

# The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

## **The Consoling Savior The Pathway of Hope John 16:16-24**

16 "A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me." 17 Some of His disciples then said to one another, "What is this thing He is telling 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 So they were saying, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is talking about." 19 Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me'? 20 Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. 21 Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. 22 Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you. 23 In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.

There was once a traveler making his way by ship across the Atlantic. The voyage was particularly rough causing the ocean liner to pitch and heave. This particular traveler was spending his time leaning over the rail, seasick and several shades of green. Seeing the nauseate passenger and wanting to encourage him, a steward came along with a towel, some water and these words of hope saying, "Don't be discouraged, sir! You know, no one has ever died of seasickness yet!" With disgruntled and discouraged eyes, the squeamish passenger pleaded, "Oh, don't say that! It's only the hope of dying that's kept me alive this long!"

Hope – what is it? Hope – by way of a technical biblical definition is a trustful anticipation of things to come, particularly with reference to the fulfillment of the promises of God. Hope - that important and yet sometimes seemingly elusive possession that causes a person to live in, live through and live past even the most difficult of situations. Hope – that expectation of good to come (from the Lord) in spite of the trials at hand. Hope – that assurance of safety, of security and salvation even as terrors threaten. It has been said that with hope a person can endure almost anything, because he can see the end. Hope is the proverbial "light at the end of the dark tunnel." But without hope, without any thought of rescue or relief, even the strongest of people will wither. I read an article that about some researchers who performed an experiment to see the effect hope has on those undergoing hardship. Two sets of laboratory rats were placed in separate tubs of water. The researchers left one set in the water, letting the rats swim and found that within an hour they had all drowned. The other rats were briefly lifted out of the water and then quickly returned. When that happened, the second set of rats swam for over 24 hours. Why? Not because they were given a rest, but because they suddenly had hope! Those animals somehow hoped that if they could stay afloat just a little longer, someone would reach down and

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rescue them. If hope holds such power for unthinking rodents, how much greater should it effect be on our lives.

In our passage this morning we find our Lord Jesus comforting the disciples with words of hope – even as I have been referring to the picture of Jesus here in John 16 as the consoling Savior – that Savior of Hope. The only problem is, the disciples did not fully grasp what it was that Jesus was telling them. In a nutshell, Jesus is informing the disciples that He is going to die, be raised from the dead, ascend to the Father and that through all this, they will see their sorrow turned to joy, their discouragement into living, active hope – this godly anticipation of the future. From these words of Jesus, I believe we find the pathway for hope, we find in these statements a series of principles concerning what true hope is – what it is like – a hope that when believed and practiced will result in an expectant, God-glorifying life. It would be my prayer that whatever it is that might be discouraging to you this morning, you might glean how to have hope by believing and practicing these principles. It is my prayer that when you face your hardships and heartaches, you might remember these principles so as to see your mourning turn into gladness and your trials into testimonies of trust in the Lord for all the world to see.

So then, from our passage we find Jesus giving these words of hope, words that would come to sustain these men and motivate them to turn their world upside down with the gospel – the message of salvation; the message that while man is separated from his Creator because of sin; because man choose to live for himself according to his own will rather than God’s will; the Creator, Jesus Christ, who is God in the flesh, humbled Himself to die on man’s behalf. Jesus became the Savior, the sinless sacrifice, to pay the penalty of our guilt on that old rugged cross. Jesus rose from the dead to declare with power that He is Lord over all, and He offers eternal life freely to sinners who will surrender to him in humble repentant faith and promises to them eternal bliss in the presence of God. This is the message of hope and we find this message in seed form before us now.

And so, by means of four points, I wish to have you consider with me from this text, the pathway of hope.

## **I. Hope Promised (John 16:16)**

*A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.*

Here in verse 16 we have what might seem to be a rather strange statement, **“A little while, and you will no longer see Me; an again a little while, and you will see Me.”** Lest we forget, let me remind you that Jesus has never been veiled or silent concerning His mission. On several occasions Jesus clearly communicated the truth that He would one day die and then rise again (Matthew 12:39-40; 16:21; 20:19; Mark 8:31; 9:31; Luke 9:22; 18:33; John 2:8-22). In Matthew 17:22-23, Jesus seems forthright enough saying,

**22 “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; 23 and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.” And they were deeply grieved.**

Being deeply grieved, the disciples seemingly tried to play dumb, trying to ignore or reinterpret what Jesus meant by such statements. We do that, don’t we? We hear something hard, something that sounds to heavy to bear and so we say something like, “Well, maybe all he

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meant was....” And we fill in the blank with what sounds easier to deal with. As Jesus brings His disciples to the upper room, using more picturesque language, Jesus tells them again of His coming death and subsequent resurrection and ascension into heaven. Jesus uses the phrase, **“a little while”** – literally a micron – a small amount. When we hear **“a little while”** with reference to time, we might think of something as immediate, but the idea is simply something that is pending. In John 7:33, several months before the crucifixion, Jesus said, **“For a little while longer I am with you, then I go back to Him who sent Me.”** So Jesus is saying that His death is pending; He is going to leave, the time is drawing near. And as we noted back in John 14:19 when Jesus used this same phrase, the idea of someone we love leaving us always brings a sense of sorrow; whether it is a loved one who lives far away and you don’t know when you might see them again, or a loved one that has passed away and while you have the expectation of seeing him again in glory, you are sorrowful at the loss of fellowship between now and that time.

