

Resurrection Joy

John 20:20

The vignettes we just watched are representative of the various types of circumstances that commonly cause us sorrow in this life. There are sorrows associated with troubled relationships, health problems, uncertainty over career and finances. Honestly, I can't remember a time when I've known more people who are experiencing deep sorrow because of their circumstances. Many of you here today face difficulties and challenges that have the potential of filling you with sorrow.

And then there is a whole other set of sorrows associated with the condition of our souls. Sometimes we find ourselves grieved by the things we've said and done; deep down we're really grieved at the persons we've become. We can only blame our circumstances and other people for so long. Eventually we have to face ourselves. We grieve over our obsessions and addictions, our fears and anxieties, our pride, our inconsistencies. We all have these types of sorrows in our lives.

The question I'd like to pose this morning is this: "Is it possible to have joy even when these issues aren't resolved? Is it possible to be deeply satisfied in God and His ways even when our circumstances are rather troubling and even when our souls aren't completely healthy?"

You may wonder why we're bringing up such a heavy topic on Easter morning. This topic is suggested by the experience of Jesus' first disciples. From Friday to Sunday, the disciples were full of sorrow and fear. Because of Jesus' crucifixion (circumstances) and because of their own cowardice (condition of their souls), they couldn't imagine that their lives would ever be good again. Out of kindness and compassion, Jesus tells them ahead of time that their sorrow will be turned to joy at His resurrection.

What Jesus says to *them* is very relevant to *us*. Since we live after the resurrection, the joy Jesus promised them is available to us. Even though we have troubling circumstances that remain unresolved and even though our souls remain imperfect, we too can have the joy that the disciples experienced at the resurrection. And so let's consider John 16:16-22.

The Joy of Jesus' Resurrection (John 16:16-22; 20:19-20) We are going to continue our study in the gospel of John this morning. In John 16:16 Jesus makes a statement to His disciples that hints at His resurrection.

16 "A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me."

Jesus has repeatedly mentioned that the reason they will "no longer see" Him is because He is going to the cross to die for the sins of the world. Here He adds that after "a little while" they would see Him again. The following narrative makes clear that

“a little while” would be only three days; on the third day the disciples would see Him raised bodily from the dead. But this was all very confusing to the disciples:

17 Some of His disciples then said to one another, “What is this thing He is telling us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’?” 18 So they were saying, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is talking about.”

John then records that Jesus understood their confusion. He proceeds to tell them as much as they could receive at that time.

19 Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, “Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me’?”

Jesus then gives this explanation:

20 “Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy.

The disciples did indeed “weep and lament” when Jesus was arrested (see Luke 22:62), when Jesus’ flesh was ripped open from being flogged, when He was condemned to die, when He was crucified between two criminals, when He breathed His last breath (see Luke 23:49), and when He was laid in the tomb. Jesus pointed out that while the disciples were grieving, the world was rejoicing: they had solved the problem of Jesus; they were happy because they had gotten rid of this man who threatened the spiritual and political status quo. While the disciples were weeping and lamenting, the world was rejoicing.

But, Jesus assured them, after “a little while” their “grief would be turned into joy.” Jesus then gives an illustration that was rather common in the Hebrew Scriptures - that of a woman in labor. I could never get away with this illustration, but Jesus could:

21 “Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world.

Throughout John “the hour” refers to the hour of Jesus’ crucifixion when He would pay for the sins of the world. Here He says that that “hour” is analogous to the “hour” of a woman’s labor pains. I confirmed this with my wife the other day: eventually the pain of labor is overshadowed by the joy of having a child in your arms. The very thing that caused pain would also bring joy. This would be the disciples’ experience also:

22 “Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.

Jesus told them that after the resurrection “your heart will rejoice” and “no one will take your joy away from you.” It’s not that they would never know sorrow again. It’s that something so profound will have happened that they would have joy that overshadowed their troubles. It’s important to note that Jesus wasn’t promising improved circumstances. Things would get much worse for the disciples *in this life*. Almost to a man they would be martyred. Jesus wasn’t promising pleasant circumstances. He was promising something much deeper - a heart-level joy that couldn’t be taken away by anybody or anything.

In John 20 we read the initial fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to His disciples. We read how the disciples’ sorrow turned to joy when Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection. Mary had already reported to the disciples how she had seen Jesus raised from the dead. Beginning in verse 19 we read this:

19 So when it was evening on that day, the first *day* of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace *be* with you.” 20 And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus showed them His scars to prove to them that He didn’t merely look like the person hanging on the cross the previous Friday; He was one and the same person. Nails had been pounded through His hands, and a spear had been thrust into His side to confirm that He was dead. In his book *King’s Cross*, Tim Keller talks about the significance of Jesus showing the disciples His scars.

“The last time the disciples saw Jesus, they thought those scars were ruining their lives. The disciples had thought they were on a presidential campaign. They thought that their candidate was going to win and they were going to be in the cabinet, and when they saw the nails going into the hands and the feet and the spear going into the side, they believed those wounds had destroyed their lives. And now Jesus is showing them that in his resurrected body his scars are still there.”

I love the point Keller makes here. Those scars had been the source of the disciples’ sorrows, but now they were the source of their joy. The disciples’ reaction was exactly as Jesus had predicted: they “rejoiced when they saw the Lord.” ***Their sorrow was turned to joy.*** Certainly there was an emotional element to their joy; there had to be a rush of excitement when they realized that Jesus was raised from the dead. And when we think about our own joy, I don’t think we should minimize the element of emotion. But their joy wasn’t *merely* emotion; it was much, much deeper than that. It would prove to be a deep, abiding satisfaction in their souls that no one could take away from them.

