

Session 2 The Power of Sorrow: Unto Spiritual Maturity or Spiritual Crisis?

“Let me drink from the river of Your pleasures as I delight in Your beauty” (Ps. 36:8; 37:4)

I. HOW WE RESPOND TO SORROW DETERMINES OUR SPIRITUAL DESTINY

A. How we respond to Jesus when sorrow engulfs our heart determines our spiritual destiny.

⁴But these things I have told you, that when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them...⁶But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. (Jn. 16:4-6)

1. I believe the 2020s will be the most dramatic transitional decade in human history. We are approaching a time of a global trauma of deep sorrow that will leave hundreds of millions in great pain. This will be the most intense time of sorrow in history surpassing even the trauma of WWII when 50 million died in 6 years and cities were extensively damaged by bombs—London, Rotterdam, Warsaw, Berlin, Hamburg, Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, etc.
2. At the same time as this global trauma, hundreds of millions of believers will enter into supernatural joy and peace. The contrast will be so dramatic as the Lord transforms people so that they are filled with peace, thus becoming living portrait of His glory to many unbelievers.

B. We can respond to sorrow in two different ways. Sorrow can lead us to a desperate hunger to connect with Jesus in deep way to seek answers and to receive supernatural joy, peace and confidence. However, many believers have been overcome with sorrow related to unfulfilled expectations, fears of coming trouble, the pain of betrayal, the shame of their personal failure, despair related to regret in their life, confusion about the direction for their life, etc.

C. If we respond to the Lord rightly, we can avoid a great spiritual crisis in our life that would result in us quitting and being overcome with dark emotions.

II. REVIEW: THE END-TIME CHURCH IS TRANSFORMED IN CONTEXT TO BETRAYAL

A. A surprising part of God’s plan is to use an unprecedented outpouring of the Spirit in the context of a culture of betrayal, persecution, and pressure as part of the optimum environment to transform the Church. Multitudes will be progressing toward mature love, while others will be overcome with offense that will lead them to betray other believers. Betrayal touches our heart in a very deep way. Betrayal is an **“accelerant”** that leads to faster growth in humble love *or* in bitterness and offense.

¹⁰“And then many will be offended, will betray one another...” (Mt. 24:10)

¹⁶“You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends...” (Lk. 21:16)

B. Betrayal is both a demonic attack to hinder our spiritual growth and a divine gift to enhance it.

C. Jesus’ reason for emphasizing persecution and betrayal (Mt. 24; Jn. 13-17) was so that they would not stumble (16:1). Our greatest danger is not in being betrayed but in responding to it wrongly, leading to our spiritual failure and falling short of the grace of God (Heb. 12:14-15).

¹These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble [be overcome by offense]. ²They will put you out of the synagogues...[and] kill you...” (Jn. 16:1-2)

- D. The Lord is leading His people to be transformed by embracing and imparting Matthew 5:44—*to be like our Father* (5:45). That is, to be a living portrait of what the Father is like (5:45). Embracing this ushers us into a supernatural lifestyle as we love those who betray us.

⁴⁴*“I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you...
⁴⁵*that you may be sons of your Father...for He makes His sun rise on the evil...” (Mt. 5:44-45)**

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGING WITH JESUS IN TIMES OF SORROW

- A. Jesus repeated “these things” 7 times in John 13-17 (13:19; 14:29; 15:11; 16:33; 17:13). “These things” include about 25 truths and promises in John 13-17 together with the troubles that Jesus highlighted in Matthew 24. I identify 12 types of trouble that challenged the early Church. [See Session 1 *Cultivating A Vibrant Heart Even In Times Of Great Trouble (Jn 15:12-27)*]

⁴*“These things I told you that, when the time comes, you may remember that I told you of them.” (Jn. 16:4)*

- B. Jesus called believers in Sardis to “remember” in seeking to overcome spiritual dullness (Rev. 3:3). They were to recall *how* and *why* God called them to be wholehearted and *what* He promised to do and to remember *how* they once responded in tender love with dedication (Acts 19). Our tendency is to forget, so we must be intentional about remembering the divine storyline. The enemy doesn’t want us to remember God’s truths and promises and His narrative of our life and ministry.

