

## 2. Characteristics of the new order

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, let's open our Bibles, please, at John's Gospel, chapter 16. And our passage is the one that I read, beginning at verse 16 and going through roughly to verse 28, perhaps not quite that far.

But let me begin tonight by pointing out a feature of the four Gospels, which it may be quite easy for us to miss. Just look with me, if you will, at John, chapter 16, verse 16.

Let me read that verse. A little while, and you will see me no longer. And again, a little while, and you will see me. Now, who is speaking, and to whom?

Well, the answer is easy, and even a six-year-old in our Sunday school could tell you. It's Jesus speaking, and he's speaking to his disciples, the eleven apostles, on the night before his crucifixion.

However, at another level, somebody else is speaking, and is speaking to a different audience altogether. Can we turn to the very last verse of John's Gospel for a moment?

[ 1 : 0 7 ] Chapter 21, verse 25. 21, 25. Now, there are also many other things that Jesus did.

Were every one of them to be written? I suppose that the whole world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Now, who is speaking there? Well, obviously, it is John the Evangelist.

John the Apostle. One of the eleven apostles who were listening to Jesus' words on that very night in John, chapter 16. And here in chapter 21, verse 25, John is telling us that he has been very selective in choosing his material.

There are many other things Jesus did. I haven't written them all down. He's saying there's so much more I could have written. In fact, if I had written everything down, the whole world could not contain the books written.

So, what I've included here in these very slim 21 chapters is only a tiny slice of the cake. Now, look back to chapter 20 and verse 30.

[ 2 : 1 3 ] Chapter 20 and verse 30. Now, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book.

Just the same message, isn't it? There's a lot more that he did which I have not recorded. But, look at verse 31. These things I have written down. Why? So that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

So, when we read the words of Jesus in the four Gospels, we need to bear in mind these two distinct levels of communication. On the one hand, we have Jesus' words to his contemporaries, truly and accurately recorded.

And we try to understand what his words meant then to them, to his contemporaries. But, on the other hand, we're listening to the message of the evangelist, to his worldwide readership, which includes us today.

John tells us there in chapter 20, verses 30 and 31, that he has selected the things that he's written down for the specific purpose of helping his readers to become Christians.

[ 3 : 26 ] To believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that through believing they may have light. So, as we study our verses in chapter 16 tonight, let's bear in mind not only that Jesus has something to say to his eleven apostles, which is going to help them and strengthen them in the first century after his departure to heaven, but also that John, the Apostle John, who's one of our teachers, has a very important message for us today.

And if we can get John's message to us under our belts, if we can swallow it and digest it, it will be to us as the can of spinach was to Popeye. It will put real strength and courage into us.

And we know that John was writing this Gospel first and foremost for those who were not yet Christians. Maybe that there are some here tonight who are not yet believers. Well, listen carefully, because there's a message for you.

Alright, well let's look at the text and we'll start here at verse 16. A little while, and you will see me no longer. And again a little while, and you will see me.

Now, what kind of a riddle is that? It's almost like playing peekaboo, isn't it, with a very young child. You know how the child's in the high chair or whatever, and there you are with your hands over your face.

[ 4 : 45 ] Now you can see me. Ha ha ha. No, you can't see me. Now you can see me. I was there all along. Ho, ho. Now that's really the way the disciples respond. With a sense of mystification to what Jesus is saying.

It seems to be a riddle to them. Look at verse 17. Some of his disciples said to one another, What is this that he says to us? They're mystified.

Now here is John remembering this scene so vividly. After all, he was there. He was one of the disciples. Possibly one of the youngest of the disciples.

He might have been a boy of only 17 or 18. And he's writing up this gospel a very long time afterwards. Perhaps in the year 80 or 85 AD. At least 50 years after the events.

He would have been quite an elderly man. But you don't forget this kind of conversation. These words that were said then were indelibly written into his memory. And he remembers how confused and clueless he and the others were.

[ 5 : 50 ] The detail there in verse 17 is so interesting. A little group of them, perhaps a little huddle of three or four of them, are speaking to each other in a corner of the room.

Almost behind their hands. Because they don't want to appear foolish. So they say to each other, What is this that he's saying to us? A little while and you will not see me.

A little while and you will see me again. What is it all about? Then verse 18. So they were saying, What does he mean by a little while? We don't know what he's talking about. Now Jesus appears to be just a little distance away from them.

