

Jesus explains that so far they have asked nothing of the Father.

What?

The disciples have never prayed?

No. That's not the point.

They have asked nothing of the Father “*in my name.*”

There is something unique about prayer in the name of Jesus.

“Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.”

“Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”

That is a remarkable promise.

What does it mean?

Is it some special promise limited to the apostles?

Only they got whatever they asked?

But what about Paul—  
who asked three times for God to remove his thorn in the flesh,  
and yet the only response was ‘my grace is sufficient for you!’ (2 C 12:9)

No, this promise is for you.

But you may not separate the “whatever you ask” from the “in my name.”  
God is not an idol that you can manipulate.  
It’s not a matter of “getting on his good side” so you can get whatever you want.  
Rather, you must ask in Jesus’ name.  
And to ask in Jesus’ name is to ask for that which gives honor to Jesus.  
To pray in the name of Jesus is to pray that his kingdom would expand.

To pray for your own selfish gain in the name of Jesus is a contradiction in terms,  
and a mockery of prayer.

James seems to be dealing with the same misunderstanding in James 4,  
“You ask and do not receive,  
because you ask wrongly to spend it on your passions.” (James 4:3)

If you want to understand how to pray,  
learn from the disciples.

In the book of Acts we hear of what it means to pray in the name of Jesus.

Acts 1:14 tells us that the disciples devoted themselves to prayer  
after the ascension of Christ.

Acts 2:42 tells us that those who repented and were baptized  
devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship,  
to the breaking of bread and to prayers.

What did those prayers look like?  
(Read Acts 4:24-30)

Prayer in the name of Jesus asks for wisdom and boldness  
for the servants of Christ who proclaim his message.

The apostles determine in Acts 6:4  
that they must devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word  
Cornelius’ prayers in Acts 10:4 result in the coming of the gospel to the Gentiles.

And all throughout Acts, the apostles declare that they speak in the name of Jesus.

They heal in the name of Jesus.

They cast out demons in the name of Jesus.

They baptize in the name of Jesus.

And so they pray in the name of Jesus.

Paul goes so far as to say in Colossians 3:17,  
that whatever you do—whether in word or in deed—  
do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,  
giving thanks to God the Father through him.

This ought to give us boldness in prayer.

This is why I am confident to pray for the day when all Christians

will be reunited in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.  
That would honor the name of Jesus.  
And so I pray—and so I preach.

This is also why I pray that Michiana Covenant Church would become Michiana Pby.  
Because I firmly believe that it would honor Christ  
to have a faithful church in every neighborhood.  
And this is why “I bow my knees before the Father,  
from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,  
that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you  
to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,  
so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—  
that you, being rooted and grounded in love,  
may have strength to comprehend with all the saints  
what is the breadth and length and height and depth,  
and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,  
that you may be filled with all the fulness of God!” (Eph. 3:14-19)

Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.  
While this is indeed good news,  
remember the context.  
Jesus is going away.  
He is leaving the world and going to the Father.  
And this is the point that Jesus highlights in verses 25-28:

## **2. “I Have Overcome the World” – the Triumph of the Son of God (v25-33)**

### **a. The Father Loves You – so Ask Him! (v25-28)**

<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>[c]</sup> <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.”

If anyone ever says that God the Father was angry at us,  
and so Jesus came in order to placate a wrathful Father –  
that is a lie from the pit of hell!

The Father himself loves you!

The Father loves the world – and he showed his love by sending his only-begotten Son,  
that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life!

Jesus came from the Father – and came into the world –  
the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

But now the Son is leaving the world and is returning to the Father.  
He is returning to the Father as the Savior of the World!

And finally the disciples understand:

**b. The Disciples Finally Get It!!! (v29-31)**

<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?”*

There is a certain sadness in Jesus’ reply.  
After all this time, do you now believe?  
Here, on the last night, just before my death—do you only now believe?  
But Jesus understands that even this is in God’s perfect timing:  
(32-33)

**c. “That in Me You May Have Peace” (v32-33)**

<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.*

The hour has come.

Jesus will speak no more to his disciples until all things have been accomplished.  
They will flee and be scattered—like the dispersion of the Exiles.  
Jesus alone will face the cross—the hordes of the evil one.  
Alone—and yet not alone—because the Father is with him.

Again Jesus is driving home the principle of *perichoresis* –  
the mutual indwelling of the Holy Trinity.  
The Father is in the Son – and the Son is in the Father.

And then Jesus speaks his final words to them before he goes to the cross (v 33)

<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.”*

Your hour will come.

In the world you will have tribulation.  
You will suffer.  
But your sorrow will be turned to joy,  
first because the Holy Spirit will remain with you,  
and second, because Jesus will return.

What does it mean that Jesus has “overcome” the world?

The word is *nikao* – the word John uses in Revelation to speak of our victory in Jesus.  
The cry “Nike, Nike” means “victory, victory!”  
Jesus has conquered!



Sure, you will encounter opposition –  
but the opposition comes from a foe who has already been defeated!

Sin and death and the devil have already been conquered.  
Satan is cast down from heaven – he no longer may accuse us before God.  
Sin is forgiven through the blood of the Lamb.  
Death is conquered through the resurrection of Christ.

The battle is over – the victory is won!  
So what is the point of this “in between” time?  
This is the time when we do “greater things”  
through the presence of the Holy Trinity with us.  
Jesus said that those who believe in him will do “greater works than these” –  
greater works than the works that Jesus himself did in his life and ministry  
(John 14:12).

When Jesus goes to the Father – he goes in triumph – he goes as the Victorious King!  
And when he sent the Holy Spirit – the Spirit that proceeds from the Father –  
he himself comes to his people –  
because the Spirit indwells both the Father and the Son.  
And so we do “greater works” than Jesus,  
because it is *through us* that the salvation of the world takes place!

No, it’s not that *we save* anyone!  
Only God can save.  
But if you have been joined to the life of God,  
through union with his only-begotten Son,  
then he is at work in and through you.

And – as we have seen throughout Jesus’ discourse –  
our sufferings and afflictions are part of our being joined to the life of God.

In the same way that the Savior of the world passed through suffering and death –  
so also those who abide in him are brought through the same cross to glory.

Take heart; I have overcome the world.

In your trials and temptations,  
take heart, I have overcome the world.

When you do not think that you have the strength to endure,  
you are right.  
You don’t.

But you have been joined to the life of God.

Therefore call upon the Father in the name of Jesus,  
Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.