²*...strengthen the things which remain...³Remember how you have received and heard...” (Rev. 3:2-3)*

1. About 60 years later, Jesus visited John telling him to call His people to remember (Rev. 3:3). The call to “remember” is one of the most emphasized exhortations in the Scripture with over 80 references—over 60 in the Old Testament and over 20 in the New Testament. Along with the command to praise or thank God, it is one of the most emphasized commands in the Bible.
2. When we “remember,” then it makes sense to walk out our kingdom commitments. When we “forget,” then we lose sight of many things, become discouraged, and lose motivation.

- C. I remember my journey in being trained by God related to betrayal began in my first prophetic encounter as a pastor (Dec. 19, 1976), when the Lord told me that in the future I would be opposed by many but my “greatness” would be related to receiving God’s gentleness, *responding to my adversaries in gentleness*, and growing in the ability to impart this to others (Ps. 18:35; Mt. 5:44).

³⁵*...Your right hand has held me up. Your gentleness has made me great. (Ps. 18:35)*

- D. The overarching theme of John 13-17 is found in John 14:1 where Jesus commanded the disciples *not to allow trouble to dominate their heart*. There are human dynamics involved as indicated by His command to “let not...” Jesus promised to release His peace (14:27) and joy (15:11) into the hearts of those who continue *not to allow trouble to dominate their heart*. See my message and handout on this theme: https://mikebickle.org/resource/01-overcoming-anxiety-fear-shame-and-betrayal-jn-141-m-bickle/?ett_series_id=11751

¹*“Let not your heart be troubled...believe also in Me...²⁷Peace I leave with you...” (Jn. 14:1, 27)*

- E. If we do our part in replacing the thoughts that trouble our heart with His truths and promises, then Jesus will do His part in imparting His joy and peace that is stronger than our troubled emotions.
- F. In John 13-17, Jesus gives us line-upon-line insight into God’s heart (about 25 truths and promises) that equips us to overcome painful and dangerous emotions that entrap many believers.
- G. As we obey John 14:1, His peace guards our heart and mind (Phil. 4:7). Prayer or talking to God includes saying, “*Thank You. Show me more.*”—related to the 25 truths and promises in John 13-17.
6Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer...with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7and the peace of God...will guard your hearts and minds... (Phil. 4:6-7)
- H. To better understand what Jesus spoke on Thursday night (Jn. 13-17), we go back to what He said on Tuesday (Mt. 24-25)—two days before the Last Supper (Jn. 13). He prophesied racial conflicts, pestilences, betrayals, martyrdom, the siege of Jerusalem (Zech. 14:2), and more in Matthew 24. Notice that Jesus called them “*to be not troubled*” (Mt. 24:6) and then repeated it in John 14:1. Jesus continued in the same conversation in His last two messages—in Matthew 24 and John 13-17.
6You will hear of wars and rumors of war. See that you are not troubled...7For nation [ethnos] will rise against nation...there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes... (Mt. 24:6-7)
- I. **Summary:** In John 13 and Matthew 24, Jesus highlighted the increase of *fear* with despair from wars, societal crisis, persecution, etc., *grief* from the death of loved ones, *shame* from personal failure, and *bitterness* from betrayal—as troubles the apostles and the end-time Church would face.