Perhaps at the other side of the room. But he doesn't miss a trick. He never misses a trick. So he looks across the room in verse 19. And he says, in effect, I can hear you in your holy huddle over there.

I know you're asking each other what I meant when I said a little while and you will not see me. And again a little while. And you will see me. I'm right, aren't I? That's what you were talking about. Yes, Lord.

[ 6 : 49 ] Yes. Now he explains himself. He gives the answer, if you like, to the riddle in verses 20 to 22. And we'll look at that in just a moment. But first, let's think about this riddle-like language that he uses.

Look on to verse 25 because Jesus says something about it there. Verse 25. I've said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech, but will tell you plainly about the Father.

So in verse 25, he's contrasting plain speech, clear, unambiguous speech, which he's going to use, he says, in the near future, with the figures of speech, which he's using at the present moment.

The King James Version translates at this point, Proverbs. This phrase that is translated as figures of speech, as Proverbs.

I'm speaking to you in Proverbs. Almost the same idea as riddles. So why do you think Jesus should use this rather obscure way of speaking? Was he deliberately trying to hide things from his friends?

[ 7 : 59 ] The answer must be no. After all, we find him in so much of the four Gospels laboring patiently to help them to understand who he was and what he was doing.

But they were so slow to cotton on. Now, that's hardly surprising when you remember that the coming of the Son of God into the world was without precedent. The world had never seen such a phenomenon.

The disciples simply couldn't absorb such a strange, novel idea. So Jesus sometimes resorted to proverbial sayings because he knew that proverbial sayings, almost riddle sayings, are such a good way of teaching.

Initially, the proverb is like a riddle. You can't grasp it. But when you do grasp it, it sticks in your memory and it conveys a truth to your understanding that nothing is going to dislodge.

It's going to stay there. You think of some of the proverbs that will have lodged in your minds, perhaps for very many years. It's the last straw that breaks the camel's back. It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good.

[ 9 : 07 ] Even advertising strap lines can be very effective and they can stick with you, can't they? Purcell washes whiter. You'll wonder where the yellow went when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent.

You need to be quite old to know that one, but it's a good one, isn't it? Now John, the Apostle John, he remembered this little proverb or riddle over 50 years later.

A little while and you will not see me, and again a little while and you will see me. And remember, John is including this teaching in his gospel for the sake of his worldwide non-Christian readership so as to help his readers to put their trust in Jesus and thus come to enjoy eternal life.

So what are we to learn from both the Lord Jesus and the Apostle John in this passage? Well, let me give it a title. Jesus is teaching some of the characteristics or marks of the new order.

He's showing his disciples and John is showing his readership that with the death and resurrection of Jesus a new order of existence is opening up.

[ 10 : 17 ] And Jesus is teaching his disciples that after his death and resurrection they will be able to experience two new and wonderful things. A new joy that no one can take from them and a new access to God the Father and access in the name of Jesus as they learn to pray.

So we'll look at those two things now in turn. First of all a new joy that no one can take from them. Now this is where this little proverb a little while this and a little while that comes into the picture.

Jesus himself is the one who sparks off this part of the conversation in verse 16. He says this proverb or riddle in the verse knowing that it will produce the puzzled reaction that we have in verses 17 and 18.

So in verse 19 having stirred up their minds into activity Jesus then begins to explain himself. So he says to them in verse 19 is this what you're asking yourselves what I meant when I said a little while and you will not see me and again a little while and you will see me.

You can imagine their heads nodding as if to say yes master that's it please tell us don't keep us in suspense. So he begins to unfold the meaning of the riddle as he moves into verse 20.

[ 11 : 38 ] Now look at verse 20. Truly truly I say to you he says in other words pin back your ears listen very carefully to what I'm about to say because this is of the utmost importance.

Truly truly I say to you you will weep and lament tomorrow when you see me hoisted up on a dreadful cross you will be aghast at that point.

That will be a day of dreadful sorrow and confusion for you. The world however that is all the anti-God forces represented by the Jewish authorities and the Roman government they will rejoice.

The Jewish leaders will be delighted to think that at last they've managed to throw me out to have me dead and buried to have me off their backs. Yes my friends tomorrow you will be sorrowful but your sorrow will turn to joy when you see me on Sunday when I'm raised up from the grave.

