

John 16:16-33

by St. John Chrysostom

Christ's departure is a temporary separation, but His return will bring joy and peace, and we will have access to all knowledge through His name.

Scripture: John 16:20-22, John 16:24-26, John 16:30, John 16:32-33

Topics: "Eternal Joy", "Spiritual Strength"

Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the comforting words of Jesus to His disciples, explaining the temporary sorrow they will face before experiencing everlasting joy. He emphasizes the analogy of childbirth pains leading to the joy of new life, symbolizing the disciples' grief turning into joy after Christ's resurrection. Chrysostom encourages believers to find peace and strength in Christ's promise of answered prayers and the power of His Name. He challenges listeners to conquer worldly temptations by focusing on the eternal blessings promised by God, urging them to love and serve God wholeheartedly, even more than worldly pleasures.

Transcript

A little while, and you shall not see Me: and again, a little while, and you shall see Me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of His disciples among themselves, What is this that He says? [And what follows.]

1. Nothing is wont so to cast down the soul that is anguished and possessed by deep despondency, as when words which cause pain are continually dwelt upon. Why then did Christ, after saying, I go, and, Hereafter I will not speak with you, continually dwell on the same subject, saying, A little while, and you shall not see Me, because I go to Him that sent Me? When He had recovered them by His words concerning the Spirit, He again casts down their courage. Wherefore does He this? He tests their feelings, and renders them more proved, and well accustoms them by hearing sad things, manfully to bear separation from Him; for they who had practiced this when spoken of in words, were likely in actions also, easily to bear it afterwards. And if one enquire closely, this very thing is a consolation, the saying that, I go to the Father. For it is the expression of One, who declares that He shall not perish, but that His end is a kind of translation. He adds too another consolation; for He says not merely, A little while, and you shall not see Me, but also, A little while, and you shall see Me; showing that He will both come to them again, and that their separation would be but for a little while, and His presence with them continual. This, however, they did not understand. Whence one may with reason wonder how, after having often heard

these things, they doubt, as though they had heard nothing. How then is it that they did not understand? It was either through grief, as I suppose, for that drove what was said from their understanding; or through the obscurity of the words. Because He seemed to them to set forth two contraries, which were not contrary. If, says one of them, we shall see You, where are You going? And if You go, how shall we see You? Therefore they say, We cannot tell what He says. That He was about to depart, they knew; but they knew not that He would shortly come to them. On which account He rebukes them, because they did not understand His saying. For, desiring to instill in them the doctrine concerning His death, what says He?

John 16:20

Verily, verily, I say unto you, That you shall weep and lament -- which belonged to the Death and the Cross--but the world shall rejoice.

Because by reason of their not desiring His death, they quickly ran into the belief that He would not die, and then when they heard that He would die, cast about, not knowing what that little meant, He says, You shall mourn and lament.

But your sorrow shall be turned into joy. Then having shown that after grief comes joy, and that grief genders joy, and that grief is short, but the pleasure endless, He passes to a common example; and what says He?

John 16:21

A woman when she is in travail has sorrow.

And He has used a comparison which the Prophets also use continually, likening despondencies to the exceeding pains of childbirth. But what He says is of this kind: Travail pains shall lay hold on you, but the pang of childbirth is the cause of joy; both confirming His words relative to the Resurrection, and showing that the departing hence is like passing from the womb into the light of day. As though He had said, Marvel not that I bring you to your advantage through such sorrow, since even a mother to become a mother, passes in like manner through pain. Here also He implies something mystical, that He has loosened the travail pangs of death, and caused a new man to be born of them. And He said not, that the pain shall pass away only, but, she does not even remember it, so great is the joy which succeeds; so also shall it be with the Saints. And yet the woman does not rejoice because a man has come into the world, but because a son has been born to her; since, had this been the case, nothing would have hindered the barren from rejoicing over another who bears. Why then spoke He thus? Because He introduced this example for this purpose only, to show that sorrow is for a season, but joy lasting: and to show that (death) is a translation unto life; and to show the great profit of their pangs. He said not, a child has been born, but, A man. For to my mind He here alludes to His own Resurrection, and that He should be born not unto that death which bare the birth-pang, but unto the Kingdom. Therefore He said not, a child has been born unto her, but, A man has been born into the world.

John 16:22-23

And ye now therefore have sorrow-- [but I will see you again, and your sorrow shall be turned into joy]. Then, to show that He shall die no more, He says, And no man takes it from you. And in that day you shall ask Me nothing.

