

No Greater Love – In Joy ²

- ✦ The Counselor's conviction (vv.1-15)
- ✦ Sorrow's turn from anguish (vv.16-24)
- ✦ The Father clearly cares. (vv.25-33)

In the Name of Jesus, God's great Joy, dearly redeemed friends of our Savior:

People often confuse happiness with joy. A new car, new house, friends, a good grade – such happenings can make you feel happy. But one of life's most frustrating realities is how quickly that candle can flicker and die. On the phone with my grandfather years ago, he asked, "Remember that new car I bought? It's an old car now." He had parked his new Mercedes at the airport only to come back and find deliberate damage from some jealous soul. You can hope for insurance to cover your losses after a storm, better friends to replace the faithless, higher grades from more study. But a fellow pastor's honest words still ring true. "The drugs the doctor prescribed for my depression only give a feeling of happiness. They cannot give you joy. Real joy can only come from Jesus." Strange as it may seem, you experience the brightest joy from Jesus in the darkest valleys of your life. The reason is simple. Jesus' **Joy** is a gift from His **Love**. Happiness is an effort inside you. Beyond Jesus there is **No Greater Love – In Joy**.

✦ The Counselor's conviction (vv.1-15)

Maybe you've heard, "Forewarned is forearmed." A secret new technology called "radar" forewarned the British about attacks coming across the English Channel from the Nazi Luftwaffe. Outnumbered 5 to 1 by both machine and men,³ pilots of the Royal Air Force could focus their few planes as needed for each threat. Fighting over friendly territory helped. Winston Churchill was almost right: "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

But the worst enemies in human conflict are not men and machines. No friendly land lies beneath these raging skies. Not radar but the Holy Spirit reveals: "*Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*" (Ephesians 6:12 NIV84) On the night of His betrayal and trials God's own Son forewarned and forearmed His disciples. Earth's multitudes owe everything to One.

Jesus warned His disciples they would be outcasts from the synagogue. He did not want them stumbling in their faith when religious people hated and murdered them. Since Christ Jesus was going quietly, without fanfare to His heavenly Father, His disciples needed to know. Jesus would send the Holy Spirit to be their divine Counselor in spiritual warfare, an advantage none of Satan's demons could have.

This Counselor would also convict the world of sin for rejecting God's only solution. We need the life, death and resurrection of His Son. Since there is no righteousness without Christ and because He pleads our case in the Father's courtroom, all who reject Jesus are convicted by the Holy Spirit. They do not have the perfect righteousness God requires. Siding with a loser earns a loser's reward. Eternal hell was created for Satan and his rebels, but all who rebel against God's Son are convicted along with them.

Time was short. Jesus had so many things He wanted to tell His disciples. But the Counselor would bring all that extra information from Jesus and thus bring the glory of Christ's victory to them.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, quotes are from a draft translation by the undersigned for the Wartburg Project – John.

² From Lenten series: *No Greater Love – Our Savior's Passion Sermons*. March-April, 2014 – New Life, Shoreview, MN

³ <http://www.raf.mod.uk/history/whowerethefew.cfm>

✠ Sorrow's turn from anguish (vv.16-24)

Like pilots wondering about new information, the disciples kept asking each other what Jesus meant. Our dear Friend and Master Teacher never leaves us in the dark. ***“Are you trying to find out from one another what I meant by saying, ‘A little while and you do not see me; and again a little while and you will see me’? Amen, Amen, I tell you, you will weep and wail, but the world will rejoice. You will become sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. A woman giving birth has sorrow because her time has come. But when she has delivered the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, because of the joy that a human has been born into the world.”***

It's powerful picture for mothers and the fathers who did their best to encourage them through that traumatic time of childbirth. My sisters warned me not to talk about another baby right after our first was born. Jesus' words really impressed me when my wife brought up the subject. Somehow God wired a mother's heart and mind to forget the travail and focus on the pure joy that another baby is born. And this one is ours! So our dear Lord Jesus says you can bring up anything on your heart, not just to Jesus, but directly to the heavenly Father. He loves to hear us in times of joy as well as times of sorrow.

Sorrow's turn from anguish is hard wired by the Holy Spirit into Word and sacrament. You never have to worry about losing your Wi-Fi connection or radio signals. ***“Amen, Amen, I tell you, whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.”***

✠ The Father clearly cares. (vv.25-33)

My high school English students once surprised me by asking if they could spend our last two weeks reading poetry and discussing it. I thought the girl who made the suggestion would be teased by her classmates. But before I knew it, the first two sections were asking too. I was impressed. And you and I are always impressed by the wonderful pictures our dear Jesus paints in powerful words: ***“I AM the Good Shepherd.” “I AM the way, the truth and the life.” “I AM the Light of the world.”*** Awesome!

But in times of extreme emergency picture language must be set aside for clear, compelling speech. The Holy Spirit's other Gospel accounts report on the Upper Room when Jesus instituted His Holy Supper. For His new covenant He used simple, plain words as His last will and testament. ***“This is my body....This is my blood.”*** Miracle, yes, but not figurative. Jesus' disciples needed clarity.

What Jesus said so clearly was this: ***“The Father himself loves you.”*** Let that warm your heart on those cold, lonely nights when you feel every friend has forsaken you. A day that starts out so happy, can end in such sadness. It boggles the mind and rattles the heart. Sometimes it makes you anxious just fearing good feelings might disappear. Who could get married, stay married or ever live happily in harmony together if nothing but feelings were the foundation of your life together? And when Jesus speaks of the Father's love in this context, it's not that awesome *agape*-love that we usually find in the Holy Spirit's Greek original. This is the *phileo*-love of companionship and friendship. It means having things in common and enjoying time together. It's the way the Father's friendship has come to us by the gift of His Son. The Father wants to win our hearts through Jesus so that we love spending time with Him. No one has to ask Jesus a question. He already knows what's on our hearts and can give the answer outright. He returned to our Father in heaven to keep reminding God of the friendship He started.

How loyal were those friends of Jesus? How loyal have we been? Lent is for remembering and confessing how often we have run away from God and our responsibilities to Him in marriage, family and friendship. Scattered thoughts sometimes rob us of blessings at church. Diminished dreams leave us feeling hopeless, as if happiness is lost. With Jesus we too can say, ***“I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”*** He warms and comforts us: ***“I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have distress. But take courage! I have conquered the world.”*** Owing everything to Him, ***“We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”*** (Romans 8:37) Amen.

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