Now we need to remember that although Jesus speaks these words on the evening before his crucifixion on the Thursday evening only three days before Easter Sunday the disciples still did not understand what was going to happen to Jesus.

[ 12 : 58 ] There are several moments in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke when Jesus carefully explains to his friends how everything is going to end but they simply can't understand him.

Here's an example from Mark chapter 9. Jesus was teaching his disciples and saying to them the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill him and when he is killed after three days he will rise but Mark adds they did not understand the saying and were afraid to ask him.

Now a little time has passed and here in John 16 months we're perhaps several months later but they're still just as clueless John himself only came to understand all this later on.

Look back to verse 12 here in chapter 16 I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now. Jesus knew they simply couldn't take in very much on that Thursday evening.

They were too weary too sorrowful too perplexed but he says in verse 13 when the spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all the truth and verse 14 he will take what is mine that is the truth about me and my work and he will declare it to you.

[ 14 : 18 ] he will make it to you as plain as a pike staff. So what is this great truth that they couldn't fathom at the time but came to grasp afterwards?

It was simply that although the cross was going to bring them the disciples great pain great sorrow their pain would quickly be succeeded by a joy so great that in the words of verse 22 nobody would be able to take it away from them.

And Jesus uses a most illuminating illustration of pain followed by joy in verse 21. Let me read verse 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.

That's a great illustration isn't it? It's so earthy. It makes you gulp a bit doesn't it? To think of the labour ward and so on. It makes you think do we really have to think about childbirth on a Sunday evening at church when we're about to have a cup of tea and a custard cream?

[ 15 : 30 ] Well the answer is yes we are going to think about it for a moment. Let me just have a word for those of you who may be preachers one day. Please use down to earth illustrations like this one to brighten up your sermons.

Don't be all refined and exquisite and philosophical. Jesus drew his illustrations from the vineyard from horticulture from fishing from the marketplace from health and sickness from animal husbandry and yes here from the maternity ward blood toil tears and sweat all four of those things isn't that right?

And he chooses this illustration because it describes unbearable pain followed by the great joy of a new existence. Labour pain is about the worst pain that a human being can suffer.

I know because I'm a father. I can remember when my wife was giving birth to one of our children in the hospital at Burton on Trent years ago.

I think I'd been up most of the night and I was so tired. So I popped out for a little breather and I went to the WRVS canteen downstairs where those nice ladies are who serve you a cup of tea.

[ 16 : 51 ] And I must have looked ashen faced because the lady who served me said, are you all right dookie? That's how they speak in South Derbyshire. And I said, well not great really, my wife's upstairs on the maternity ward and it's all a bit difficult.

And she said to me, now she was a muscular looking lady of about 70, she said, your wife's having a baby. Having babies, she said, it's easy, there's nothing to it, I've had seven.

It's as easy, she said, as popping peas out of a pod. I thought to myself, mother, you go and tell my wife that, she might say something rather old fashioned to you.

Now, I reckon that 70 year old tea lady was the exception to the rule, but the rule is that the pains of labour are unbearable. They have to be born, but they're unbearable. Jesus uses these words sorrow and anguish in verse 21.

But, he says, but as soon as she's delivered the baby, she doesn't remember the anguish for joy that a human being has been born into the world. And that's exactly what it's like.

[ 18 : 01 ] As soon as the baby is born, the mother's face is transformed. The pain and the suffering vanish instantly. And she's full of joy and delight as she holds her baby and contemplates a new beginning, a whole new existence.

So, Jesus explains the illustration in verse 22. So also, just like this labour pain business, 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.

Now, this illustration, this vivid earthy illustration in verse 21, serves two purposes. First, it shows the enormous contrast between great pain and great joy.

But secondly, it shows how the joy that will come through the resurrection of Jesus is joy at the prospect of a new existence, of a new order.

Jesus is not merely wanting to contrast pain and joy. He is showing that his resurrection marks the arrival of a new order. It's the first stage in the dawning of the new creation.

[ 19 : 14 ] It's the event that immediately precedes the coming of the Holy Spirit. So, Jesus is teaching his disciples and us that his death and resurrection is the hinge between the old world, which is subject to decay and ruin, and the new order where death and pain and tears have no place.

That's why the disciples are about to experience a depth of joy that no one will be able to take away from them. So, when they met Jesus again on Easter Sunday, in his resurrection body, they were not merely being reunited with their dear friend and teacher.

