

I Must Go, but You Will See Me Again

John 16:16-22

John 16:16-22: *“A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.” Then some of His disciples said among themselves, “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 go to the Father?’”¹⁸ They said therefore, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is saying.”*

¹⁹ Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, *“Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’?”²⁰ Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.*

²¹ A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world.²² Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.”

Background Notes

John 16 is part of the farewell discourse that our Lord gave either in the upper room, or as He and the disciples walked along the way to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He was arrested. In this part of the discourse the Lord reminded the disciples that it in a little while He would leave them, and they would not see Him. *“A little while and you will not see me”* (v16).

That phrase “a little while” has already been used several times in the Gospel of John, referring to the time when the Lord would go to the cross. In John 7:33-34 the Lord told the Jewish authorities who had come to arrest Him: *“I shall be with you a little while longer, and then I go to Him who sent Me. You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come.”* In John 12:35-36 the Lord told the crowds gathered in the Temple courts: *“A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”* Then in John 13:33 the Lord said, *“Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you.”* And again in John 14:19 the Lord said, *“A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also.”* And now here again in John 16, the Lord told His disciples *“A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.”*

At this point in John 16 it was only a matter of hours before the Lord's arrest, trial and crucifixion, so we can easily understand what the Lord meant by the first mention of "a little while" in verse 16. But what about the second "a little

while? at the end of verse 16: *“and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.”* When the Lord said, *“again, a little while and you will see me”* - was He referring to His resurrection and His post-resurrection appearances? Or was He possibly referring to Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit would come and help believers (including us) to see Jesus more clearly in a spiritual sense?

In this connection, it's interesting to note that the Lord used two different Greek words for the word “see” in verse 16. The first “see” means to see physically: *“A little while, and you will not see Me”* – you will not see Me physically. The second “see” can be used to see physically or to see spiritually, *“and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.”* This is the word for “see” that is used, for example, when the Lord said to Nathaniel, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man”* (John 1:51).

Maybe the Lord was referring to Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit would come to magnify Christ before our spiritual eyes. On the other hand, maybe the Lord was referring to His second coming when we will see Him face to face. In that case the *“little while”* would refer to the present Church Age, as we wait expectantly for the return of our Lord, when we will see Him.

What's the answer here? I think this is a place where we can't be too dogmatic in our interpretation. Good students of God's Word down through the years have supported all three interpretations! Some say the second “little while” in verse 16 is the time between the Lord's death and resurrection. Others say the second *“little while”* is the time between His death and Pentecost. And still others say, the second *“little while”* is between His death and His second coming to earth. Some commentators have even said the Lord is even speaking of two or three of these events lumped together!

In verses 17-18, notice that the disciples were confused! *“Then some of His disciples said among themselves, ‘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 go to the Father?’ They said therefore, ‘What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is saying.’”* The Lord knew that they didn't understand, so He said to them, *“Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’? Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy”* (v19-20). Now that sounds to me like the Lord was referring to His resurrection. Certainly the disciples' sorrow was turned to joy when they realized the Lord was alive - that He was resurrected from the dead!

The illustration and application given by the Lord in verses 21-22 also sounds like He was referring to His coming resurrection. *“A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.”* Doesn't that sound to you like the Lord was referring to His resurrection? In John 20:20 after the resurrection, we read – *“He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.”* So I'm inclined to go with

the interpretation that the second “*a little while*” in verse 16 is the time of sorrow between the Lord’s death and resurrection. The Lord’s resurrection brought lasting joy to the disciples!

Now while I believe that this is the specific interpretation of the passage, there are certainly principles here that we can apply today, and that’s what we’ll do for our two doctrinal points from this passage.

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. The world's happiness is only temporary.

“Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy” (v20). When the world crucified the Son of God, they rejoiced. They thought they had removed the One who had exposed their pride, greed, and hypocrisy. The world rejoiced because they thought they could continue to create their own “God” in their own image. But the world’s happiness was short-lived. Three days later the Lord Jesus Christ returned from the dead to prove that He was right, and the world was wrong! The world’s happiness is only temporary.

Right now the world is rejoicing because it thinks the need for the God of the Bible and the restrictions of His moral standards have been eliminated. After all, they say, the universe came about through time and chance from nothing, and people came about through evolution - so who needs God? In fact, does God even exist?

The world is rejoicing right now because, without any God, it believes it has been set free from all moral standards and restrictions. But the world’s happiness is only temporary. Judgment is coming! The God of the Bible **does** exist, and it’s only a matter of time before the Lord will judge the unbelievers of this world and consign them to eternal punishment. The world’s happiness is only temporary.

2. The believer's sorrow is only temporary.

“Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy” (v20). And verse 22: *“Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.”* What great sorrow must have filled the disciples’ hearts when the Lord was crucified, especially knowing that they had forsaken Him. But what joy they experienced when the Lord returned to them alive and said, “Peace be with you!” Their sorrow was only temporary.

What a good illustration of the biblical truth that the believer’s present sorrow is only temporary! Are you experiencing some kind of sorrow right now? If you’re a believer, you can be sure that your sorrow is only temporary. Even if your particular sorrow stays with you for the rest of your life, it is only temporary. Revelation 21:4 says, *“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”* The believer’s sorrow is only temporary.

Practical Application

Don't be upset if you feel confused.

Do you ever feel confused? I don't mean confused about work assignments or instructions about how to assemble an item that you bought. We're all confused at times with those kinds of things! But that's not what we're talking about here. We mean have you ever felt confused about something that the Lord has said, or something that you read in the Bible? Have you ever felt confused and frustrated when you're trying to understand the Bible?

That was the experience of the disciples in verse 18: *"They said therefore, 'What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying."* And notice - the Lord's answer didn't clear up all their questions. Essentially the Lord said in His answer, "Trust Me! You may not understand everything now, but trust Me! You will have sorrow, but your sorrow will be turned to joy. Just trust Me!"

The Lord says the same thing to us today. "Don't be upset if you feel confused about something in My Word. Trust me! You may not understand everything now, but trust Me. Wait a little while, and things will clear up. Maybe you will have to wait until Heaven before you understand some things, but trust Me! I have your best interests at heart, so just trust Me!"

After the first day of a course, some of my Bible college students feel completely confused. They didn't understand parts of the lecture, and the assignments seem overwhelming. But I always tell them, "Don't be upset, and don't worry! Trust me - everything will clear up later." (And it does!)

So when you're feeling confused by something in Scripture, don't be upset. Trust the Lord. Everything will clear up later, as you continue to walk with Him and trust Him. Don't be upset if you feel confused!