

## **Preparing For Sorrow**

### **John 16:16-24**

This morning I want to talk about the importance of being prepared, and I want to start by asking: Are you the kind of person that likes to plan and prepare for things, or do you like to fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants? There are benefits to both approaches and I've seen both in this church family. I think I'm a little bit of each, but mostly a planner. For some things I like to wait and see what happens, but mostly I prefer to be prepared.

There are a lot of things we should prepare for – maybe it's having guests in your home for a few days, or getting your taxes done, or going on a vacation. Amy and I have had several things we've had to prepare for in the past few months. We prepared for Caleb's graduation and open house, and then we had a trip to Montana for a wedding, and we've got a similar trip to Illinois coming up next weekend. These are all things we've needed to prepare for. And there are many more – things like work, or a house project, or meals for the week, or a big birthday party, or holiday gathering.

Being prepared is very important for a lot of things, and this morning I want to talk about one that I think is most important, and that's sorrow. Sorrow is something that none of us want to encounter, but all of us will, and it's not something that we want to approach with the attitude of just flying-by-the-seat-of-our-pants. We want to be prepared as much as possible because sorrow is always difficult and it can be even more crippling and devastating if we're not prepared.

But how can you prepare for sorrow? Sometimes you can see it coming but a lot of times you can't, and it pops up unexpectedly. And even when you can see it coming, you never really know what it's going to be like until it arrives. Sorrow can come from many things – I've experienced sorrow from kids growing up and leaving home, and from loved ones getting sick and dying. Some of you have faced similar things, or maybe an accident or injury, declining health, loss of a job, having to move from a home and community you love. Some of you have lost spouses or kids. Some of you have lost friends. Some of you are dealing with cancer and declining health.

As good as life can be at times, it isn't a fairytale, and there isn't always a happy ending. There are sorrows that all of us are going to face in this life. How can we be prepared?

As we continue our series in the Upper Room, we're going to see a passage where Jesus is preparing his disciples for sorrow, and he points them to something that is going to also help us as we prepare for the sorrows we're going to face in our lives. This won't make it easy, but it will give us solid ground to stand on, and a way to move forward so we're not overcome by sorrow and crippled with grief.

Jesus just finished teaching his disciples about how he would send the Holy Spirit to them after he went to be with his Father and how the Holy Spirit would be at work in the world and in their lives to help them in their mission and ministry. And now he turns his attention to preparing them for the deep anguish they would go through in the next two days.

Read John 16:16-19.

*“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’?”*

So he begins by saying, “In a little while you will see me no longer, and again a little while and you will see me.” You can see this was confusing to them, and they didn't know what he meant. Why would they not see him in a little while, but then see him in a little while? What did he mean by “a little while”? Did this have something to do with what he said earlier about going to the Father?

They were confused, and Jesus could see it, so he gives them an answer to their questions in the next few verses.

Ready John 16:20-24.

*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.*

So he gives an answer, but I'm not sure it cleared things up or not, because he didn't give a direct answer. For them it would have been very difficult to understand until later on when they could put the pieces together. For us it's a little easier because we know what was about to happen. Scholars generally agree that based on his answer, when Jesus said, "A little while, and you will see me no longer," he's talking about his death and burial. That would be a time when they wouldn't see him, they would weep and lament, and the world would rejoice, especially the Jewish religious leaders.

But what does he mean by "and again a little while, and you will see me"? Scholars wonder if he's talking about when they would see him after his resurrection, or when they would see him at his Second Coming. Either could be a possibility, but it seems to me that the one that fits best is that he's talking about when they would see him after his resurrection. That's when they would see him again and their sorrow would turn into joy, and they would begin asking the Father in Jesus' name.

Jesus was trying to prepare them for the deep sorrow they would feel in a little while when they would see him die on the cross. He was reassuring them that after his death, their sorrow would turn into an unshakeable joy, and we know that's because of his resurrection. Not only would they be filled with joy because he was alive again and they could see him, but that's when I think a whole bunch of things would begin to make sense to them about what Jesus had been telling them.

I think there would have been much more clarity about his purpose and mission on earth and how he was building his kingdom. And I also think they would realize that even though he was leaving them to go to the Father, he would always be with them in Spirit and would eventually return to take them to be with him forever, once their mission was complete. His promise to them

was their sorrow would turn into joy, and I want us to see that their joy would be grounded upon an eternal hope and the promises of an eternal kingdom and no one could take that away from them.

To help them understand how their sorrow would turn into joy, he used the illustration of a mother giving birth to a baby. When that mother is going through labor and delivery, she has sorrow because of the anguish of giving birth. Some of you can relate to that. But once that baby has been delivered, her attention shifts very quickly from her sorrow to joy because of the wonder of meeting and holding her precious new baby.

That's a little bit like what the disciples would soon experience – they would go through the anguish of seeing their master be crucified. But then would come the jubilation of unshakable joy as they beheld him, risen from the dead, never to die again. They would begin to see that he was building an eternal kingdom and they would be with him forever. It would change their lives forever and nothing could take their joy away – not persecution, imprisonment, suffering, or even death.

So I think that's what Jesus was telling them that night in the Upper Room, and even though we won't go through the same sorrow they were going to go through, this teaching gives us the answer for how to prepare for whatever sorrows we face.

How do we prepare for the sorrows in this life? We keep our eyes on the eternal joy that is awaiting us in heaven. The disease you are suffering from is not the end of the story for you. The pain you feel from the loss of a loved one is not the end. The loss of your health or home or things you enjoy in this world is not the end. The Psalmist declares: "*Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.*" (Ps. 30:5b) And we need to arm ourselves with that way of thinking.

The disciples took Jesus' words to heart, and after experiencing the joy of Christ's resurrection, they lived with the future glory of heaven in mind and taught others to do the same. In 1 Peter 1:3-9, Peter writes: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* <sup>4</sup> *to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,* <sup>5</sup> *who by God's power are being*

*guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, <sup>9</sup> obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”*

Paul writes something similar in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18: *“For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”* And again in Philippians 3:12-14: *“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

Because Jesus died and rose again, he has secured an eternal salvation and inheritance for all who trust in him, and we need to keep our eyes fixed on him and on heaven, especially in times of sorrow. There is always hope, no matter what you’re going through, for those who are in Christ. Are you fixing your eyes on him? Are you living in light of eternity? That is how we prepare, and that is how you respond to the sorrow you’re going through today. No matter what happens to us in this life, we will always have our eternal home with him to look forward to: eternal life, eternal joy, everlasting peace, rest, blessing and goodness and there will be no more pain and sorrow, only joy and blessing. Keep turning your eyes to the future joys and glory of heaven. Keep reminding yourself that joy comes in the morning. Know that your Savior is with you at every moment, and he will see you through to the other side.