They were going to see with their own eyes the prince of the new life. They were going to be able to touch him with their hands, eat with him, talk with him, on many occasions over the coming days.

And then later, when the Holy Spirit came to clarify their understanding of Jesus, they knew with an unalterable conviction that they were members of this new order.

It was the resurrection of Jesus which opened the gateway into the new creation. Remember how Peter the Apostle puts it at the beginning of his first letter. God has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

[ 20 : 37 ] And then Peter adds a moment later, in this you rejoice. Now this is what filled John and Peter and the others with such joy.

They came to realise that through the resurrection of Jesus they had been brought from the unbearable agony, the birth pangs of the cross to the unbreakable incorruptible joy of membership of the new order.

Now they knew of course that they still had to die and leave their earthly bodies but they knew that they now belonged forever to the one over whom death had no more dominion.

Now friends that joy, that new joy which nobody could take from the eleven apostles is for all to share if we're Christians, if we belong to Jesus.

This is why John the apostle wrote all this down 50 years after the events. Think of it, Peter and James and the other apostles were long dead. John was probably the only one still surviving.

[ 21 : 41 ] So he didn't write these words down for the sake of his now demised brother apostles. He wrote these words down for us, to give us authoritative apostolic assurance that all who belong to Jesus will not find the southern necropolis to be our final resting place.

Not at all. If we belong to Jesus, we're destined for the new creation. Indeed, we have one foot in it already. The second foot will soon follow. And when that happens, when we're there in the end, we shall gaze about ourselves and look around and then we shall really begin to understand the gospel.

So if you're a Christian, as I know so many here are, be assured, be assured, the Lord Jesus himself teaches you that you have in you a joy which no one can take from you because of the resurrection of Jesus.

Now, you'll have plenty of tribulations in this world. Jesus goes on to say that in verse 33. But this world and its tribulations will not have the final word in the life of a Christian because Jesus by his resurrection has brought us into the new order and we shall leave the old world and all its tribulations fully behind us.

We're now second. Jesus teaches his disciples that they will have a new access to God the Father, an access in the name of Jesus as they learn to pray.

[ 23 : 12 ] Now, friends, most of us, I guess, would say that in the school of prayer, we're still in a fairly low class. Even those of us who've been Christians for a long time perhaps feel that we're only in primary two in the Lord's school of prayer.

But the fact is that P2 children look forward to becoming P7 children and even dream of stepping up into senior school eventually. So let's allow the Lord's words here to rekindle our appetite to pray to him and to God the Father.

It's one thing to know about God, but it's quite a different thing to know him. And Jesus here is teaching his disciples to know God the Father by speaking to him and by asking him for things.

And he is saying to them at the end of verse 24 that when they ask God for things, they will receive them and their joy will be full because their relationship to God will be filled with the constant blessing of asking and receiving.

So in our passage here we have two great sources of joy within three verses. We have this unlosable joy in verse 22 because of the resurrection of Jesus.

[ 24 : 30 ] And now we have a tip-top full-up joy in verse 24 because of the Father's willingness to answer the prayers offered to him in Jesus' name. Now if we only looked at verses 23 and 24, we might think that the only right way to pray was to the Father in the name of Jesus.

But just look back to chapter 14 and verses 13 and 14. Chapter 14 verses 13 and 14. Let me read those two verses. 14 and 13. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. So here in chapter 14, Jesus teaches his friends that they can pray to him in his name and he will do it.

So Jesus is the one who answers their prayers in chapter 14 verse 14 and God the Father is the one who answers in chapter 16 verse 23. And if you've got sharp eyes, you might have spotted the first sentence in chapter 16 verse 23 where Jesus says, in that day you will ask nothing of me.

And then you're going to say, well how does that square with chapter 14 verse 14 where Jesus encourages his friends to ask him for things? Well it's the context of chapter 16 verse 23 which helps us.

[ 25 : 58 ] Look back to verse 19. Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him, meaning that they wanted to ask him a question.

What do you mean by a little file this and a little file that? They're wanting to ask him there to clarify his teaching because they don't understand it. This is asking questions not asking for things and blessings.

So in verse 23 Jesus is saying in that day, in other words once the new order opens up after my death and resurrection and ascension and after you've received the Holy Spirit who will teach you everything that I can't teach you now, in that day you won't need to be asking me the kind of question that you were wanting to ask me back in verse 19 because the Spirit will be guiding you into all the truth and he will be teaching you all about me after I've gone back to the Father.