Again He proves nothing else by these words, but that He is from God. For then you shall for the time to come know all things. But what is, You shall not ask Me? You shall need no intercessor, but it is sufficient that you call on My Name, and so gain all things.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever you shall ask My Father in My Name.

He shows the power of His Name, if at least being neither seen nor called upon, but only named, He even makes us approved by the Father. But where has this taken place? Where they say, Lord, behold their threatenings, and grant unto Your servants that with boldness they may speak Your word Acts 4:29-31, and work miracles in Your Name. And the place was shaken where they were.

John 16:24

Hitherto you have asked nothing.

2. Hence He shows it to be good that He should depart, if hitherto they had asked nothing, and if then they should receive all things whatsoever they should ask. For do not suppose, because I shall no longer be with you, that you are deserted; My Name shall give you greater boldness. Since then the words which He had used had been veiled, He says,

John 16:25

These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs, but the time comes when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs.

There shall be a time when you shall know all things clearly. He speaks of the time of the Resurrection. Then,

I shall tell you plainly of the Father.

(For He was with them, and talked with them forty days, being assembled with them, and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God Acts 1:3-4)-- because now being in fear, you give no heed to My words; but then when you see Me risen again, and converse with Me, you will be able to learn all things plainly, for the Father Himself will love you, when your faith in Me has been made firm.

John 16:26

And I will not ask the Father.

Your love for Me suffices to be your advocate.

John 16:27-28

Because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God. I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world; again I leave the world, and go to the Father.

For since His discourse concerning the Resurrection, and together with this, the hearing that I came out from God, and there I go, gave them no common comfort, He continually handles these things. He gave a pledge, in the first place, that they were right in believing on Him; in the second, that they should be in safety. When therefore He said, A little while, and you shall not see Me; and again a little while, and you shall see Me John 16:17, they with reason did not understand Him. But now it is no longer so. What then

is, You shall not ask Me? You shall not say, 'Show us the Father,' and, 'Where are You going?' for you shall know all knowledge, and the Father shall be disposed towards you even as I am. It was this especially which made them breathe again, the learning that they should be the Father's friends wherefore they say,

John 16:30

speakest Thou plainly, and speakest no parable. "N.T.)-->

Now we know that You know all things.

Do you see that He made answer to what was secretly harboring in their minds?

And needest not that any man should ask You.

That is, Before hearing, You know the things which made us stumble, and You have given us rest, since You have said, 'The Father loves you, because you have loved Me.' After so many and so great matters, they say, Now we know. Do you see in what an imperfect state they were? Then, when, as though conferring a favor upon Him, they say, Now we know, He replies, You still require many other things to come to perfection; nothing is as yet achieved by you. You shall presently betray Me to My enemies, and such fear shall seize you, that you shall not even be able to retire one with another, yet from this I shall suffer nothing dreadful. Do you see again how condescending His speech is? And indeed He makes this a charge against them, that they continually needed condescension. For when they say, Lo, now You speak plainly, and speakest no parable John 16:29, and therefore we believe You, He shows them that now, when they believe, they do not yet believe, neither does He accept their words. This He says, referring them to another season. But the,

John 16:32

The Father is with Me.

He has again put on their account; for this they everywhere wished to learn. Then, to show that He did not give them perfect knowledge by saying this, but in order that their reason might not rebel, (for it was probable that they might form some human ideas, and think that they should not enjoy any assistance from Him,) He says,

John 16:33

These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace.

That is, that you should not cast Me from your thoughts, but receive Me. Let no one, then, drag these words into a doctrine; they are spoken for our comfort and love. For not even when we suffer such things as I have mentioned shall your troubles stop there, but as long as you are in the world you shall have sorrow, not only now when I am betrayed, but also afterwards. But rouse your minds, for you shall suffer nothing terrible. When the master has gotten the better of his enemies, the disciples must not despond. And how, tell me, have You 'conquered the world'? I have told you already, that I have cast down its ruler, but you shall know hereafter, when all things yield and give place to you.

3. But it is permitted to us also to conquer, looking to the Author of our faith, and walking on that road which He cut for us. So neither shall death get the mastery of us. What then, shall we not die? says some

one. Why, from this very thing it is clear that he shall not gain the mastery over us. The champion truly will then be glorious, not when he has not closed with his opponent, but when having closed he is not holden by him. We therefore are not mortal, because of our struggle with death, but immortal, because of our victory; then should we have been mortal, had we remained with him always.

As then I should not call the longest-lived animals immortal, although they long remain free from death, so neither him who shall rise after death mortal, because he is dissolved by death. For, tell me, if a man blush a little, should we say that he was continually ruddy? Not so, for the action is not a habit. If one become pale, should we call him jaundiced? No, for the affection is but temporary. And so you would not call him mortal, who has been for but a short time in the hands of death.

