“I WILL SEE YOU AGAIN”

John 16:16–33

Key Verse: 16:22

“So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”

Have you ever heard of the song, “I’ll Be Seeing You”? It was a famous song during the World War II era. It’s about a person’s anticipation of what life would be like without a loved one. Though the loved one is gone, the one left behind says she’ll be seeing him everywhere, though not literally. The lyrics express in poetic form the powerful human experience of love. This song resonated in the war era because so many young men and women experienced painful separation and loss. In today’s passage, just before he leaves them, Jesus says something similar to his disciples: “I will see you again.” But in this case, it’s not a romantic, transcendental longing; it’s a promise of a literal reality. Jesus really would see them again. What would it mean for them? What does it mean for us? May God open our hearts and speak to us through his words today.

Look at verse 16. Jesus had just been telling his disciples about how the Holy Spirit would help them. Now he comes back to the news that was most difficult for them to hear: He was leaving. But Jesus comforts them by saying, “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.” How do the disciples respond to this new revelation of Jesus? Look at verses 17,18. He told them back in verse 10 that he was going to the Father, where they could see him no longer. Despite everything he was saying, this was really too hard to accept. But now he’s promising it would be for only a little while, and then they would see him again. The disciples latch on to his words “a little while,” wondering how long he meant.

Look at verse 19. The disciples are spiritually dim, but Jesus isn’t condescending or rude or harsh. He understands them so well and speaks to them in such a gentle, comforting way. And then he gets more to the point. Read verse 20. Jesus knows that even though it’s just for a little while, his death on a cross is going to be so hard for them. He tells these men that they are going to weep and mourn and grieve. Why? It’s because their beloved Lord, Jesus, would be executed in such a horrible, humiliating way. We human beings all have to deal with loss, loss of people or things we love. Those who have never lost can’t understand what we go through. But in this case there’s another dimension. Jesus says that in this loss, the world will rejoice while his disciples grieve. Why? It’s because, as he said earlier, the world hates Jesus. They’re glad to be rid of him because he reminds them of how wrong and evil they are. It’s a scenario that so many Christians have experienced down through the centuries. People who are against God rejoice to see Christians put down and expelled. But for Christians, the death of Jesus leads us to weep and mourn and grieve. Why? We’re not like his original disciples who got to spend over three years with him personally. But when we believe in him, we share the same love for Jesus. And we realize that it was our sins that caused him to be crucified on the cross. As we truly realize our sinfulness before him, and yet how much Jesus suffered to save us from our sins, we cannot but weep and mourn and grieve.

To help them understand what he means Jesus gives his disciples a real-life allegory. Read verse 21. He’s comparing what’s about to happen to childbirth. At first a pregnant woman in labor experiences great pain and anguish, but when her baby is finally born, she forgets all about it and is filled with joy. In light of the full span of life, the time of labor really is just “a little while.” Jesus is not at all diminishing what his disciples are about to go through. He just wants them to see beyond it, to the outcome.

Read verse 22. Jesus says, “Now is your time of grief.” The disciples’ grief has already started because Jesus told them he was leaving (6), that they would be with him only a little longer and that they couldn’t be with him anymore (13:33). The grief his words caused them made it hard for them to bear what he was saying. And their time of grief is about to intensify drastically as Jesus gets arrested, tried and crucified. But Jesus promises here, “…but I will see you again.” He meant he would be raised from the dead and would come and meet them in person. In chapter 20 he would show them his hands where the nails were and his side where the spear had pierced him. Jesus would thereby prove to them that death had not conquered him, but that he had conquered death. Seeing him again would fulfill his words in 14:18, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

So many people experience separation and loss. It may be when someone we loved leaves us and moves away, or it may be even more final, when a loved one dies. After experiencing such a painful separation and loss, some people weep and mourn and grieve for many, many years. Desolation, bitterness and meaninglessness can set in. It can be debilitating. But Jesus promises us, “I will see you again.” It’s a promise of his Second Coming. If we believe in Jesus, whoever we are, we can claim this promise personally. John wrote in 1 John 3:2b, “But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face” (cf. 1Jn3:2). When we see the Risen Christ in person, all our pain and suffering, all our feelings of sorrow and loss and abandonment, will be wiped away. He’ll make us forget all about it. He’ll replace all our agonies and anguish with the greatest, eternal joy.

It’s not just something we’ll experience when we get to heaven; it’s a change and a joy we get to experience now. Jesus says in verse 22b, “…and no one will take away your joy.” Human joys can be so temporary; they come and go. And we all know about joy-killers. Strangely, there will always be people out there who are not happy that we are joyful, for whatever reason. They want to pop our bubble, take us down, make us miserable like them. Some people are less intense but still have a way of making us feel sad or depressed. Sometimes people’s words can be like poisoned arrows that pierce our hearts. Or it can just be someone’s general attitude that makes us feel stifled and smothered.