You won't need to ask your rather dumb questions at that stage because the Spirit will give you the answers. But you will need to be asking both me and my Father for blessings.

In fact, I'm commanding you to become praying people who regularly ask for things. And this, he says, is going to be a new departure for you. Look at the beginning of verse 24.

[ 27 : 21 ] Until now, you've asked nothing in my name. This is a new thing that you haven't yet learned to do. So, my friends, do it. Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full.

Now, the key thing for us to understand is this phrase in my name. Jesus uses the phrase in verse 23 and he uses it again in my name in verse 24.

And if you look back to chapter 14, it's there in verse 13 and it's there in verse 14 as well. And if you look at chapter 15, verse 16, there it is again towards the end of that verse, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

Now, this phrase in my name is a gracious, wise, kind, limitation given to us to prevent us from being foolish in our prayers.

It's not some kind of magical key into Aladdin's cave. It's not a kind of abracadabra, open, so to me. I have the key, therefore, O cave, yield to me your treasures.

[ 28 : 33 ] No, it's not that, not at all. It's quite the opposite really to that. It's a limitation on what we can ask for. It's a gracious means of preventing us from being foolish.

If I thought that this little phrase, in Jesus' name, was a kind of tag or slogan, which I only had to use in order to get anything that I particularly wanted, I might pray something like this.

O Lord, in Jesus' name, I ask you, in Jesus' name, that when I wake up tomorrow morning, I'll look outside my house and there'll be a Ferrari and a Rolls Royce with a chauffeur wearing a grey coat and cap and a lovely pinstripe suit with padded shoulders to make me look a bit more impressive.

And, oh, perhaps also for my wife and daughters, maybe three leopard skin coats, because, as you know, Father, we're English and these Scottish winters are so terribly cold. In Jesus' name, in Jesus' name, Amen.

Now, friends, I can't pray like that for luxuries and silly expensive things in the name of one who didn't have two brass farthings to rub together, who didn't even own a donkey, who probably only had one or two sets of clothes to wear.

[ 29 : 53 ] If I pray in his name, it means that I'm going to pray in line with everything that he values and approves. If I pray in his name, I'll be asking God for this kind of thing.

I'll be asking God to make me more like Jesus, because the Bible teaches that it is his will to conform us to the image of his son. I'll be asking God to make me willing to put the needs of others before my own.

I'll be asking him that I might grow in readiness to speak out, to speak the truth and the gospel. I'll be asking for other people to become believers. I'll be asking for my Christian friends to grow in usefulness and Christ likeness.

I'll be asking for the lives of other Christians and my life too, to be fruitful. I might even dare to ask that I should become more of a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, because to grow as a Christian is to become more like the Lord Jesus.

It's when we pray like that that we can trust and enjoy the promise of verse 23. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, I will give it to you.

[ 31 : 11 ] If it's in line with the best will of the Lord Jesus for us, we will receive it and we leave it to our wise Father to know what is best for us.

So, friends, let's dare to ask for things. Let's delight to ask for things in the name of Jesus, things which we know accord with his will and purpose.

Well, I think it's time for us to take the bales off and walk back to the pavilion. Time is pushing on, but let me encourage you, friends, to re-read this passage over the next few days. Remember that line in one of the old hymns which says, let your drooping hearts be glad.

It's a great line, isn't it? Let your drooping hearts be glad. I think this passage in John 16 is the sort of passage which will help our drooping hearts to be strengthened. It's deliberately intended by Jesus to fill the hearts of his followers, both then and now, with joy.

Fullness of joy in verse 24 as we pray in Jesus' name. And in verse 22, as we contemplate the new order that has resulted from the death and resurrection of Jesus, a joy so deeply embedded that no one can take it away.

[ 32 : 34 ] Let us pray. Amen. Our dear Lord Jesus, you are more gracious and kind than we have dared to imagine.



And we thank you so much for these words that you said to your friends on that awesome night and which John has recorded for us. We pray that you will write these things in our hearts and that as we think about them, you will help us to know this joy that no one can take from us.

And we pray that it will be a joy not simply to be kept in our own hearts, but something which, dear Lord, we are able to share with many others as we invite them and urge them and press them to come to you and find in you a gracious and wonderful saviour.

And we ask these things, dear Lord Jesus, in your name and for your sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.