Since in this way we may speak of those who sleep, for they are dead, so to say, and without action. But does death corrupt our bodies? What of that? It is not that they may remain in corruption, but that they be made better. Let us then conquer the world, let us run to immortality, let us follow our King, let us too set up a trophy, let us despise the world's pleasures. We need no toil to do so; let us transfer our souls to heaven, and all the world is conquered. If you desire it not, it is conquered; if you deride it, it is worsted.

Strangers are we and sojourners, let us then not grieve at any of its painful things. For if, being sprung from a renowned country, and from illustrious ancestors, you had gone into some distant land, being known to no one, having with you neither servants nor wealth, and then some one had insulted you, you would not grieve as though you had suffered these things at home. For the knowing clearly that you were in a strange and foreign land, would persuade you to bear all easily, and to despise hunger, and thirst, and any suffering whatever.

Consider this also now, that you are a stranger and a sojourner, and let nothing disturb you in this foreign land; for you have a City whose Artificer and Creator is God, and the sojourning itself is but for a short and little time. Let whoever will strike, insult, revile; we are in a strange land, and live but meanly; the dreadful thing would be, to suffer so in our own country, before our fellow citizens, then is the greatest unseemliness and loss. For if a man be where he had none that knows him, he endures all easily, because insult becomes more grievous from the intention of those who offer it.

For instance, if a man insult the governor, knowing that he is governor, then the insult is bitter; but if he insult, supposing him to be a private man, he cannot even touch him who undergoes the insult. So let us reason also. For neither do our revilers know what we are, as, that we are citizens of heaven, registered for the country which is above, fellow-choristers of the Cherubim. Let us not then grieve nor deem their insult to be insult; had they known, they would not have insulted us.

Do they deem us poor and mean? Neither let us count this an insult. For tell me, if a traveler having got before his servants, were sitting a little space in the inn waiting for them, and then the innkeeper, or some travelers, should behave rudely to him, and revile him, would he not laugh at the other's ignorance? Would not their mistake rather give him pleasure? Would he not feel a satisfaction as though not he but some one else were insulted? Let us too behave thus. We too sit in an inn, waiting for our friends who travel the same road; when we are all collected, then they shall know whom they insult. These men then shall hang their heads; then they shall say, This is he whom we fools had in derision. Wisdom 5:3

4. With these two things then let us comfort ourselves, that we are not insulted, for they know not who we are, and that, if we wish to obtain satisfaction, they shall hereafter give us a most bitter one. But God forbid that any should have a soul so cruel and inhuman. What then if we be insulted by our kinsmen? For this is

the burdensome thing. Nay, this is the light thing. Why, pray? Because we do not bear those whom we love when they insult us, in the same way as we bear those whom we do not know.

For instance, in consoling those who have been injured, we often say, It is a brother who has injured you, bear it nobly; it is a father; it is an uncle. But if the name of father and brother puts you to shame, much more if I name to you a relationship more intimate than these; for we are not only brethren one to another, but also members, and one body. Now if the name of brother shame you, much more that of member. Have you not heard that Gentile proverb, which says, that it behooves to keep friends with their defects?

Have you not heard Paul say, Bear ye one another's burdens? Do you see not lovers? For I am compelled, since I cannot draw an instance from you, to bring my discourse to that ground of argument. This also Paul does, thus saying, Furthermore we have had fathers in our flesh, which corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Hebrews 12:9 Or rather, that is more apt which he says to the Romans, As you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now yield your members servants to righteousness.

For this reason let us confidently keep hold of the illustration. Now do you not observe lovers, what miseries these suffer when inflamed with desire for harlots, cuffed, beaten, and laughed at, enduring a harlot, who turns away from and insults them in ten thousand ways; yet if they see but once anything sweet or gentle, all is well to do with them, all former things are gone, all goes on with a fair wind, be it poverty, be it sickness, be it anything else besides these. For they count their own life as miserable or blessed, according as they may have her whom they love disposed towards them.

They know nothing of mortal honor or disgrace, but even if one insult, they bear all easily through the great pleasure and delight which they receive from her; and though she revile, though she spit in their face, they think, when they are enduring this, that they are being pelted with roses. And what wonder, if such are their feelings as to her person? For her very house they think to be more splendid than any, though it be but of mud, though it be falling down. But why speak I of walls?