I can’t imagine anything more devastating to the disciples than their misinformed mindset that with Jesus leaving, they were somehow losing something. To every think that with reference to a relationship with Christ, that He would ever do anything to diminish it is misguided. Jesus had been sharing and teaching them that there will be something more complete and more wonderful about their relationship to Him after He dies on the cross, after He leaves them. And so while this first **“a little while and you will no longer see Me”** of verse 16 is clearly a reference to His death, Jesus adds to that a second use saying, **“and again a little while and you will see Me.”** But a question arose in my mind while reading this as I asked myself, “To what is Jesus referring to by this?” I know that the first inclination is to say, “Silly Pastor, it is a reference to the resurrection of Jesus!” This is what I would like to consider for a moment, because how we interpret and understand this statement reveals something to us about the **hope** Jesus is promising here.

To begin with, let us agree that whatever Jesus means by this, the end result is an everlasting joy. Looking at verse 22 for just a moment, notice Jesus says, **“Therefore you too have grief now, but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice and no one will take away your joy.”** So, after a little while, the disciples are promised that they will see Jesus and this beholding of Jesus results in eternal joy. So far so good? Now, let us apply this to three possibilities of what Jesus meant when He said **“and again a little while, and you will see Me.”**

First, there are some who teach that what Jesus means here is referring to His second coming. That the disciples of Christ will see Jesus when He returns. Those who believe this will point out that Jesus uses the illustration of birth pangs in Matthew 24:8 as a picture of what things will be like before He returns and since Jesus uses a similar illustration here in John 16:21, the two references must be speaking of the same event. However, I don’t see that here. In Matthew 24, the reference to birth pains is meant to illustrate the intensity of events experienced in the time of the tribulation, that seven-year period prior to the coming of Christ during which God judges the nations and purges Israel. Such a time is not associated with joy. Here in John 16 the reference to birth pains pictures a single event that while initially produces sorrow, results in great joy. Furthermore, it is hard to see how that phrase **“a little while”** can rightly be stretched from referring to a few days or months to over 2000 years. This would not necessarily be the most “hopeful” of interpretations. I don’t see this as a reference to the second coming of Jesus.

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The second possibility to which many people hold is that when Jesus says, **“a little while you will see Me...”** is a reference to the three days between His death and resurrection. If this is true, then the first **“little while”** in which the disciples would not see Jesus refers only to His death while the second **“little while”** would point to His resurrection. I can see this and this might be right. To be sure, the disciples were greatly overjoyed and comforted when they realized Jesus had risen from the dead. But remember that Jesus was only with them for forty days after His resurrection and that they were again stricken with grief and some doubts until the coming Holy Spirit came upon them. This interpretation would say that the disciples experienced grief (at the pending death of Christ); joy (at the resurrection of Christ); then grief again at the ascension of Christ in Acts 1. This doesn't seem too consistent with Jesus statement in verse 22 saying, **“and no one will take your joy away from you.”**

So then, let me give you the third view, a view which I think best fits the context of John 16. The first **“little while”** is a reference to the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Jesus would not only not be seen while in the grave, but He would also not be seen after He ascended into heaven. The second **“little while”** I believe has in view the promise Jesus has been making all throughout this Upper Room Discourse (John 14:16-17; 26; 15:26; 16:7; 13); the promise; the hope of the Holy Spirit being pour out upon them and within them on the day of Pentecost. It may seem rather strange to associate the coming of the Holy Spirit with the phrase, “and you will see Me.” Until we remember that the identity, the mission, the expectation of the coming of the Holy Spirit, whom Scripture calls **“the Spirit of Christ”** (Romans 8:9; Galatians 4:4; Philippians 1:19; 1 Peter 1:11) is the one who reveals and testifies about Jesus being Lord and Savior. It is this Holy Spirit whom Jesus has promised will come; whom Jesus has promised will be with them; whom Jesus promise will be in them. And when the Spirit of Christ is in you, then you see Jesus, you see His worth, you see His sacrifice, you see His beauty, you see His Lordship. Colossians 1:27 speaks of it this way, “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” How do we see “Christ in us” when He is at the right hand of the Father in heaven? We see Christ in us when the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ is in us and we begin to do what the Holy Spirit came to do, that is to reflect and reveal the person of Jesus Christ. And this then becomes the true source of eternal joy, this joy that no one can take away, when the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus Christ, floods our souls with Himself. Remember the statement at the end of Matthew's Gospel, chapter 28, verse 20 where Jesus said, **“And lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”** How can Jesus, who dwells in bodily form, seated at the right hand of God the Father, serving as our Advocate, making intercession for us; be with us always? He is with us in the indwelling ministry of His Spirit.