IV. REASONS THE APOSTLES WERE TROUBLED BY FEAR, GRIEF, SHAME, & BITTERNESS

- A. *Trouble #1—Death of their beloved leader and other friends:* Jesus reminded them that He was going to be taken from them in death (13:36). The thought of Jesus dying brought grief to them (Jn. 16:16, 20-28). Jesus told them on Tuesday that some of them would also be killed (Mt. 24:9).
- B. *Trouble #2—shame over personal failure:* Jesus prophesied that Peter would deny Him (13:38). He said that “all” would stumble that night (Mt. 26:31). They all felt the crisis of shame that night.
- C. *Trouble #3—bitterness of betrayal:* They would be betrayed by loved ones (Mt. 24:10; Lk. 21:16).
- D. *Trouble #4—societal crisis:* This includes ethnic conflict, lawlessness, deception, etc. (Mt. 24:7-12).
- E. *Trouble #5—persecution:* The early church experienced physical, social, and economic persecution. Some were killed, beaten, or imprisoned (Jn. 15:19-20; cf. Mt. 24:9; Lk. 21:12; Jn. 16:2).
- F. *Trouble #6—natural disasters:* pestilence, earthquakes, famines, droughts, hurricanes, tsunamis, forest fires, volcanos, floods, etc. (Mt. 24:7; Lk. 21:11, 25).
- G. *Trouble #7—fearful cosmic sights:* There will be signs in the heavens, etc.
11“...there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven...25There will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars...with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring...” (Lk. 21:11, 25)

V. RECEIVING GOD’S JOY & PEACE—5 OF THE MANY TRUTHS THAT JESUS EMPHASIZED

- A. We can cultivate a vibrant heart filled with God’s peace even in times of great trouble. We obey the command “to not allow trouble to dominate our heart” by engaging in conversation with Jesus saying, “*Thank You, show me more!*” specifically related to each promise and truth in John 13-17.
¹***“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.” (Jn. 14:1)***
- B. Truth #1—Jesus has provided the way for us to live with Him in the Father’s house forever (14:2-3).
- C. Truth #2—God’s love for us—we can engage in a deep relationship with God (14:23; 15:5, 9).
- D. Truth #3—Access to supernatural resources through Spirit-led prayer as God supplies our needs.
- E. Truth #4—How Jesus responded to the apostles when they stumbled (Mt. 26:31; Lk. 22:31-32).
- F. Truth #5—The joy of eternal rewards for obeying Jesus—bearing fruit that remains forever (15:16).

VI. CONNECT TO THE BIG PICTURE OF JESUS’ DESTINY WITH THE FATHER (JN. 16:5)

- A. Jesus wanted them to ask Him where He was going so that it would comfort them (16:5). Some point out that Peter had asked Him this question (Jn. 13:36), and Thomas implied it (Jn. 14:5). They were both concerned to know what location in Israel that Jesus might temporarily go to instead of wanting to understand *His destiny with the Father* out of love for Him (14:28).
⁵***“But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’***
⁶***But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.” (Jn. 16:5-6)***
²⁸***“If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’...” (Jn. 14:28)***
1. Jesus wanted His disciples to connect to the big picture of His story. Sorrow was dominating the perception of the disciples. Their questions were focused on their temporal circumstances and comfort. They did not want Him to go on another trip without them.
 2. In John 11, after Jesus raised Lazarus from dead, the Jewish Sanhedrin determined to kill Him immediately (Jn. 11:53). Therefore, Jesus left Jerusalem—going to Ephraim a city NE of Jerusalem (Jn. 11:54) and then to Perea (Mt. 19:1) for about 4 to 8 weeks so that they could not arrest Him. Jesus returned to Jerusalem in time to die on specifically on Passover.
- B. We overcome sorrow by engaging in the big-picture story of Jesus’ destiny—as Paul highlighted (Eph. 1:20-23). Jesus sits in the highest governmental position in creation—far above all angels and demons. The Father put all things under Jesus’ feet— He transferred the “ownership” of all things to Jesus. He gave Jesus to the Church as the vehicle through which He expresses the fullness of God’s glory on earth. Our eternal destiny and story is deeply connected to Jesus’ destiny and story.
²⁰***...when He [the Father] raised Him...and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,***
²¹***far above all principality and power and might...²²He put all things under His [Jesus’] feet... and gave Him to be head...to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all.***
(Eph. 1:20-23)

