

2019-04-07 Transcript

Good morning, Moon Valley!

For the past several months, we have been studying our way through the first five chapters of Acts in a sermon series called, “The Church that Changed the World.” Today we are going to temporarily suspend that series and return to another series we’ve worked on previously, titled “Now I See” which is a study through the gospel of John.

The primary reason for the transition is the coming of Easter. The biblical texts we’ll be studying for the next three Sundays anticipate the resurrection of Jesus, which of course, is what Easter is all about.

The biblical text we’re going to be studying today is John 16:5-24. This text is going to help us learn how to deal with the difficulty of transitions.

Transitions can be unsettling and stressful, particularly when you feel like you’re losing a good, familiar, reliable part of your life that has worked for you, and things will never be the same.

My wife Cathy works at ASU. Over the years, she has experienced multiple transitions from one boss to another. Although she is very conscientious and competent, each transition is stressful, and she wonders if she will survive it. We look back and smile because, for the most part, each transition has turned out well and she has found favor. But curiously, the success of prior transitions doesn’t take away the stress of the next one.

We are in the middle of transition at Moon Valley, from an old church campus, to a transitional portable church campus, to a new campus that is on the horizon. And for many of us, it’s been worrisome and unsettling and a bother.

Life is full of transitions. From one school to another. From one employment status to another. From one relationship status to another. From one health condition to another.

And the bigger the transition, the bigger the emotional impact. Losing a loved one, for example, can be a deeply sorrowful and disorienting transition. At least three people in our church family lost loved ones just this past week.

How can we navigate well life's transitions? That's the question we'll be addressing today.

First, let me provide some background on our text. John 16:5-24 is in the middle of what is commonly called the upper-room discourse which extends from John, chapter 13 through John, chapter 17. It's an account of Jesus's interaction with his disciples on the night before his crucifixion.

In his last time together with his disciples before his execution, you would expect Jesus to say and do the things that are most important to him. And he does.

That night, among other things, the disciples learned a lot about what they can expect if they are obedient to Christ's directives—particularly his new commandment to love one another as he has loved them.

According to Jesus, here are some of the positive outcomes of obediently loving one another. This is a review. Here's what his followers can expect.

The world will know that they are followers of Jesus.

They will experience closeness with God that they would not otherwise experience.

They will collectively have a greater impact on the world than Jesus did in his earthly ministry.

They will receive from the Lord whatever they ask, as long as it's in alignment with his assignment.

This is good stuff.

But concurrently, Jesus has also been talking about something else. The disciples face an important transition. Jesus is leaving. He's going away. And in his place the Holy Spirit, the Helper, is going to come.

And, Jesus says the transition will bring suffering. The more Christlike they become, the more they will be treated as Christ was treated, both positively and negatively. That means they will be persecuted as Jesus was.

In retrospect, we know how this plays out. Jesus is going to be crucified, rise again, appear to his disciples, and then ascend to heaven. We've been studying in Acts how the Holy Spirit then came and empowered the disciples to be courageous witnesses. And yes, they got pushback from the religious authorities. So, looking back, we know what's going happen. But we need to remember these disciples in our text don't have the benefit of that perspective.

Put yourself in the disciples' sandals. All they know is there's going to be a transition that involves Jesus's departure and their persecution, both of which are perceived as negatives. Jesus has tried to emphasize the positives, including the coming of the Holy Spirit. But the disciples don't know what the whole Holy Spirit thing is going to be like; they've never

experienced it. So, it's very difficult for them to see this transition as a net positive.

And that brings us to our text for today, in which Jesus tries to explain the value of this transition to his disciples. In Acts 16:5, Jesus says,

ESV John 16:5 “But now I am going to him who sent me, . . .”

This is yet another reference to Jesus's departure to go to the Father who sent him. But then Jesus observes in the very same verse,

ESV John 16:5 “. . . and none of you asks me, ‘Where are you going?’”

Jesus has just reiterated that he's leaving, and in this moment, none of the disciples is asking Jesus where he is about to go; they're silent. Jesus makes this observation because, apparently, the disciples aren't listening. The normally expected response of a listening person would be, “where are you going?”

Then Jesus explains why they're not listening in verse 6:

ESV John 16:6 “But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.”

