

Resurrection Joy

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Jesus is teaching us about joy: the promise of joy, the process of joy, the permanence of joy.

The Promise of Joy

Knowing that sorrow, not joy, has filled the disciples' hearts (6), Jesus says to them: "[A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.](#)" He's taken up the theme of his departure, again; something he's been discussing for 2.5 chapters, as they make their way to the place of his arrest. But here time suddenly constricts. In a *little while*, he says. The disciples grow antsy. Jesus repeats the phrase seven times in four verses. In a "little while". Why all the repetition? *Because what is about to happen in a "little while" is central to everything Jesus has been saying.* What is it? Well, there are two little whiles. When the *first* happens, the disciples *will not see* Jesus. Their beloved friend, mentor, professor, messiah is about to depart. Where is he going? Jesus predicts his departure will be accompanied by [weeping and lamenting](#) (20). The word "weeping," in the NT, is always used in the context of death (11:31, 33; 20:11). Here it is a reference to *Jesus' death*. The *second* little while is more hopeful, a time when the disciples *will see* Jesus. A time when, "[Your sorrow will turn to joy](#)" (20). Shortly after Jesus' resurrection, John records that, "[The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord](#)" (20:20). So, if we put the two "little whiles" together, we get the sorrow of the cross and the joy of the resurrection; the twin events of the gospel. This is history-altering news. Now some might say they believe in the love of the **cross** but not the miracle of the resurrection. But you cannot have a meaningful cross without resurrection. The resurrection vindicates all the claims that Jesus has been making—that he is not a half-crazed messiah, his offers of forgiveness, eternal life, and the Holy Spirit are true! Alternatively, some say they prefer to focus on the **resurrection**, not the doom and gloom of the cross. But we cannot have the glorious hope of resurrection without his swallowing up of death and sin. You see, what the Greeks and the Romans had universally recognized as a symbol of suffering and death will now become transformed for all of history and time into a symbol of life and hope. The cross no longer stands for bad Friday but Good Friday. Sorrow can be turned to joy because death and sin were swallowed up by life. Earlier in the Gospel, Jesus said to a woman, "[I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live](#)" (11:25). Have you noticed this is the stuff of great stories? A sudden turn from sadness to joy? J.R.R. Tolkien called it *eucatastrophe*. What looks like catastrophe is suddenly turned for good. Frodo and Sam toss the ring of power into Mt. Mordor, but are trapped on a rock surrounded by molten lava. It appears, after all their heartache and perseverance, they will forfeit their lives, but suddenly they look up and Sam exclaims, "The Eagles are coming; the Eagle are coming." There is a sudden turn from sadness to joy. This is *eucatastrophe*. Good emerging out of catastrophe. Sorrow transformed into joy. We know this is promised to the disciples, but is it a promise for us? If the resurrected Christ transforms sorrow into joy, then why do aren't we more joyful. Why are we beset by joyless? The process of joy.

