

John 16 - WBS - Rae Barnes

Good evening/morning! Many of you may not know this about me, but I started graduate school last August to get my Masters in Clinical Counseling with a focus on Trauma Studies. So, I'm basically studying suffering and healing, and I have to say that these verses have been so good for me to sit in during the last semester and a half. BUT... since I am back in the grind as a student, I am in paper writing mode, and I must admit that I typed up this really long, kind of boring paper on this passage, and somehow that still felt like it was not enough. Just a week ago, I started to feel overwhelmed by this content and how I would do this passage justice for you all. AND then, the Holy Spirit started nudging me just last Tuesday to erase what I had and start over. Obviously, I just tried to ignore those prompts because that's crazy, but then Linda Ruth spoke last week about abiding in the scripture, and it was as if the Holy Spirit said "Have you tried that?" And then I realized I was treating this like a research paper, not a Bible study to share with my friends. So... this is not my original bit. You're welcome. We won't be here for hours. But, my prayer is that it is exactly what you need to hear today.

If we want to put one THEME on John 16, it is the preparation of a Father for his children. Jesus knows what is about to come, and he knows he will be leaving his disciples soon. As a parent, I think about the hundreds of times I try to prepare my children for what is to come... I mean, that's really all parenting is: a series of little goodbyes starting from birth... preparing kids to be able to function without us. Jesus is speaking as a Father to attempt to prepare his disciples for what is about to happen.

In Jesus's preparation for his departure, he gives us three main PROMISES in this chapter: Jesus promises HELP. Jesus promises SORROW & JOY. Jesus promises VICTORY & PEACE in our trials.

First, Jesus promises HELP. Jesus tells his disciples in verse 7 that he is going away, but it is for the best that he leaves. Jesus must leave for His Purpose to be fulfilled and for the Helper, or the Holy Spirit, to come. The world, or those who sent Jesus to the cross, believed that Jesus was a false prophet, but the resurrection shows that the world was WRONG about Christ. By conquering death, Jesus shows the world that he is who he said he is. Jesus continues his ministry through the HS, but we have to understand the critical point that the Holy Spirit could not come in FULL POWER while Jesus was on Earth because that Satan-defeating power came from Christ's death and resurrection.

In verse 8, Jesus explains that when the Holy Spirit comes, he will expose the faults in the world's view of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The world thinks that if we live a righteous life, we will be "blessed." If we are good, we will have a good life. Tim Keller explains that "Without the Holy Spirit, there is no remedy for the spiritual blindness of the human race." Jesus makes it clear in these passages that we will never understand, believe, or live the way we need to live without the Holy Spirit.

Think about it... we do not inherently like these categories of sin and righteousness. John Stott explains "Jesus is saying that when the HS comes, he makes these moral categories which human beings otherwise despise and resist into a solemn reality." We are so good at rationalizing just about any behavior: I'm not mean, I'm just straightforward. I am not gossiping, I'm sharing so you can pray for them. I don't hate them, I just think they are a terrible person. I'm not drinking too much, I just like having fun. We are always in denial of how deep our sin is.

J.C. Ryle says "The true secret of spiritual strength is self-distrust and deep humility."

This quote got me. How far do I go to prove I am right? (even if this is internal) How uncomfortable do I get when there is sufficient evidence that I am indeed WRONG? How deep is

my pride integrated into my beliefs about others and the world around me? Am I able to question my worldly beliefs? Our nature as humans is to confirm our own biases. We are told to “trust our gut” and “follow our hearts.” We go to GREAT lengths to cling to our truths, regardless of whether or not they are grounded in actual Truth.

But in verse 12, Jesus says “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth...” Jesus is saying that he has trained his followers, but they will not be ready to fully grasp it until the Holy Spirit comes. I love this. I love ALSO that Jesus doesn’t say the HS will suddenly make everything super clear right away. He says that the HS will **guide** you. It isn’t immediate. We are constantly under construction, right? The Holy Spirit is our personal minister, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit is through the Bible. Just think about verses you have read a thousand times and suddenly they have a new meaning to you: maybe you connect it to something new in your life or to other verses you have studied recently. This is the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Another word for a helper in some translations is ADVOCATE. When I think about an advocate, I think of an attorney fighting for the judge or jury to give grace, mercy, and justice to the defender. My sister-in-law is a public defender down in NC. She is beautiful and charming and so incredibly smart. Just the kind of person you really want fighting for you. She is defending the vilest criminals, but she has a background in social services and can see how the system and generational trauma have failed these people. And, while she fully believes nearly all of them still belong in prison, she also believes they need a fair trial. An advocate fights for you, no matter what you’ve done. I love this picture of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus sent us HELP. And praise God that he did. I was reassured by something Tim Keller said about the Holy Spirit... he said something to the effect of... if anything I said is

moving you or digging into your heart, that is the ministry of the HS, not my skill in speaking. This takes a huge load off all of us who stand up here to speak, right? It isn't up to me for your hearts to be moved or changed. PRAISE THE LORD! (that's too much responsibility)

Now we move onto the second promise... Jesus promises SORROW and JOY.