But Jesus says to us, “No one will take away your joy.” He means that once we meet him personally, our souls are healed from the power of death. Sorrow and fear are all erased from us, and he leaves us with lasting joy, a deeper joy. We see it in his disciples in chapter 20. Mary Magdalene and Peter and John are all healed and filled with joy when they meet the Risen Jesus. It’s not just their story; each Christian needs to experience the love of the Risen Jesus personally and let him heal us deeply. When his love heals us, our joy is complete and everlasting. This is why, when the apostles were flogged and disgraced, they were still rejoicing (Ac5:41). This is why, when Paul and Silas were flogged and put in prison, they were praying and singing hymns (Ac16:25). This is why Apostle Paul admonished Christians: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” (Php4:4). We should never allow hard circumstances or difficult people rob us of the joy Jesus gives us.

Jesus goes on to describe another aspect of their change. Read verse 23. He’s saying they would no longer be looking to their human shepherd Jesus for help; they would start depending on God directly in prayer. The Bible says that Jesus came to connect each of us in very personal way with God himself. We may take that for granted, but actually it’s really amazing that sinners like us can actually come to the Holy God. Ephesians 3:12 says, “In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.” Hebrews 4:16 tells us, “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 10:22 says, “…let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings…”

In light of this new relationship Jesus urges his disciples to do something. What is it? Read verse 24. Often we think that asking in Jesus’ name means to close our prayers by saying, “In Jesus’ name, Amen.” But to ask in his name means more than a magical kind of incantation to get God to do what we want. To ask in his name means to ask on account of what Jesus did. We can ask God for anything when we accept that Jesus died in my place to save me from my sins. To ask in his name also means to ask for Jesus’ sake. It means we care about what he lived and died for. We care about God’s plan to save the lost. We care about God’s plan to save the world. We pray for these things in Jesus’ name because this is why Jesus came and died and rose again. To ask in his name means to pray based on what is in Jesus’ heart. When we pray in his name, God surely hears and will answer in his own way and time.

Jesus also promises here again that “our joy will be complete.” He already said the same thing back in 15:11: “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” What is this “complete” joy? John writes about it in 1 John 1:3,4: “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.” Complete joy comes from having this amazing fellowship with the Father and the Son, and fellowship with other true believers. Also, complete joy comes when we see those who were lost come to personal faith in Christ and join the fellowship of believers. There is no other joy like it. Jesus said that the angels in heaven rejoice when even one lost sinner repents (Lk15:7,10). Jesus himself experienced this complete joy and forgot all about his physical hunger and thirst when he led the Samaritan woman to the spring of water welling up to eternal life (4:14,28,29,34). As we tell others about Jesus, pray for them and see them receive him personally, we too can experience this complete joy. No earthly joy in this world compares to it.

Jesus said he would soon change his way of speaking with his disciples (25). Until his death on a cross he had to speak figuratively, so that they would not try to stop him or get hurt doing so. But after he finished the work God gave him to do, he could tell them everything plainly. Then in verses 26,27 he describes another aspect of their change. In these verses he emphasizes how the Father himself loves them. Though the disciples were full of weaknesses and were about to fail him, Jesus still deeply respected them because of their love and faith. Because of their love for him and faith in him, God would someday use them greatly. Then Jesus summarizes his entire life and ministry. Read verse 28. When we realize that Jesus came from God and went back to God, we’ve come to mature faith. We also find our own life’s direction: We may have many human ideas about ourselves, our life’s origins and our final destination. But when we believe in Jesus, we share his same conviction: we came from God and we’re returning to God.

In verses 29,30 the disciples speak as if they understand what Jesus is saying. But Jesus asks them a question. Look at verse 31. What is Jesus asking? Of course the disciples believe. They believed when they first left everything and followed Jesus. It says they believed when they saw him turn water into wine (2:11). When many disciples turned back and no longer followed Jesus, these disciples believed and Peter confessed, “We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God” (6:69). But John’s Gospel shows us that belief is not static—it is something that grows. Belief needs to grow. Our faith needs to shift from miracles or the testimony of other believers to Jesus’ words themselves. Our faith needs to shift from what we do to what Jesus did. Our faith matures as we come to know him very personally. In verse 32a Jesus predicts that they were all about to scatter to their own homes and leave him all alone, to suffer by himself. At this time their faith was not strong enough to endure. But Jesus was sure that the Father himself would be with him and not leave him alone (32b; cf. 8:29).

Read verse 33. Here, “these things” means everything he’s been saying since chapter 13. Despite their failure and his departure Jesus promises them peace. The world would give them trouble, especially the trouble of persecution. But Jesus gives them some of the best loved words in the Bible: “But take heart! I have overcome the world.” Jesus overcame the world, ironically, when he died on the cross. Through his absolute obedience to God unto death, he defeated all the devil’s sly and subtle temptations and won the eternal victory for us. So we have victory in Jesus. When we’re born again and Jesus lives in us, we already have the victory over the devil and the world. Our faith in Jesus enables us to overcome even the whole world (1Jn4:4; 5:4).

Read verse 22 again. Are you experiencing some kind of grief or loss? May God bless us to hear Jesus speaking to us, “I will see you again.” May this hope shine brightly in our hearts, heal us, fill us with his joy and give us the real assurance of victory.