When they even see the places which they frequent in the evening, they are excited. Allow me now for what follows to speak the word of the Apostle. As he says, As you have yielded your members servants to uncleanness, so yield your members servants unto righteousness; so in like manner now I say, as we have loved these women, let us love one another, and we shall not think that we suffer anything terrible. And why say I, one another? Let us so love God. Do ye shudder, when you hear that I require as much love in the case of God, as we have shown towards a harlot?

But I shudder that we do not show even thus much. And, if you will, let us go on with the argument, though what is said be very painful. The woman beloved promises her lovers nothing good, but dishonor, shame, and insolence. For this is what the waiting upon a harlot makes a man, ridiculous, shameful, dishonored. But God promises us heaven, and the good things which are in heaven; He has made us sons, and brethren of the Only-begotten, and has given you ten thousand things while living, and when you die, resurrection, and promises that He will give us such good things as it is not possible even to imagine, and makes us honored and revered.

Again, that woman compels her lovers to spend all their substance for the pit and for destruction; but God bids us sow the heaven, and gives us an hundred-fold, and eternal life. Again, she uses her lover like a slave, giving commands more hardly than any tyrant; but God says, I no longer call you servants, but friends. John 15:15

5. Have ye seen the excess both of the evils here and the blessings there ? What then comes next? For this woman's sake, many lie awake, and whatever she commands, readily obey; give up house, and father, and mother, and friends, and money, and patronage, and leave all that belongs to them in want and desolation; but for the sake of God, or rather for the sake of ourselves, we often do not choose to expend even the third portion of our substance, but we look on the hungry, we overlook him, and run past the naked, and do not even bestow a word upon him.

But the lovers, if they see but a little servant girl of their mistress, and her a barbarian, they stand in the middle of the market-place, and talk with her, as if they were proud and glad to do so, unrolling an interminable round of words; and for her sake they count all their living as nothing, deem rulers and rule nothing, (they know it, all who have had experience of the malady,) and thank her more when she commands, than others when they serve. Is there not with good reason a hell?

Are there not with good reason ten thousand punishments? Let us then become sober, let us apply to the service of God as much, or half, or even the third part of what others supply to the harlot. Perhaps again ye shudder; for so do I myself. But I would not that you should shudder at words only, but at the actions; as it is, here indeed our hearts are made orderly, but we go forth and cast all away. What then is the gain? For there, if it be required to spend money, no one laments his poverty, but even borrows it to give, perchance, when smitten.

But here, if we do but mention almsgiving, they pretend to us children, and wife, and house, and patronage, and ten thousand excuses. But, says some one, the pleasure is great there. This it is that I lament and mourn. What if I show that the pleasure here is greater? For there shame, and insult, and expense, cut away no little of the pleasure, and after these the quarreling and enmity; but here there is nothing of the kind. What is there, tell me, equal to this pleasure, to sit expecting heaven and the kingdom there, and the glory of the saints, and the life that is endless?

But these things, says some one, are in expectation, the others in experience. What kind of experience? Will you that I tell you the pleasures which are here also by experience? Consider what freedom you enjoy, and how you fear and tremble at no man when you live in company with virtue, neither enemy, nor plotter, nor informer, nor rival in credit or in love, nor envious person, nor poverty, nor sickness, nor any other human thing. But there, although ten thousand things be according to your mind, though riches flow in as from a fountain, yet the war with rivals, and the plots, and ambuscades, will make more miserable than any the life of him who wallows with those women.

For when that abominable one is haughty, and insolent, you needs must kindle quarrel to flatter her. This therefore is more grievous than ten thousand deaths, more intolerable than any punishment. But here there is nothing of the kind. For the fruit, it says, of the Spirit is love, joy, peace. Galatians 5:22 Here is no quarreling, nor unseasonable pecuniary expense, nor disgrace and expense too; and if you give but a farthing, or a loaf, or a cup of cold water, He will be much beholden to you, and He does nothing to pain or grieve you, but all so as to make you glorious, and free you from all shame.

What defense therefore shall we have, what pardon shall we gain, if, leaving these things, we give ourselves up to the contrary, and voluntarily cast ourselves into the furnace that burns with fire? Wherefore I exhort those who are sick of this malady, to recover themselves, and return to health, and not allow themselves to fall into despair. Since that son also was in a far more grievous state than this, yet when he returned to his father's house, he came to his former honor, and appeared more glorious than

him who had ever been well-pleasing.

Let us also imitate him, and returning to our Father, even though it be late, let us depart from that captivity, and transfer ourselves to freedom, that we may enjoy the Kingdom of heaven, through the grace and lovingkindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

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