“These things” Jesus has said include the seemingly bad news about the transition: Jesus is leaving, and persecution is coming. One Bible scholar notes that the form of this statement suggests that their hearts have been filled with such sorrow that there is no room for anything else. No room for hope. No room for joy. They can't see past the trauma of transition.

But Jesus tries to explain to his followers that they themselves are the ones to gain by this transition. In verse 7, he says,

ESV John 16:7 “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.”

Note the emphasis Jesus places on the personal benefit the disciples will experience; he emphasizes it by the use of the phrases, “to your advantage” and “to you.” This suggests that what follows is an explanation of how they will benefit. In verse 8, Jesus says,

ESV John 16:8 “And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment:”

It’s easy to think that, whatever this means, it relates to the convicting work of the coming Holy Spirit on his own, independent of the work of his followers. But remember, this immediately follows Jesus’s point that the disciples will personally benefit from the Spirit. And so, this convicting work of the Holy Spirit is a part of the benefit the disciples will experience. The idea is that the Holy Spirit will use his disciples to convict the world. We will be his agents. And this will benefit us in our role as witnesses who bring the life of Jesus to our world.

Well, how is this a benefit, and how does this work?

In this context, the word “convict” means to enlighten a person as to their guilt before God. The Spirit plays the role of an inner prosecutor who, through a kind of cross-examination of the conscience, brings a person to a knowledge of their own guilt and perilous condition before a holy God who is our judge.

Jesus lists three areas of conviction: sin, righteousness, and judgment. And in the next three verses, he explains each consecutively.

In verse 9, he says,

ESV John 16:9 “concerning sin, because they do not believe in me;”

Notice that the word “sin” is singular, not plural; it’s “sin” not “sins.” In light of Jesus’s explanation that it’s “because they do not believe in me,” the specific sin in view is unbelief. Let me explain.

Contrary to popular belief, nobody goes to hell because they’re not good enough for heaven. You see, if God accepts into heaven only those who are deserving, God would be alone, because no one is deserving. We all fall short.

It is precisely because no one is deserving that, by his grace and love, Jesus paid the full price for all our sins on the cross that we may be forgiven. As such, people go to hell because they have failed to accept the free gift of eternal salvation and forgiveness that has already been paid in full.

How does a person accept this free gift of eternal salvation? By faith alone in Christ alone. As such, the one and only reason people go to hell is because of their refusal to believe in Jesus. That is the sin of unbelief in view in our text.

How is this a benefit in the transition the disciples face in our text? Well, Jesus charges his followers with the responsibility to bring life to the world through things like reflecting his character and sharing his message and doing his work and enjoying his abundance. In light of this, I think there are at least two inferences we may draw from the verse 9.

First, bringing life to our world should emphasize the need for faith alone in Christ alone to receive the free gift of eternal life.

And second, when we bring life in this way, highlighting the need for faith, the Holy Spirit will bring conviction. We don't have to try to convict people or guilt them into believing in Jesus. It's the Spirit who does the dirty work. When we bring life, the Spirit brings conviction. And that's a benefit.

Jesus touches on the second area of conviction in verse 10, saying,

ESV John 16:10 “concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer;”

In this text, the term, “righteousness” refers to who is right, who has integrity, who is representing the truth. And this question of righteousness is connected to Christ's resurrection. When Jesus says, “I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer,” he is referring to his resurrection and ascension to the Father.

I draw at least two inferences from this.

First, bringing life to our world should emphasize the resurrection of Jesus. His resurrection is a vindication that he is right; he is the righteous one who is telling the truth; his payment for our sins and his offer of eternal life are genuine. His resurrection validates his righteousness.

And a second inference is this: when we bring life in this way, emphasizing his resurrection, the Holy Spirit will bring conviction. He'll do the dirty work of convicting people that their own self-righteousness is pitiful; their own rationalizations are empty; they have been wrong and need to be made right with God through faith in Jesus. When we bring life, the Spirit brings conviction. And that's a benefit.

