



SERMON TITLE: The Difference Jesus Makes

DATE: November 15, 2020

SCRIPTURE: John 16:16-24

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"These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ" (John 20:31). This is how John concludes his biography of Jesus. He wanted the young, the old, the sick, the well, the despairing, the hopeful, the skeptics, the faithful, and whoever reads his account of Jesus to believe and trust him more fully. But what did John want them to believe? He wanted them to believe that Jesus alone brought eternal life into the present, broken world. And for all who enter this eternal life with God right now, we—like John—are exiles. For all who enter a relationship with Jesus, we will very likely be marginalized and dismissed because we follow him. So, what does it mean to believe? And how do we mature in believing? What does it mean to remain faithful to God when the pressure is on? These are the things that John will help us explore by showing us the glory and beauty of Jesus.

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Speaker, author Rebecca Pippert once had a conversation with a professor at Harvard. Basically, he asked her—"If life is pretty much the same for everyone, whether they are Christians or not—and if life is difficult for all of us—and if Christians sometimes fail like the rest of us fail—then—what difference does Jesus make? How would you answer that? What difference does Jesus make—not after you die—but what difference does he make now, in this life? That's the question we will try to answer this morning.

We continue our study through the Gospel of John, and we are in a section of John that is commonly referred to as the Upper Room Discourse (CHP 13-16). The conversation Jesus is having here is his final instructions to the eleven disciples. In a few short hours, he will be tried and crucified. He's been telling them that he is leaving them, he's going back to the Father, and when he does, he will send the Holy Spirit to live inside them. And he says that, when the Spirit comes, they will be able to know God personally in a way that wasn't possible when he was with them. But none of this makes any sense to them. That amazes me. Most of what Jesus tells these men that night they could not understand. "We" understand because we know the rest of the story. But most of what he says in his final instructions to the disciples goes in one ear and out the other—which—is what we see here in v16.

**READ 16:16-18** — They are clueless. "Now you see me, now you don't, but you will" —???— What is that all about? Again, we know he's talking about his death and resurrection. Jesus is saying that in a few short hours—he will be dead and buried—the disciples will no longer see him—but in a few short days—three days—he will rise from the dead—and they will see him again on Sunday evening. We understand that, but not them. It makes you wonder why Jesus wouldn't just say it like I just said it.

**READ 16:19-21** — Jesus asks them if they are wondering what—"now you see, now you don't, but you will" means. Of course, they are. So, he explains it to them. But you tell me—Does his explanation clear things up for them? "When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because the labor is excruciatingly painful. But when the baby is born, she no longer remembers the pain because the joy of the newborn baby transcends the pain." His point is: "You are sorrowful now, but your sorrow will be turned to joy." Again, we understand, but for those disciples, not so much.

*How do you handle the fog in your life? How do you deal with not knowing how something is going to turn out? How do you handle life when life doesn't make sense? —when—you can't see around the next corner? How are you doing with the questions you have that God hasn't answered?* Most of us hate uncertainty. We hate not knowing what's going on or what's going to happen next. Uncertainty creates fear and worry—frustration and anxiety. What we don't understand tends to upset us, and it robs us of our joy. Up to this point, the more Jesus explained things, the more confused they became. Why is Jesus so vague? Why is he being intentionally obscure? Why keep them in the dark? Why not just tell them in plain language? God often allows confusion and uncertainty to linger in our lives. From what I've learned about God over the years—from what I read in the Bible and what I've experienced in life—it seems clear to me that for whatever reason—God does not always make things clear to the people he loves. Sometimes God doesn't make things clear because he wants us to trust that he is good and wise and powerful even if we can't see his goodness or his wisdom or his power at work when we think we should. In uncertain times, Jesus promises that if we trust him, our sorrow will turn to joy—our confusion will turn to confidence. Hold that thought...

READ 16:23-24 — when we read v24, we immediately lock in on this as another promise of *answered prayer*. It is that, but here, it's much more than that. Jesus is saying, a new day is dawning. Everything they knew about God and people was about to change. When he dies on the Cross, rises from the dead, ascends back to the Father, and he sends the HS to live inside them, they will be able to ask God for things themselves. They will be able to personally, directly ask the Father for the things they need, and he will grant their requests as they are in line with what Jesus wants for their lives. They won't need anyone to approach God *for* them—even Jesus won't have to ask the Father for things for them. They can come to God personally and directly themselves—in *Jesus' name*—so—Because of who Jesus is and what Jesus will do for them, they can ask and receive. They can approach and be welcomed, and that means—*joy will fill their hearts*—a joy that no one can ever take from them.

Here's my two-part summary:

1. *Jesus is saying*—"When you see me—*alive from the dead*—it'll all make sense—you will have joy. *He's saying*—"When you see what I've done for you—*opening the way for you to go directly to the Father*—you will have a joy that no one can ever take from you." Said a slightly different way—
2. *Seeing Jesus for who he really is brings joy. Seeing all that Jesus had done for you brings joy—THAT—is what Jesus is teaching those disciples.*

Here's the *Big Idea* I want to unpack—The difference Jesus makes in the here and now is that he turns sorrow into joy. There are four things about this joy that Jesus gives we need to understand.

1. The word "Gospel" literally means "Joy News."
2. In the world, joy and sorrow cannot overlap.
3. The world's joy rests on circumstances, but the Christian joy does not.
4. We lose our joy when we stop thinking "Gospel." The way we "see" Jesus today is by thinking "Gospel." *Circumstantial joy demands that you not think too hard. Christian joy transcends your circumstances when you think hard on the Gospel.*

Jesus says to us today—If you see me above, beneath, before, and behind all the things going on in your life, your heart will rejoice. Oh, you will feel the sadness—you will feel the sorrow, the loneliness—the pain, the hurt, the anger, the anxiety—just like everyone else. But unlike everyone else, when you "see" Jesus, and what you have in Jesus as more important, more valuable, more beautiful than what you hope to gain if your circumstances changed for the better, then you will have a joy that transcends even life itself. That is the difference Jesus makes, and that's how I would answer that professor's question.

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Discussion Starters —

- Begin by asking the group this question—How do you or how are you handling the "fog" in your life? "How are you handling the things you've lost—the things you can't control—the things someone has said that you don't like—the wrongs done to you?"
- READ 16:16-24 — Ask—"Why do you think Jesus did not explain things in a way they could understand? Why did he not speak more plainly?"
- Why might Jesus purposely orchestrate things in your life so you don't understand what's going on or what's going to happen next?
- What are some of the ways that people who don't know God handle the sorrow and pain in their lives? ...
- How is that Christians can hold sorrow and joy in their hearts at the same time and their hearts not blow apart?
- Jesus was telling those disciples—"When you see me, you will have joy." What does "seeing" Jesus mean for us today?
- How does Thomas Epting's story help us "see" what "seeing" Jesus means for us when we go through hard times?
- Based on what we've learned from this passage, how would you answer the professor's question, "What difference does Jesus make now, in this life?"