

Pronouns, Perspective, and Peace

As Christians, one of the things that gives us *tremendous comfort and peace* after a loved one has died in the faith is the fact that we **know** we will be reunited with them in heaven. Yes, we still grieve the separation brought about by death, but we know that it is only a *temporary* separation. It will pass. We, too, will one day go home to heaven, and there we will be reunited with our loved ones, gathered together around the throne of the Lamb of God in praise and adoration of Him and His great glory and honor and blessing. *Now* we grieve, but our grief will be turned to joy. In fact, *now* in faith, in spite of our grief, we *still* have joy and peace; a joy and peace that can only be understood in faith.

With all this in mind, the words of Jesus in our Gospel lesson regarding not seeing but then seeing again and having sorrow but then having joy all make *perfect sense* to our ears. We get it. We get it from an “everyday” mortality perspective. We get it from a post-Ascension perspective. We don’t see Jesus right now, *but we will*, and when we do our grief and sorrow that comes with living in this fallen and sinful world will be turned to heavenly joy, and no one can ever take that from us.

But...what if that’s not what Jesus was saying here? Don’t get me wrong: There is absolute truth to everything we’ve already said regarding reunion around the throne of God and seeing Christ in all His glory. But...**context matters.** Jesus spoke these words to His apostles at the Last Supper, *mere hours* before His crucifixion (which they knew nothing about). Jesus wasn’t referring here to what the apostles would someday see when they died and went home to heaven, nor was He preparing them for post-Ascension time; i.e, the time between when they would see Him no more after ascending into heaven and when He would return again in all glory and judgment; the time we’re still living in right now.

Folks: Christ’s betrayal and death was *hours* away. These men would grieve. They would mourn. In just a very short time their whole world would be turned upside down. And yet...in just a very short time—three days—their sorrow would be turned to joy. Christ would rise again. “*A little while you won’t see Me, but again a little while and you will see Me. You will weep and lament, but then you will rejoice.*” And we know this to be true. We’re told that the disciples were terribly distressed and full of grief and sorrow in the immediate wake of Christ’s death, but on that third day, when He appeared to them in their midst, St. Luke tells us that they “*disbelieved for joy.*” Their sorrow had been turned to joy; ***joy in the resurrection of Jesus.*** Though He once was dead, now He lives and reigns victorious. Death no longer has dominion over Him. Nothing and no one can ever take that joy from them! ***Christ lives! The victory is won!***

And if anyone still doubts that Jesus is referring here specifically to His imminent death and resurrection, look no further than His own words in verse 22. *“You will have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”* ***Did you catch that? Context matters. Pronouns matter.*** It’s one thing to say that we will see Jesus again. We will. We will see Him in all His glory when we get home to heaven (or when He returns in judgment; whichever comes first). It’s quite another thing, though, for Jesus to say, *“I will see you again.”* **This is resurrection language!**

In the original Greek Jesus says that He will *opsamai* them again. This is a word that deals with the eyes; with ***physically*** seeing. This is where we get the word “ophthalmology” from—the study of the eyes. This is the same kind of language Job was using when he expressed his faith in the resurrection. *“I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!”* (Job 19:25-27) With **his own eyes** he will see his Savior in the flesh! This is ***exactly*** what Jesus is promising His apostles. With His own eyes—***His resurrected eyes***—He will see them again. This isn’t a spiritual kind of *“I will be looking down from heaven and even though you won’t see Me, I will see you.”* **No!** Jesus is giving them Gospel resurrection comfort, even before the full hammer of His Father’s righteous Law is dropped squarely on Him in His horrifying crucifixion. *“I will see you again, and this fact will make your hearts rejoice, and no one will be able to take that joy from you.”*

And it is precisely at this point that we can say with all certainty that these victorious words and promises of Christ are meant for our ears, our comfort, and our joy too. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: You don’t have to wait to get home to heaven to see Jesus! ***Through the God-given eyes of faith, you see Him now, right where He tells you to look; right where He promises to be.*** You don’t have to wait to get home to heaven to have joy and peace! Behold! [*Word and Sacrament*] The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! Behold! *“This is My Body. This is My Blood. I am with you always, even to the end of the age. I am with you always, even in the midst of your suffering and struggling and trials and tribulations. I am with you always, even in the midst of sorrow and despair and loss and grief.”* Even when we are surrounded by and swallowed up in the darkness of sin and despair, the light of Christ ever shines forth, piercing the darkness and giving to us ***His joy, His peace, His comfort, His assurance.***

I can’t tell you how often I’ve been **privileged** to witness this reality in the lives of your loved ones. To be at the bedside of a faithful person who is suffering and in the final stages of tremendous pain, and to witness their ***faithful joy***, even as

they suffer, is *humbling* beyond all words. To see their faces—their entire countenance—light up in joy as together we worship and pray and listen to our Lord’s Word and receive His Body and Blood...*it’s humbling and awe-inspiring*. I always leave feeling *so small and pathetic!* I lament when the checkbook is tight or when the Packers lose or when the hunting wasn’t so good. These folks, even in the midst of all their true sorrow and suffering—yea, *in spite of* all their true sorrow and suffering—*exemplify and radiate* the joy of the eternal resurrection victory they have been baptized into. Nothing can take that away from them; not cancer, not weakness, not pain, *not even impending death...NOTHING*. They have and exemplify the “now and not yet” joy of faith. They have joy *now*, even as they suffer, and they also have joy in knowing what awaits them in all glory on the heavenly side of eternity.

This “now and not yet” joy, just like the apostles and just like all the faithful who’ve come before us and who will, by God’s grace, come after us, *is grounded and founded in the reality of the resurrected and victorious Christ*; the same resurrected and victorious Christ who continues to come to us this very day and into our very midst, feeding us and nourishing us with His *death-conquering, life-giving* Word and Sacrament. Folks: I don’t care how bad life may get or life may seem. “*I am with you always.*” Here is this very Truth. Here is the Light the darkness has not and cannot overcome. Here is your Lord and Savior. Here is the joy and peace of the resurrected Christ; a joy and a peace that surpasses all human understanding.

May this same joy and peace guard and keep your hearts and minds ever grounded in Him, and may His joy and peace be and remain with you now and into all eternity.

AMEN