

3. Jesus knew His disciples were troubled and confused by the things He'd been telling them and He sought to quiet their fears and encourage them in view of what lay ahead – not only for Him, but for them. There was much they still needed to hear and learn, but at this point it was critical that they understand and tightly embrace the things He'd told them. Otherwise they would surely stumble in the hour of testing. And so this section of the discourse provides the transition between Jesus' instruction and His climactic prayer on His disciples' behalf. He'd told them what was necessary for them to know at that time, but His instruction would only profit them if they received it, not in confusion and fear, but with understanding, courage and peace. The same burden that moved Him to petition His Father on their behalf motivated Him to do all He could to illumine their understanding and settle their hearts and minds (cf. 16:1, 4, 6, 12, 25, 33).

Toward this end, Jesus elaborated on His sending of the Spirit and what His coming and ministration would mean for them and their calling as His witnesses. Now He turned His attention to the matter of His own return and how the dynamics of that phenomenon were going to play out. He'd told the disciples that He was leaving, but He also assured them that He was going to return in the person of His Spirit. Thereafter He'd be with them in a radically new way (cf. again 14:1-3, 16-20, 23 with Matthew 18:20, 28:20 and Revelation 1:10-2:1), but first there was to be an intervening return – that is, His resurrection from the dead (16:16-33).

- a. Scholars have wrestled with Jesus' meaning in this passage since the time of the early Church fathers. Some have held that He was referring to His resurrection, while others believe He was talking about His return in the Spirit (cf. 16:23-28 with 14:1-20). Still others, Augustine among them, have looked even further into the future, believing verse 16 refers to the present age which culminates with Jesus' Parousia ("again a little while and you will see Me"). The best solution is to treat Jesus' words as following the pattern set by Israel's prophets. They took a panoramic view of the future and wove together themes of near and distant phenomena in their utterances. In this way they highlighted the organic, interrelated nature of God's purposes and work in the world.

This pattern arguably characterizes Jesus' Olivet Discourse as recorded by the Synoptists and seems to be present here as well. To this point in the Upper Room He'd emphasized His return in the Spirit, but His statements in 16:16-22 strongly suggest His impending resurrection. But these two phenomena are inseparably conjoined and mutually interpreting. Hence one would expect Jesus to weave both into this final instruction to His disciples. They were going to see Him shortly after His death and find their sorrow turned to joy when they realized that death hadn't held Him. But the ultimate significance of that "day" is its inauguration of the new creational paradigm that would radically transform His relationship with them and, through them, with the world of men and finally the entire created order. His resurrection to newness of life would signal their resurrection as He took them up in His own life by His return in His Spirit. Jesus understood – and wanted His disciples to understand – that His resurrection meant life for the world (6:33, 51); resurrection from the dead has its goal and fruit in new creation.

John indicated that Jesus' statement raised questions in the minds of His disciples and the way he framed those questions suggests that they were struggling to reconcile His return to His Father ("you will not behold Me") and His insistence that they were going to see Him again (16:17-18). He'd told them He was going to return in the person of the Spirit after leaving them, but this "return" wouldn't involve them seeing Him with their eyes (16:7-10). So also He'd seemed to indicate that His return to the Father was permanent, yet now He spoke as if this absence was only for a short time (cf. 16:10, 16).

Jesus knew His disciples were puzzled and wished to question Him and so He answered their confusion. But He did so in an unexpected way. They were concerned with the things He was speaking about (vv. 17, 19); He focused on the effect of those things on them. They were going to agonize over His death while those around them celebrated it. But their agony would be like that of a woman travailing in labor: It would give way to an exultant joy transcending and completely eclipsing their former pain. Thus the issue with "a little while" wasn't duration, but design: It spoke of an ordained interval serving a particular outcome. The disciples' sorrow was real and justified because their Lord was leaving them, but after "a little while" they would see Him again and then have Him forever. Their travail in sorrow was going to give birth to joy – enduring joy that no one and nothing would ever be able to take from them (16:22).

- b. And when the disciples beheld Jesus again with joyful eyes it would signal a new paradigm in their relationship with Him. This is the new "day" of intimate union and communion He'd already spoken about; the "day" characterized by "you in Me and I in you" such that both Father and Son would make their abode with them (14:19-23). This is the "day" of the outpoured Spirit ushering in the life-out-of-death for men (and the creation) that is the goal of Jesus' own resurrection.