Verses 16-19 mention "a little while" seven times in just four verses. I think it is worth pointing out that to Jesus a little while was not that much time, but to the disciples, it was. I am certain that as they watched Jesus get arrested, beaten, crucified, and buried, it did not feel quick. We often anecdotally say "Time flies when you are having fun," but the opposite is true. Studies have confirmed that it feels as if time moves slower when we are distressed or depressed. So, surely, the disciples felt like this "little while" was an eternity. I know we all can relate to something in our lives when we felt like time was standing still and the Lord wasn't working quickly enough. When we wish our loved one would just be healed already, or when we wish the wars would end, or whatever we wish God would just fix already... we are essentially crying out to God. "You said a little while, but this feels like forever."

In verse 20, Jesus compares what the disciples are about to endure to childbirth. Jesus speaks of labor pains in a time before there were epidurals and hospitals, a time when childbirth was much scarier. Our first baby was born in a hospital that did not offer epidurals, so my first time enduring childbirth not only felt like an eternity but it felt like there was nothing I could do to help ease the pain. I vividly remember this sweet, kind nurse trying to coach me through it by telling me that my PAIN IS PRODUCTIVE. Every labor pang was getting me closer to meeting my daughter. Of course, at that exact moment when I felt like I might die from this pain, a near stranger telling me what I was supposed to think while I was in pain did not have the effect I

think she wanted to have, but in my future labors and delivery, I carried that thought with me. This pain is DOING SOMETHING. I'm getting closer.

Also worth noting... the pain that a mother endures DOES NOT go away after the baby is born, instead, she doesn't really consider it in light of her baby. Just like that mother (still in pain) experiencing joy while holding this new life... Christian joy can coexist with sorrow because it isn't circumstantial. Christian joy goes down deep... it is not a surface feeling... it is not extinguishable. The world's joy is based on circumstances because worldly joy CANNOT exist with sorrow, but Christian sorrow pushes us towards joy.

Josh Butler, in an article for the Gospel Coalition, says, "Peace doesn't come when you pretend what you're enduring isn't hard but rather when you compare it with the age to come. Your future joy will exceed your present sorrow." So when a little feels long and our sorrow feels neverending, the only way we can simultaneously feel joy in the midst of that is to look to Jesus, what he has done for us, how much he loves us, and the hope that he has given us in the resurrection. Only then can we realize that our suffering has a purpose. Romans 5:3-5 tells us that we are to rejoice in our sufferings because that pain is ultimately PRODUCING HOPE!

Worldly sorrow tells us to stop thinking about or avoid pain. We can try to turn our brains off by doom-scrolling, drinking, shopping, or pouring ourselves into work or charities. But... think about this... This type of worldview deals with sorrow by NOT dealing with it... Keep busy. Move on. Don't think about it. I must admit that one of my unhealthy but seemingly automatic coping strategies is to block something out mentally; I can just shut down and try not to think about the pain... but, whenever you stuff a glass capsule with explosive materials, you know it isn't going to end well. All it takes is someone asking me about that painful situation, and I would become a puddle of tears. So I am challenging myself here but also any of you who

may also try to avoid pain to think MORE not LESS. Think about WHO we are in Christ and what He is going to do in and through us.

I like to look to different translations of the Bible to try to get a better grasp on some scripture, so I want to read to you 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 from the Message. “So we’re not giving up. How could we? Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There’s far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can’t see now will last forever.”

In verse 23, Jesus says that whatever we ask of the Father, he will give to us. This can be such a tricky promise for us. “Well I asked for this person to be president, and you didn’t answer” or “I asked for a new job, but I’m still working for this jerk” or even “I asked to be healed, but I’m still suffering.” I thought Tim Keller had a great thought on this... he said “God will give you whatever you would have asked for if you knew everything God knows.” The joy of the Christian is infinite confidence that our Heavenly Father will give us exactly what we need when we need it. And so, for me, I feel like lately, my prayers have just been for the Lord to give me peace amid my suffering... and he answers that by reassuring me of who He is.

Sisters. Your pain is productive AND the joy from Christ is unconditional.

I want to share the story of my journey to graduate school after running a successful photography business for 20 years because this seemingly sudden change might have been a jolt to some of you. But, it came through this type of “productive pain.”

