

JOHN 16:16-32

In this section we come to the end of the extended teaching Jesus is giving to his disciples before he departs to be arrested and crucified. The discourse concludes in the next chapter with a prayer to his Father.

Jesus is still concerned and aware that his disciples don't yet fully understand what is about to happen. He spells out what is going to happen in a not too cryptic way in verse 16, but this causes some discussion amongst his followers, which Jesus overhears. They simply don't know what is going to happen "in a little while". Despite what Jesus has been teaching them, they don't fully grasp what it means for Jesus to "return to his Father". The questions they ask in verse 17 pick up on what he has said in 15:10.

Jesus is not cross, but sympathetic and continues to prepare them for the rollercoaster ride of the next few days. He prepares them for a time of weeping and mourning and grieving (verse 21) as he is taken away from them to die. This will be the time when it will appear as if they have lost, and the world (which as we have seen in John's gospel means "the world in opposition to God", those who do not believe Jesus has come from the father) will seem to have won, as they crucify Jesus.

Yet there will very soon be a turnaround. The disciple's grief will be deep, but it will be brief. It will soon turn to joy (verse 20). Jesus uses the illustration of a mother giving birth – there is real pain, but afterwards there is great joy because of new life. It is an important illustration because in using it Jesus shows that the disciple's grief and joy will be connected. They can only experience the joy if they go through the grief. The way to lasting joy is only if Jesus goes to the cross.

There will be other benefits that the disciples will experience the other side of the cross. Once they have got through this coming weekend and Jesus has returned, their confusion will be gone ("no one will ask me anything"). They will have access to the Father through him as he has opened the way for a new intimacy in prayer (verse 23/24). Because of what Jesus achieves at the cross, his disciples are able to ask "in his name", we can approach the throne of grace with a new boldness.

Jesus also promises that when he returns he will teach them in a clear rather than figurative way (verse 25). We can see something of that in the gospel accounts of his return when he spoke clearly of his identity and role with the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24), and as he spoke through his Spirit to the apostles as they wrote the New Testament letters and preached in his name in the book of Acts. They clearly understood what Jesus was teaching and could pass it on.

Jesus then clarifies what he has been saying about the privilege we have to ask the Father in his name. We are not to think that the Father is somehow reluctant to give us things and we have to go to him through Jesus as a kind of back door to get to him. No – the Father loves us! We speak to him directly through Jesus (not using Jesus as a messenger). We can know he loves us because we love Jesus – we recognise that he loves us so much as to give his only Son for us and we trust that the promises he has made of eternal life and forgiveness of sins are true for us.

Verse 28 is a key verse which summarises all that Jesus has been teaching in these chapters. It answers the question Jesus himself has raised in 16:5. He is returning to his Father.

In verses 29 and 30 the disciples make a bold claim about their understanding. However it is likely that this is a claim made more out of embarrassment for being shown up by Jesus in verse 19 than from a real grasp of what Jesus has said. Jesus shows that they haven't really grasped what's going to happen, and says they will leave him alone (Verse 31-32). But there is a great comfort. Their salvation is not dependent on them, it is dependent on Jesus alone. They won't overcome the world, but Jesus has. Life will be hard for them, even after the resurrection and they see clearly who Jesus is and what he has done. But they will have peace – real lasting peace “in me (In Christ)”.

The application to us from this section is the same as the application to those first disciples who first heard these words. Jesus has come to bring glory to his Father and to save us, bringing us intimacy with God. But this has only come through the cross. We must never move away from an appreciation of the wonder of the cross.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

What does Jesus say is just about to happen? Do the disciples understand? (Vs 16-19)

How does Jesus prepare his disciples for the coming events over the next few days (Vs 20)?

How will the world feel initially? Why?

How will the disciples feelings change?

What image does Jesus use to illustrate what they are all about to go through? What does this tell us about the connection between their coming grief and their joy?

When this joy comes, what other blessings will come? (Vs 23-24) What does this tell us about what the cross has achieved for us?

How will Jesus teach when he returns (Vs 25)?

How does Jesus underline the fact that we have a real relationship with the Father (Vs 26)?

What is the evidence of the Father's love for us (Vs 27)?

Where is Jesus going? How does this summarise the teaching of these 3 chapters we have been studying (Vs 28)?

How do the disciples respond? Is this real understanding, or a false confidence in their own abilities (vs 29-32)?

Where is true security, confidence and peace found? Why? (Vs 33)