VII. JESUS' MODEL OF TEACHING ABOUT TROUBLE: WHAT THEY CAN BEAR (JN. 16:4, 12)

- A. Jesus gives truth in a progressive way according to the capacity of those to whom He is speaking. The way that Jesus taught them progressively about the coming trouble is a model for how we are to teaching others about the coming trouble. He held back many things until they could bear it (16:12).
⁴“...*These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you...*
¹²*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” (Jn. 16:4, 12)*
- B. *I did not say to you at the beginning* (16:4): These words seem to contradict the times where He had spoken of their future persecutions (Mt. 5:10-12; 10:16-23; 24:9; Lk. 6:22-23; 12:4; 21:16).
1. What Jesus told them earlier in 15:15 is not a contradiction to what Jesus said here in 16:4.
¹⁵“...*for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.*” (Jn. 15:15)
 2. In John 15:15, Jesus gave them “seeds of truths” for 3½ years and then more in Matthew 24 and John 13-17 but *much more* after the resurrection—as unfolding of the “flower of truth.”
- C. *Because I was with You*: At the beginning, all the persecution was focused on Jesus. But now that He was leaving them as His representatives, they would face the hostility aimed at Him.
- D. *These things*: This expression includes the future troubles that He prophesied on Tuesday they would face (Mt. 24) together with new details in John 15:18-16:4 where He explained *why* the world hates them and *how* they would be “put out” or betrayed by leaders in the synagogue that grew up in—leaders who assumed they were serving God in excommunicating them (16:2) .
- E. Jesus modeled how we are to teach others about the coming trouble. He held back many things until they could understand and bear it (16:12). At the beginning, they apostles did not need nor could they bear the “many things” He would tell them in the future in God’s timing.
¹²“*I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” (Jn. 16:12)*
- F. He had not yet told them the things that He revealed during the 40 days after His resurrection (Acts 1:3). The “many things” include truths developed in Romans, Ephesians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, etc. He waited about 60 years before He told John many of the events seen in the book of Revelation.
³*to whom He also presented Himself alive...being seen by them [the apostles] during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)*
1. The apostles struggled to receive many of the things that He taught them before that night—such as the fact of His coming death that He spoke of about 9 months earlier (Mt. 16:21-23).
²¹*From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem... be killed...*²²*Peter...began to rebuke Him, saying, “...Lord; this shall not happen to You!”*
²³*He...“Get behind Me, Satan...you are not mindful of the things of God.” (Mt. 16:21-23)*
 2. All of us as fallen humans are slow of heart to understand (Lk. 24:25).
²⁵“*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all the prophets have spoken!” (Lk. 24:25)*

- G. Jesus' model of teaching about trouble was to give His disciples information progressively according to what they could understand, bear to hear, and according what they needed to know to cooperate with God's purposes in each particular season of their life. This will vary greatly according to the measure of understanding and spiritual maturity of each community of believers.
- H. We are called to be helpful to the people the Lord puts before us. This includes teaching unpopular truths (Acts 20:20-27) in contrast to some who only teach that which wins affirmation from those who hear them (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Some teach mostly on subjects that they personally like. Some teach others in way to win their theological arguments or to showcase how much they know.
- ²⁰...I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you...²⁶I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:20-27)*
- ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers. (2 Tim. 4:3-4)*
- I. Paul embraced the principle of teaching to meet the need of those he ministered to. He fed some believers with the milk of the Word because they could not bear the solid food (meat, 1 Cor. 3:1-2).
- ¹And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but...as to babes in Christ.*
- ²I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it... (1 Cor. 3:1-2)*
- J. There are many levels of understanding in the multitudes of the body of Christ (Heb. 5:12-13)
- ¹²By this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. (Heb. 5:12-13)*
- K. In the generation the Lord returns, the Lord promised to raise up "people of understanding" who will help others understand the biblical narrative related to the end times (Dan. 11:33). This promise is available to all believers. "Many" will be hungry for answers from God's Word.
- ³³And those of the people who understand shall instruct many. (Dan. 11:33)*
- ²⁰The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly. (Jer. 23:20)*
- L. As shepherds, we speak truths to help people grow, not merely to reveal how much we know.
- ¹⁵I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. (Jer. 3:15)*
- M. We are speak the truth in love to edify the younger believers that we minister to (Eph. 4:14-15).
- ¹⁴that we should no longer be children...carried about with every wind of doctrine...¹⁵but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head. (Eph. 4:14-15)*