Jesus points to the third and final area of conviction in verse 11, saying,

ESV John 16:11 “concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

The term, “judgment” describes the actions of God as judge. And the one whom God judges is “the ruler of this world,” that is, Satan. Through Christ’s death and resurrection, Satan is defeated. Satan’s efforts to separate people from God have been conquered, and Satan will one day be cast away from the presence of God forever in judgment. Eternal separation from God is eternal death.

I draw at least two inferences from this.

First, bringing life to our world should emphasize the availability of the new, eternal life Jesus offers. It is in sharp contrast to the judgment of eternal death we all face apart from Christ. Those who align themselves with Jesus through faith will share in his glory; those who align themselves with Satan through unbelief will share in his judgment.

A second inference this this: when we bring life in this way, emphasizing the new, eternal life Jesus offers—the life that saves us from eternal death—the Holy Spirit will bring conviction. There is no need for us to try to coerce a conversion by being judgy. The Spirit will do the dirty work of convicting people that this is a life-or-death situation. The Spirit will impress upon them that judgment is coming and demands a response.

As such, the only human beings who will join Satan in hell are those who choose it, because the Spirit’s conviction invites a faith response.

So, the points Jesus makes in verses 8 through 11 are all variations on a theme: when we bring life, the Spirit brings conviction. And that is a tremendous benefit.

We saw this benefit play out in our study through Acts. Peter is one of the disciples here in John 16 whose heart is full of sorrow as he anticipates the transition involving Jesus's departure. But we saw that, after the transition, the Holy Spirit comes and empowers Peter to bring the words of life to an unbelieving crowd in Jerusalem. Acts 2:37 says,

ESV Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart . . .

Who's doing the "cutting" here? Who is bringing the conviction? It's not Peter; he's just bringing words of life. It's the Spirit who brings conviction. And 3,000 people believe in Jesus for eternal life that day. That's a benefit!

Back in John 16, Jesus says in verse 12,

ESV John 16:12 "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."

Jesus recognizes the disciples are so full of sorrow in this moment, that they cannot possibly absorb all the truths he wants to teach them. And that leads to another benefit of the Spirit. When the Spirit comes, he will teach them new truths Jesus has not yet disclosed—truths these disciples cannot absorb right now. In verse 13, Jesus explains,

ESV John 16:13 "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come."

I believe these words relate to the Spirit who will soon guide some of these disciples to write the books and epistles we now have in the New Testament, including the one we're studying now.

Back in John 14:26, Jesus says that the Spirit will help bring to mind the things Jesus already taught. Here in John 16:13, Jesus is saying that the Spirit will add to that some new material as well, which he calls “the things that are to come.” That’s a benefit.

And the Spirit will not do this independently; he will inspire the writing of Scripture in accord with the will of Jesus the Son and God the Father. All three persons of the godhead will be in agreement. I think that’s Jesus’s point in verses 14 and 15, where he says,

ESV John 16:14 “He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.”

I imagine the heads of the disciples are swimming in this moment. If I were one of them I might be thinking to myself, “Didn’t Jesus just say, ‘I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now’? Well, he’s right, I can’t bear any more. My head is full of information I don’t understand. My heart is full of sorrow I can’t undo. Jesus is about to walk out on us. I’m flooded right now.”

So, Jesus circles back around to the burden of their hearts. In verse 16, he says,

ESV John 16:16 “A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.”

We know, in retrospect, Jesus is referring to his crucifixion and burial, at which time, the disciples will see him no longer. But then, in a little while, they will see him again, which refers to his resurrection and appearance to his disciples before his ascension.

But the disciples don't get this. They're clueless, as evidenced in verses 17 and 18, where you can almost hear some irritation.

ESV John 16:17 So some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I am going to the Father'?" 18 So they were saying, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he is talking about."

Jesus knows exactly what's going on and intercepts their whispering. Verse 19 says,

ESV John 16:19 Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, so he said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me'?"

If the disciples weren't listening before, they probably are now as Jesus has just exposed their muttering. But Jesus does not take the opportunity to chastise them; instead, he graciously encourages them with important information they need to know as they face this transition.

In verse 20, Jesus says,

ESV John 16:20 "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. . . ."

Jesus is alluding to his coming crucifixion, which will be a source of weeping for the disciples, but a cause for celebration to the unbelieving world. Jesus is not being Pollyannaish about the difficulty of the transition they are about to experience; it's going to be painful.

