

Your grief will be turned into joy – Easter - 27/03/2016

“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.”
(John 16:20-22)

Beloved in the Lord,

Grieving, a father comes to Jesus and begs Him to come to His house, for his only daughter has just died. He believed that Jesus could help. We read:

“My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live.”
(Mt.9:18)

Jesus goes along with Jairus. They arrive at his house and people have gathered. The sad music is playing and there are sounds of wailing and weeping. Jesus drives out the mourners and goes into the girl’s bedroom; He lays His hand upon her and raises her from the dead. A family’s grief was turned into joy.

One day Jesus was coming into a town called Naine. At the gate He was met with a funeral procession. The people were heading out to bury a widow’s only son. Again there was much noise and sadness. We read: ***“¹³ When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, “Do not weep.”¹⁴ And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, “Young man, I say to you, arise!”¹⁵ The dead man sat up and began to speak. And Jesus gave him back to his mother. (Luke 7:13-15)***

Again great sorrow was turned into joy.

One day, Jesus received news that His friend Lazarus was ill. Eventually Jesus got to the home of Lazarus in Bethany, but sadly Lazarus had died and had been buried four days earlier. Lazarus’ sisters Martha and Mary were grief stricken. Everyone is crying, there is much sadness and an out pouring of grief. Jesus stood by Lazarus tomb and we read that He also wept.

But then Jesus ordered that the stone be rolled away from the entrance to the tomb, and when it was, Jesus called out: “Lazarus come forth!” Miracle of miracles, still wrapped in grave clothes – Lazarus walked out very much alive. Again great sorrow and grief was turned into great joy.

On Good Friday, at around 3.00pm a voice cried out from the middle cross “It is finished!” Jesus bowed His head and gave up His spirit to the Father. Those standing by felt that awful choking feeling as grief and shock took over. Many tears were shed. Their beloved Teacher and Master was dead. A soldier pierced His side with a spear and blood and water poured out. He was indeed dead.

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Having gained permission from Pilate, Joseph from Arimathea took down Jesus body from the cross and placed it in his own new tomb. There is darkness over the land, and darkness and despair in the hearts of those who loved Jesus. Jesus words were fulfilled:

***“Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; ...”
(Jn.16:20)***

While those who loved Jesus mourned, His enemies rejoiced. The Pharisees and the Scribes were happy. They had got this pesky preacher/teacher off the stage once and for all. So they thought, but they had forgotten what Jesus said:

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.

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. (John 16:20&22)

On Friday, all through Saturday and into Sunday morning, there was much grief amongst Jesus disciples and those who followed Him. But as the sun rose on Easter morning and the day grew brighter so the light of Easter began to dawn. The women who had gone to the tomb early that morning, who had slowly trudged their way to the awful task of preparing Jesus body for a proper burial, now ran with feet light as a deer to tell the disciples the news.

The stone was rolled away, the soldiers were gone, the tomb was empty. Only the grave clothes, no body.

Mary Magdalene is standing by the tomb weeping. Sorrow of sorrows. Not only is Jesus dead, now someone has taken His body as well. She can't even see that Jesus gets a decent and proper burial...

We read: ***¹¹ But Mary was standing outside the tomb weeping; and so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; ¹² and she *saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had been lying. ¹³ And they *said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She *said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” ¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and *saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵ Jesus *said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing Him to be the gardener, she *said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” ¹⁶ Jesus *said to her, “Mary!” She turned and *said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher). ¹⁷ Jesus *said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.’” ¹⁸ Mary Magdalene *came, announcing to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and that He had said these things to her.” (John 20:11-18)***

Mary's sorrow was turned to joy, a joy that nothing or nobody could ever take away.

The moment Jesus spoke her name – “Mary”, her eyes were opened and she saw Jesus. He is alive. He has risen. The grave could not hold Him. He is truly Lord. He is God's Son. He is the Resurrection and the life just as He said. All her grief turned to joy.

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This scene is repeated on that evening of the first Easter. Jesus appeared to the disciples who were gathered together in the Upper Room. Again, Jesus appeared to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. Yet again 8 days later Jesus appeared again in the Upper Room and this time Thomas was also there. We read that after Easter, Jesus appeared many times and was seen by more than 500 believers, before He ascended to the Father 40 days after Easter. For all who saw Him, their grief turned into joy.

Today nothing has changed. When we meet Jesus by faith in Him, then He turns our grief into joy, because He is greater than any grief we may have. He is the King of King's and Lord of Lord's. He is much more than a great story, or tradition or religion. He is The Living Lord, The Son of Almighty God.

He says: ***"Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."*** (Rev.1:17b-18)

Jesus is alive forevermore. He has defeated sin, death, hell and the devil. He alone holds all power. When we are in Him, then He turns all of our grief into joy.

He said: ***"³³ These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."*** (Jn.16:33)

Jesus has overcome the world. The message of Easter is a message of victory. When we are in Christ, He gives us victory and He turns our sorrow into joy. That is why we hear him inviting us over and over again:

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. ³⁰ For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Mt.11:28-30)

In order for our grief to turn into joy, all we need to do is to come to Jesus. All we need to do is surrender all to Him. Where Jesus is, there is life.

The message of Easter is that God loves you. He wants you in His family, close to Him. He wants to turn your sorrow into joy. Come to Him today.

We cannot even begin to imagine the joy that we will experience when Jesus promise in our text is fulfilled at His coming: - ***I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.*** We will see Jesus on that day the trumpet sounds and all who have died in Christ will rise to new life, and those who are living will be changed and we will all be taken to The Father's House, where we will no longer live by faith, for we will live by sight. We will see Him as He is full of grace and truth.

Until that day dawns, may we hold fast to Him, keep the faith, and be of a sound mind. Let us allow Jesus to turn all of our sorrow into joy. ***Amen.***

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.***

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