In that new day the Eleven (and all true disciples) were going to know their Lord as sharing His life and mind by His Spirit (16:13-15) with the result that they would no longer need to ask Him questions as they presently did (16:23; cf. 20:19-29, 21:1-12, 15-22; also Luke 24:33-43; Acts 1:1-8). And abiding in Him as branches appointed to bear His fruit, His Father would give them whatever they asked in His name – that is, in accordance with the truth of His person and work (cf. 16:23-24 with 14:12-14, 15:7-8). Even more, Jesus explained to His apostles that this new Lord-disciple relationship would mean direct intimacy between them and His Father; because He is in the Father, their union with Him would render them in the Father as well (17:20-21; cf. Colossians 3:1-4). *His* Father was to become *their* Father such that they would truly know Him and commune with Him as His beloved, devoted children (16:26-27; cf. 20:1-18).

- c. Jesus explained these things out of concern to address the disciples' confusion and allay their fears. And most important was that they recognize that none of this was either arbitrary or contrary; everything He spoke about and promised precisely accorded with His Father's purposes in sending Him into the world (16:28).

The apostles responded enthusiastically, crediting Jesus with finally speaking to them plainly. He'd admitted to using figurative language with them, but He also insisted that an hour was coming when He was going to speak openly concerning His Father (16:25). Some commentators point to His birthing analogy as the figurative speech He was alluding to, but it's better to understand Jesus as referring broadly to the mysterious quality of His words as heard and interpreted by men. By His own admission, He spoke openly and clearly in His teaching and preaching, but His meaning was veiled to those lacking "ears to hear." Men's minds and hearts, not His language, obscured His speech (cf. 10:22-27 with Matthew 13:1-17, 34-35; Acts 28:16-28; 2 Corinthians 3:12-18).

Whatever the apostles thought Jesus meant, they evidently perceived His summary statement (v. 28) to be an example of the "plain speaking" about His Father He'd just promised. They were confident they were now hearing Him clearly and understanding His meaning. Furthermore, they insisted that their understanding was met with faith (16:30). Jesus, however, knew better; though they'd gained some insight and conviction (cf. 17:6-8), the apostles didn't *truly* comprehend what He'd been telling them; if they did, they would react differently to the coming events (16:31-32). For He'd been instructing them concerning those things, how they would fulfill His mission in the world and what that fulfillment meant for them and their calling. He'd given His apostles all that was necessary for them to stand fast in confident faith, yet, when events began to play out in a few hours, they were going to abandon Him in fear – first at His arrest and then in their slowness to embrace Him after His resurrection (cf. Mark 14:26-50; John 20:19-29, 21:1-14). The Eleven, like Jesus' other disciples, were "foolish and slow of heart to believe" their prophets and their Lord (Luke 24:13-41). No, the hour of "plain speaking" Jesus promised hadn't arrived; it awaited the Spirit's coming. From that hour forward He'd communicate clearly concerning His Father by means of the Spirit's illumination – the Spirit of the Father and the Son sent by both to lead the sons of the kingdom into all truth (14:25-26, 15:26, 16:12-15).

- d. Anxiousness, fear and doubt were already infecting Jesus' apostles and very soon they'd be overcome. Whatever their sense of themselves at that moment, true peace eluded them. Jesus knew this, but also understood that peace was to be one of the supreme fruits of His work. For this peace – this *shalom* – is fundamental to the inter-Trinitarian life and love and the triune God intended that His beloved creation should experience it. The first creation caught a glimpse of this peace and God held it out as a centerpiece of His renewing and perfecting work. The prophets pledged and celebrated it and Israel longed for its coming. For that day would bring reconciliation and healing, not just to Israel, but to the whole creation as Yahweh arose in His messianic Servant to banish the curse, restore the desolate habitations and recover His world back to Himself (Isaiah 9:1-8, 32:12-20, 54:1ff; Zechariah 9:9-10). That day had now come in Jesus the Messiah. And though men would continue to know tribulation in a traveling world awaiting its renewal, Yahweh's promised peace was now yea and amen in the triumphant Prince of Peace. Whatever life's storms, there is *shalom* for those in Him (16:33, 14:27).