But here's the good news Jesus gives in the last part of verse 20:

ESV John 16:20 “. . . You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.”

In saying this, Jesus has just put his finger on the answer to our question: How can we navigate well life’s transitions? A key to navigating transitions well is to put them into proper perspective. And here’s the perspective Jesus is teaching; here’s the big idea: the trauma of any transition God calls us to face will end in joy.

This is always true; it’s just a matter of time. For the believer, the trauma of transitions turns into joy. Our part is to faithfully endure the transition and look forward to the joy that is coming.

This is not an isolated idea; it’s peppered throughout Scripture. For example, in James 1:2 we are told that when we encounter trials of various kinds, including difficult transitions, we are to count it all joy. Not because the suffering itself is enjoyable, but because we can bank on the ultimate joy of being better off at the end of it.

Jesus gives an illustration of this truth in verses 21 and 22. He says,

ESV John 16:21 “When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”

Jesus likens transition to childbirth. Joy comes at the end.

Here’s an interesting sidebar. It is generally recognized that the most painful part of childbirth is when a mother’s body shifts from preparing

the baby's path to beginning the baby's descent. Anybody know what they call this most painful part? It's called, "transition."

In verse 23, Jesus says,

ESV John 16:23 "In that day you will ask nothing of me. . . ."

This is Jesus's way of saying, "Trust me; one day it's all going to make sense to you. You don't understand now, and you have questions. But one day, you'll get it, and all your questions will be answered. You will realize that the trauma of any transition I call you to face will end in joy."

Then Jesus rounds out our text by returning to a promise he has given before. In verses 23 and 24, he says

ESV John 16:23 ". . . Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, . . ."

Jesus made this same promise back in John 14. The idea is that when our prayer is in alignment with God's assignment his answer is always yes. God will provide everything we need to face the transitions he brings. But here in verse 24, Jesus adds something new to the promise. It's an outcome of navigating well the transitions God brings. It's what Jesus has in mind for us as a benefit of transitions. He says,

ESV John 16:24 ". . . that your joy may be full."

I want you to notice something. The last word in our text is the word, "full." It's a translation of the Greek word, πληρόω. We've seen it before. The same word also appears in the very first sentence of our text in verse 6, where Jesus describes the disciples as full of sorrow. In the original

Greek text, verses 5 and 6 are a single sentence; English translators split it into two sentences for easier reading.

So, our passage begins and ends with the needle on “full.” But what’s in the tank changes. The transition begins full of sorrow; it will end full of joy. And I believe this literary framing is intended to reflect our big idea: the trauma of any transition God calls us to face will end in joy.

Jesus not only teaches this truth, he also models it.

If you think about it, the crucifixion was a transition Jesus faced. How was he able to navigate so well this terrible transition? How was he able to endure the cross? Scripture tells us.

The answer is in Hebrews 12:1-2. See if you can see it as I read it.

ESV Hebrews 12:1 . . . let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross . . .

See the joy? Jesus was able to navigate well the terrible transition of the cross because of the joy that was set before him. The joy of resurrection. The joy of being reunited with the Father. The joy of being reunited with us, through his provision of eternal life.

Jesus practices what he preaches. The trauma of any transition God calls us to face will end in joy. Count on it.

Today, it is our joy to commemorate the triumphant transition of the cross through communion.

In a moment, I'm going to pray. And after I do, you have options. If for any reason you're uncomfortable participating in communion today, no problem; you can sit this one out. There is no pressure to participate.

If you'd like to participate, you have two options.

Here's option number one. After I pray, you are free to come forward to either one of the identical stations to eat the bread and drink the cup. The bread represents Christ's body given on the cross in payment for our sins. The cup represents Christ's blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

Your second option is to remain seated and simply raise your hand, so I can see it. And I will bring the elements to you.

Let's pray and you choose.

Lord, help us to believe that the trauma of any transition you call us to face will end in joy. Renew our minds with this truth that we may represent you well in transition. And thank you, Lord, for the transition you had to face on the cross in our place and on our behalf. In eating the bread and drinking the cup we acknowledge you as the source of our salvation. And the ultimate source of our joy. Amen.