Just to illustrate how their joy was deeper than their circumstances, consider what happened to the disciples/apostles in Acts 5. They had been arrested for teaching in the temple about Jesus.

40 . . . and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and *then* released them. 41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name.

The flogging they had just received didn't take away their joy; the "shame" they experienced didn't take away their joy. The joy of the resurrection gave them a type of joy that made it "okay" that they suffered persecution/evil at the hands of people.

At this point we should ask the question, "Why did Jesus' resurrection give the disciples joy that no one could take away?" The short answer is that ***the resurrection validated everything Jesus said and did.*** The last three years with Jesus hadn't been a cruel joke. Everything Jesus had taught about the Kingdom, about the power of loving your enemies, about His identity (the light of the world, the bread of life, the living water, the good shepherd, etc.) was true! ***The resurrection validated the truth of Jesus' life and the power of His death.***

Some of you may be familiar with the game called Jenga. You begin by stacking up layers of wooden blocks in an overlapping pattern to form a tower. To play the game you take turns removing blocks from somewhere in the stack; you lose when you remove a block that causes the rest of the tower to collapse. In the Christian faith, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is like that block. If you remove the resurrection of Jesus Christ from Christianity, the whole thing collapses.

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says that if Christ hasn't been raised from the dead, our faith is worthless and we're still in our sins (15:17). If Christ wasn't raised from the dead, Christianity is merely a fairy tale that only makes us feel better. Paul said that if Christ wasn't raised from the dead, we are the most pitiful people on the planet. The converse is also true: If Jesus ***has been raised*** from the dead, we're doing the most rational, logical thing in believing in Him and following Him through this life.

The joy of the resurrection isn't merely excitement over the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead. The joy that sustained the disciples when they were falsely accused and publicly shamed flowed from what Jesus' death and resurrection accomplished. ***Jesus' death and resurrection established the new covenant.*** A covenant defines a relationship between two parties - your commitment to each other and how you relate to each other. In the new covenant, God removes our sins as far as the east is from the west, writes His truth on our hearts, and puts His Spirit within us. God promises, "You will be My people and I will be your God." The resurrection validates the new covenant.

How does Jesus' resurrection secure for us a type of joy that "no one can take away"? Our joy rests on the same foundation as that of the original disciples. The

resurrection guarantees that the life and death of Jesus established a new covenant. When you put your faith in Christ, the deepest longings of your heart are satisfied. This relationship with God gives you so much forgiveness and life and freedom that you have a type of joy that is so substantive that nothing can take it away. It's not that you never have sorrow or that you never get "down"; but joy is always restored because your relationship with God is secure.

Let's think about how this joy transcends the two types of sorrow/grief we mentioned at the beginning of this message: sorrow associated with troubling circumstances and with our own sin. **First**, let's consider how we can have joy even before our circumstances are resolved. The disciples' experience is very instructive. Because of the resurrection, they saw "danger" very differently. Before they realized Jesus was raised from the dead, they were meeting behind locked doors out of fear of the authorities. After the resurrection (and the coming of the Holy Spirit), they went out into public places and talked openly about Jesus. Acts 5 even recorded that they rejoiced (i.e., expressed joy) that they could "suffer shame" for Jesus' name. The resurrection changed everything. They went from trying to protect themselves to asking the question, "How can God be honored no matter what happens?"

Ultimately each of us needs to come to this same place in relation to our troubling circumstances. Instead of being consumed with anxiety and fear, we need to ask, "How might God be glorified through my suffering and even my shame?" This isn't at all meant to minimize or trivialize what you're experiencing. You need to enter into your pain and your suffering fully; there's no place for pretending that your circumstances are good or easy when they're not. But the resurrection of Jesus proves that there is something much deeper at work in your life and in your circumstances.

Second, let's consider how we can have joy in spite of our own sinfulness (in spite of the fact that we're not perfect yet). The resurrection of Jesus proves that there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). If you've received Jesus' forgiveness for your sin, you will never have to pay for it. You will never be condemned for your sin. The condemnation that you deserved fell upon Jesus.

This means that you no longer need to put on a spiritual facade to make people think you're better than you are. The most natural instinct in the world is to cover up our sin and hide it from others; we don't want to be "found out." On a sunny fall day in 1972 a man stood on a street corner in the busy Chicago Loop. As people walked by he would occasionally lift his arm and point to a person and pronounce, "Guilty!" He would then resume his stance for a few moments before raising his arm again and pronouncing to someone else, "Guilty!" Apparently the effect on people was startling. People would look at each other and at the man and hurry on their way. One man was overheard saying, "How did he know?" (Karl Menninger in *Whatever Became of Sin*, pp. 1-2)

He "knew" that he was pointing at a guilty man because **we're all guilty**. The resurrection of Jesus makes it okay to admit as much. We can admit, "I'm guilty. . . I

still sin. . .” because there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. We can live like people whose sin has actually been paid for by Christ. Instead of slinking around in the darkness and hiding our sin, we confess our sins to God and even to trusted friends who will speak the truth in love and pray for us. We walk in the light - allowing our sin to be exposed - and we have genuine fellowship with one another.

If you’ve never experienced this type of freedom and this type of joy, you may not think that it’s even possible. But the resurrection of Jesus changes everything. We can have deep, abiding joy even when our circumstances are unresolved and even when our souls remain imperfect.