For those who have the Spirit of Christ, they behold the wonder, the person, the work and the love of Jesus. This was the promise of hope, the promise of God not simply dwelling with us, but also dwelling in us. We will hear and are familiar with the Hebrew term Immanuel – a name given to Messiah that literally means “With us is God.” I don't know if my Hebrew is right, but Jesus has promise “Lanuruwachel” – literally “In us is the Spirit of God.” Beloved this was the hope of Israel as well as the hope of anyone who would call upon the name of the Lord, to be filled with the Spirit of Christ. There are many references to this hope in the Old Testament. Let me show you this one in Ezekiel 36:25-27. This is a reference to the New Covenant, the new

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means by which God would interact with His people; not longer by keeping the OT law, which man could not keep, but how. Let us read;

***25 Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. 26 Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.***

Beloved, the pathway to hope begins by believing in what Jesus has said and done. By trusting that His sacrifice on the cross was for your sins and that while you are unable to live rightly for Jesus in yourself (a hopeless condition), He has promised to give Himself, His righteousness and His presence to you in the Person of the Holy Spirit and that by the Holy Spirit you will now be able to walk in God's statutes and carefully observe His ordinances. This is such a hope; the promise of hope.

## **II. Hope Provided (John 16:17-19)**

*17 Some of His disciples then said to one another, "What is this thing He is telling 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 So they were saying, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is talking about." 19 Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me'?"*

After this promise of hope, the other three points simply play off the first. And here in verse 17-19 we see Jesus telling the disciples in essence that not only is hope promised; but also hope is provided. By provided I mean that hope is granted to those who believe. Hope is given it is granted by God, not found in deliberation with others. We see in verses 17-18 the disciples trying to figure this thing out. I find it interesting that since John 14:22, we have not heard a word or a question from the disciples. And now, rather than coming directly to Jesus to understand this promise of hope, they are trying to figure out this hope among themselves. Oh what a danger it is to deliberate among ourselves what Jesus promises apart from His word. We get into that, “Well, I think it must mean this....” mode and until we bring our thoughts, opinions and considerations into captivity to Christ, we will not have hope. Hope is not the result of some brilliantly conceived formula. Hope, according to the Scriptures, is provided, it is grant to us and comes to us in and through the Holy Spirit. To say this another way, hope is a gift and is realized in a person as he or she receives the gift of the indwelling Spirit of Christ. Again, there are many verses that demonstrate this, but let me share with you Romans 15:13 which says,

***Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.***

It is the Spirit of Christ who reveals to our hearts that we are loved by God, and if God is for us, who can be against us. This is our provided hope. Have you received this hope by faith,

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by trusting in what Jesus has said and done or do you look for hope in what others say or do, or in what you can figure out?

### III. Hope Pictured (John 16:20-22)

*20 Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy. 21 Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world. 22 Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.*

To drive home the wonder and intensity of the hope that Jesus promises to provided by His Holy Spirit, Jesus next pictures hope in verse 20-22, using the illustration or parable of a woman in childbirth. Before this, Jesus does say that the time between His death and the coming of the Holy Spirit will be difficult. So true, so sure is this time of difficulty, so assured of this coming experience Jesus introduces it emphatically saying, **“Truly, truly”** or as we have been singing it, “Amen and Amen.” Jesus says that His people will weep and lament and at the same time the world would rejoice. And then comes “but” – **“but...your grief will be turned into joy.”** In other words, the disciples’ sorrow would be temporary, it would be short-lived while the world’s joy over Christ’s death would also be temporary and short-lived. The believers’ would come to have hope while the world would remain in hopelessness. I love how one preacher put it saying,

*The Jewish leaders had mockingly promised to believe in Jesus if He came down from the cross (Matthew 27:42). But when He did the far greater miracle of rising from the dead, they refused to believe. (John MacArthur, NT Commentary – John 12-21, pp. 216-217)*

This is the way of the world, this is the mindset of fallen man, that so long as Christ seems weak and can be controlled, such ones as these will rejoice, but when Christ is come to be seen in power and sovereign control, then such ones as these see their joy turned to sorrow.

