

Study Notes for [John 16:16-33](#)

JOY, LOVE, AND PEACE IN THE NEW AGE

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Setting:

Jesus completed his public ministry and was now giving his twelve disciples their final instructions and teaching (this is section beginning at chapter 13 is often called the Upper Room Discourse). Our passage for this week follows immediately after Jesus has told the disciples that the Counselor (“Spirit of Truth”) who “goes out from the Father” will come and testify about him. The text now continues with Jesus’ teaching on the Holy Spirit’s role in the lives of the disciples. Jesus continues to teach them that when he leaves, and the Holy Spirit comes they will be able to pray directly to the Father in the name of Jesus. The Father will give to them everything the disciples ask in the name of Jesus.

The Disciples Understand (16:16-22)

- 16-18 It is not difficult to imagine why the disciples had difficulty with Jesus’ talk of leaving and coming back. There are three possible meanings. It may refer to the time between Jesus’ death and resurrection; or, it may mean the time between his departure at his ascension and his second coming; or it may mean the time between Jesus’ ascension and the coming Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Since Jesus had just been speaking of the work of the Spirit in his absence, this latter meaning may well be the right one. (See also v. 10 where Jesus speaks of “going to the Father”).
- 19-22 Jesus continues to use difficult language to describe what will happen. However, one thing he makes clear: his disciples will be in severe grief, but this grief will be short and then they will be filled with joy. This joy will be so great that they will forget the pain of separation. On the other hand, the world that wanted to be rid of Jesus will also rejoice. Again, this time of grief and joy may be referring to the time between Christ’s ascension, and Pentecost ([Acts 13:52](#); [1 Thess 1:6](#)).

Praying in Jesus’ Name (16:23-33)

- 23-24 This instruction is similar to John [14:12-14](#) and [15:7-8,16](#) where Jesus tells them that the Father will give them whatever they ask in his name so that God the Father may be glorified in the Son. The meaning here is the same. The Father and the Son are one (Bruce, 323). To pray in the name of Jesus was the privilege given by the Son to pray directly to the Father on behalf of the Son. What could the disciples be “asking” for? A possible answer in this context is knowledge of Jesus and the Father. The disciples had just been asking (or wanting to ask) Jesus many questions since they had met in the upper room ([13:6,25,36-37](#);[14:5,22](#)). Also, Jesus has already told them he had much more to tell them but was unable to at that time (16:12). However, the requests of the disciples are not be limited to this. The Greek word that is translated “whatever” (v. 23) and “anything” (v. 25) is very general. It places no limits on what can be asked of and given by the Father (Morris, 628).

“In that day” may possibly refer to various different times but by far the most likely meaning is the time after Jesus’ resurrection.

- 25 “figuratively” (NIV, NASB) or “figures of speech” (ESV) imply that it was difficult for the disciples to really get the meaning of all Jesus had taught them while he was with them. This does not mean that Jesus was speaking in parables (contrast [Mark 4:33-34](#)) but that his speech was difficult to understand given the context in which the disciples lived. None of the disciples had any real sense of the cross and its meaning until after the resurrection. And yet the ultimate understanding of who Jesus is only comes from his victory over sin and death through the cross and resurrection.

“a time is coming” surely must refer to Jesus ascension and the coming Holy Spirit. There is a marked difference in the understanding of the disciples after Pentecost. (Morris, 629)

- 26-27 Jesus does not have to intercede on the disciples behalf when they pray directly to the Father. This is because the Father himself loves them. This is not a ‘general’ love that the Father has for the world (3:16) but it is as a result of the disciples love for the Son and their belief in him.

- 28 Jesus is still the one through which the disciples understand who the Father is. The difference now is that Jesus reveals the Father through the Spirit.

- 29-30 The disciples claim they finally understand that Jesus is the revealer of the Father, and that they understand something of Jesus’ leaving and returning. This is confirmed to them not because he has answered their questions only but also because he even knows ahead of time what questions they will ask. Jesus showed the ability to read them and answer them without them having first to put their questions into words (Bruce, 325). However, the degree to which the disciples really did understand Jesus is debatable. It is highly unlikely that they fully understood his leaving and coming again otherwise they would have acted very differently. Possibly there is some irony in this statement (Morris, 631). This is confirmed in v. 30 where the disciples state that they believe that he knows all things even if they do not. And this faith in Jesus makes the disciples believe that Jesus is divine (“you came from God”). This is not a particularly great statement of faith on the part of the disciples; belief that Jesus has greater knowledge than them had already been established ([1:47-50](#); [4:29](#)).

- 31-32 Not only does Jesus know their questions before they ask he also knows their hearts better than they do. He knows that when the time comes they will all desert him. Although they have just stated their belief in Jesus, Jesus also knows that they have not yet reached a “quality of the faith that stands firm in the face of difficulty and danger” (Morris, 632).

The shallowness of their faith is predicted by Jesus. It is interesting that this has been recorded. The very men that Jesus hand selected and were his daily companions during his entire earthly ministry claim a degree of faith only to be told by their Lord and Master that they will all abandon him. This men are the foundation and beginning of the glorious Christian church. And it is important for this to be recorded because the church’s success does not depend on the courage, knowledge and strength of its members but solely on the saving work God has done through Christ (Morris, 632).

33 We have peace “in” Jesus not “in” this world; actually, in this world we will have trouble. But Christ’s death and resurrection has overcome the evil of this world that binds us to it and results in our death. Jesus is telling them not to despair when they realize what they have done. Jesus knows their weakness but he also knows their hearts. He will not abandon them even though they abandoned him.

This verse is similar to [14:27](#). Here too Jesus states that only he can give peace. When the world mentions peace it is a wish for the absence of conflict. When Jesus mentions peace it is given in the assurance that he alone can give it. Also, the peace Jesus speaks of is not simply negative (cessation of conflict) but positive – a renewed relationship with God established in love, grace and mercy.

References

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