When I was in high school, I wanted to be a family therapist. I had a rather tumultuous childhood; I don’t remember most of it. I’m sparing you the details because the pain of that

childhood came from the actions, inactions, and words of people that I have since forgiven. But, I had this thought that maybe if we had had a family therapist, our family would have been better. It wouldn't have hurt so much. But, God had different plans for me at that time in my life. It wasn't the time for that yet. I was offered a scholarship I needed if I were an art major, so I followed that path. And God blessed that path.

Well, I started feeling a little restless in 2019, and so I began to pray that God would help me loosen my grip on my business and that I would hold it with open hands if He had something else for me. It wasn't until the fall of 2023 that the Holy Spirit started his nudging. At the end of October 2023, I stood up at my dad's funeral to give a eulogy to hundreds of people in the church and hundreds more streaming. I was blown away by how God had used a broken man to minister to so many people, and if he could use him to bless so many lives, then perhaps there was something different for me ahead.

My husband and I started praying. What came next was a lot of suffering... both grieving my dad and grieving the structure of my family of origin that seemed to be crumbling after my dad's death and my grandmother's death less than 2 years prior. Several of my original family members suffer mental illnesses, and unfortunately, these disorders have caused so much pain. These conditions were exasperated between and after the deaths of my grandmother, who helped raise me, and my dad. There are so many details of this story that I have to keep close to my chest since this is being recorded, but I hope you can understand the gravity of feeling what once felt like HOME is a crumbling foundation that will not only never be the same but also may never be safe to go back to. It was so painful.

BUT... this pain has been productive. As I started feverishly studying these mental disorders so that I could better understand these people who were hurting me, my husband Chris

said “Hey, maybe you should go to school for this?” I originally thought the idea sounded crazy (spoiler alert: it is), but the Holy Spirit would NOT let this idea out of my head. I kept fighting it. This isn’t the right time. The Holy Spirit responded “When will it ever be? If not now, then when? Won’t you always be busy?” And so... here I am... in grad school in my 40s with 4 kids and 2 dogs and a super supportive husband that picks up my slack. This pain was productive. If not for the suffering I have endured and have continually experienced, I likely would not be on this path to help others in their pain, and while I do not know yet how God will use this degree that I am working on, I am confident He has a purpose.

I know this isn’t normally done during these talks, but I am going to pause here just for a moment and ask you to write down an example in your life of a time when you saw God’s purpose in your pain or (more broadly) when your sorrow and joy coexisted.

Now, we move on to the last promise... Jesus promises VICTORY & PEACE in our trials. The first part of this promise is the last part of that sentence. Jesus PROMISES great distress and suffering, and honestly, I think this is a promise most of us know to be true without question. He doesn’t say we MIGHT have trouble in this world. He promises we will. I don’t know about you, but I feel so SEEN in this promise because suffering can be so isolating. It is so easy for me to sit in my pain and feel like no one else knows this pain like I do, but the truth is... pain is a universal experience for us all in this fallen world. 1 Peter 5:8-9 says “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that your SISTERHOOD is experiencing the same kinds of suffering throughout the world.”

Friends, if you want this doctrine to transform your life, it happens best when you are in the thick of it. Generally, we grow best in storms, not sunshine. When we are living in a troubling time, these truths become transforming.

Jesus follows this promise for great suffering with a charge to us. Take heart. Take heart means to “DARE to believe.” When you are suffering, dare to believe He still loves you. Jesus suffered for us. He lost his peace so that we could have it. I will dare to believe I am in His grip even when I feel like I am falling. I will dare to believe my suffering serves a purpose even when I feel hopeless. I will dare to believe I am safe even when I feel like the world is out to get me. I’m paraphrasing Psalm 23:4 here... but even when I am in the darkest of my days, I have nothing to fear because the Lord is with me.

I will dare to believe that there is NOTHING that has the potential to defeat me that Jesus hasn’t already defeated. I think of the lyrics from the song “You’ve Already Won” by Shane Bernard... “I’m fighting a battle you’ve already won. No matter what comes my way, I will overcome. I don’t know what you’re doing, but I know what you’ve done.” If you have never heard this song, play it. And, let these words ruminate in your mind this week.

Let’s pray. Father, thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to HELP us in our times of sorrow. Lord, thank you for the unconditional joy you give us through your VICTORY over death. And Father, would you please help us all to experience YOUR PEACE in our trials? Bless our conversations in small groups ahead. In your name, Amen.

Helpful verses: 1 John 5:4, Romans 12:2, 2 Timothy 3:16, Romans 5:3-5, James 1:2-4, Psalm 23:4, Peter 8:5-9, Genesis 50:20, 2 Corinthians 4:8-18, Isaiah 43:2, Psalm 34:19