But for the disciples, their sorrow would be turned to joy and the picture given is the heart or mindset of a woman in childbirth. It is an amazing thing, the birthing of a child. Particularly for a first child, many woman, as they feel the pains of childbirth can begin to wonder if they can do this. But after all a woman’s anguish, once that little life is put into her arms, **“she no longer remembers the anguish”** and her sorrow in pain turns to joy, **“because a child has been born into the world.”** Think about that for a moment, the very event that causes a woman great pain and temporary sorrow becomes the event that brings her great joy. And Jesus makes this comparison for the disciples; that the same event that caused their sorrow, the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus; would become the very cause of their eternal joy. Let us remember – that which looks most dark, most fearsome, most painful, most bothersome, most trying in our lives God turns into the greatest pathway of light – the proverbial “light at the end of the tunnel” is seen as we realize God is leading us through to Himself – this beloved is hope pictured.

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So, as the disciples considered the cross, it appeared most dark and ominous to them, until the light of the resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit because of the cross was revealed.

How we respond to our trials, to our hardships is a barometer of our relationship to the Spirit of God. If Christ is in us by means of the Holy Spirit, then we see our trials, even though painful, as but a needful means to experience a greater and eternal joy. We often sing of this in the great hymn, “Jesus, I Thy Cross Have Taken.” Consider these verses that can only be said if these principles of hope are understood:

Man may trouble and distress me,  
'Twill but drive me to Thy breast.  
Life with trials hard may press me;  
Heaven will bring me sweeter rest.  
Oh, 'tis not in grief to harm me  
While Thy love is left to me;  
Oh, 'twere not in joy to charm me,  
Were that joy unmixed with Thee.

Go, then, earthly fame and treasure,  
Come disaster, scorn and pain  
In Thy service, pain is pleasure,  
With Thy favor, loss is gain  
I have called Thee Abba Father,  
I have stayed my heart on Thee  
Storms may howl, and clouds may gather;  
All must work for good to me.

#### IV. Hope Practiced (John 16:23-24)

*23 In that day you will not question Me about anything. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.*

This brings us to our final principle for walking the pathway of hope. We must know that hope is promised, that hope is given by the Lord, that hope is pictured for us as sorrow turned to joy; but also we see in verse 23-24 hope practiced. What is the end result of living on the pathway of hope?

**“In that day you will not question Me about anything...”** We know that the disciples had many questions after Jesus rose from the dead, so this does not refer to the forty days Jesus remained on the earth before He went into heaven. What Jesus is saying is that with the indwelling Spirit of God, the Spirit becomes our teacher. Look back at John 16:13 where Jesus had just said, **“But when He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth...”** Here is the great hope of the disciples and is to be the hope of every believer in Jesus Christ, that Jesus has given us His Spirit, and His Spirit teaches us, guides us and leads us in the truth. In 1 John 2:20 and 27 we see something similar:

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**21 But you have an anointing from the Holy One (Jesus sending the Holy Spirit), and you all know. . .27 As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you (the indwelling Holy Spirit), and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him (to live in Jesus – to see Jesus in your life as the Spirit reveals Jesus in your life).**

For these first disciples, the indwelling Spirit of Christ would help them understand why it was that Jesus had to die. And the same is true for all who would be in Christ today, have you come to understand why Jesus died – do you see that He died for you so that you might live for Him?

And then Jesus uses that emphatic, “Truly, truly” – “Amen and Amen” – this is so true, so important, so significant. If the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ is in you, then **“if you ask the Father for anything in My name, He will give it to you.”**—How do you know if you have this hope – this expectation of God’s good manifested in your life – the indwelling of His Spirit in you. Beloved, a hopeful person is a praying person and the person who prays in a manner consistent with the person of Jesus, who prays as a means of confessing his dependence upon Jesus to supply every need with the desire that Jesus be glorified in everything he does – this one is praying by the Spirit of Christ in the hope of Christ. Before this time, the disciples would have either simply asked Jesus who was with them about or for things or to the Father. But now they were called to pray even as Jesus prayed; to pray for the things Jesus prayed for and to know that as they asked for such things, they would receive and as they received such things their joy would increase and be made full. Beloved, desiring to pray in the name, according to the person and work of Jesus is a work of the Spirit of Jesus within you. And as you increase in your knowledge of Jesus, how He prayed and what He prayed for, you are promised and increase in true and eternal joy. Praying then is hope practiced. Are you hoping in Jesus? How’s your prayer life. The more you pray, the more you hope in Him and the more you hope in Him the more you will pray.

These then are the principles of hope – hope is promised; have you received the promise; have you trusted in Jesus to receive His Spirit; to live by His Spirit; this is hope provided as we cannot please Jesus apart from His Spirit being within us. And let us remember that hope is often best pictured through suffering; that suffering and sorrow is short-lived and God promises eternal joy and blessings as we trust Him through the trials. Therefore let us practice hope, which is manifested in our prayer life, talking to and trust in God, in His promises; in His word. Let us walk on this pathway of hope.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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