The Process of Joy

Jesus explains through a parable: "[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” (21). Jesus isn’t promising the absence of sorrow. A pregnant mother knows great discomfort, and as the contractions increase, her pain and anguish only intensify, but once that baby is born and placed softly in her arms, *her sorrow is put in check*. Why? By the joy of new life. I’ve visited a lot of mothers, and to this day not one has said, “It wasn’t worth it. You won’t believe what I had to go through.” Instead, they’re joyfully obsessed with their new little life: cradling it, ooing and ahing over it, paying so much attention that they see family resemblances that I rarely see. Why? They pay attention to the new life. Are you beset by sorrow? Consumed with joylessness? Put off by discontent? You’re looking in the wrong place. Don’t let sorrows dictate your joy; allow Joy to dictate to your sorrows. Pay attention to the New Life before you. Resurrection has put death on notice: “Also, you have pain now, but I will see you and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you” (22). If anyone knows suffering, it’s Jesus. But looking ahead, through the cross and out the other side of resurrection, Jesus reverses the perspective. He does not say, as he did earlier, “you will see me.” Instead, he says, “I will see you.” The verb, in the middle voice, allows Jesus’ emotion to bleed through. Tears in his eyes, “I will see you.” And he will die to make it true, to secure a joy that can never be taken away. If the joy of the risen Christ can never be taken away, then why the joylessness? Well, the joy cannot be taken away, but it can be surrendered. It may not be snatched but it can be sold. We can look to fun experiences and circles of friends; to what we do not have but wish we did. To mundane demands or better days, to sufferings and sorrows, and miss the Joy that puts it all in check. And when we do, our hearts begin to shrivel up. They lose space for a joy the size of Jesus. What then do we do with our joylessness? St. Augustine confessed, “Unhappy man that I am, in your mercy, O Lord my God, tell me what you are to me. Say to my soul: I am your salvation.” Appeal to his mercy; recognize your salvation. Confess your love of little, petty joys that block the way of Christ to your heart. Then, run: “I will run after that voice, and I will catch hold of you. Too narrow is the house of my soul for you to enter into it: let it be enlarged by you. It lies in ruins; build it up again.” His joy cannot be taken away, but it can be given away. And though it may be lost; it can be recovered. By turning our eyes to the Resurrection and the life, repenting of lesser joys, and training our eyes on the firstborn from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus brings joy to the heart like no other *because he himself is the origin and fountain of Joy*: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (Jn 15:11). Repentance is a turning from the sorrows of sin to joys of the Savior, a mini-eucatastrophe. Just this week a friend of mine described coming face to face with sinful resentment towards others as “realizing what a dirtbag he has been.” We’re all dirtbags, he said, but that is what makes the gospel sweet, we get to turn to Jesus.” Indeed, thank God Jesus didn’t remain resentful toward us after torture on the cross. What compassion, what love, that Jesus would offer us, sin-stained scoffers, his eternal joy!

The Permanence of Joy

The promise of joy, the process of joy, and now the permanence of joy. Jesus says to them, “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” (23). “In that day” is formulaic for the post-resurrection age, life after the Christ event. And Jesus is saying in that day we will not need to pray to him as an intermediary to the Father, but that we will have direct access to God the Father, each one. We can call upon the name of the Lord and he will give it. Sometimes

we read a promise like this with suspicion because we know that if we ask *anything* God will not give it to us. We are not guaranteed a new house, car, career, or even a healing or a friend's salvation. But notice we are also to pray *in Jesus' name*. Jesus name isn't a magic incantation to secure anything we want. Praying in Jesus' name means to pray in submission to his authority, to pray as though he is Lord and we are not. To call out to him as though HE is the chief joy above all other joys. Oh for prayers that take seriously this invitation. Prayers that take God's promises to the bank, that insist his holy joy fill our hearts! Prayers like Augustine's, "[Who will give me help that I may rest in you? Who will help me, so that you will come into my heart and inebriate it, to the end that I forget my evils and embrace you, my one good?](#)" Let's storm heaven for joy, not only our joy, but the joy of our neighbors and friends, the joy of all nations: "[Let the nations be glad and sing for joy](#)" (Ps 67:4). The resurrection has launched a whole new age. Unprecedented numbers and ethnic groups are streaming to Jesus. The center of global Christianity is thriving in Asia and Africa with thousands upon thousands turning from the sorrow of sin to the joy of salvation. Prayer puts us inside the world to come. It is our satellite link to the mission of God's new creation. And the more we storm heaven with our prayers for the joy of the nations, the joy of the city, the more we move closer and further into that permanent joy. Jesus says, [Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full](#)" (24). The word full is in a tense that means the joy is secured with ongoing effect. Prayer is the vital link to God's new creation. The more we neglect it, the more our hearts grow cold, but the more we frequent it, the more we get in touch with permanent joy. Yet a little while and God's new world we be upon us. Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning (Ps 30:5). Jesus is the resurrection and the life; keep your eyes on him.