

From Grief to Gladness

John 16:16-24

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Robert Ayoub

Camden Valley Baptist Church

www.cvbaptist.org.au

So, John chapter 16. Brother Steve read verses 1 through to 15. I'll preach from verses 16 through to 24. Before I read the Word of God, pray, and then share the Word of God: Just to give you a bit of context, the obvious context of the setting of this passage is the Last Supper, Jesus enjoying his final meal with the disciples.

I think a very important thing to understand, as many of you already know, which helps me, gives me a bit of a better understanding of some of the behavior of the disciples as we go through the Gospels, but it's important to note that their understanding of the coming Kingdom was very different from reality. The disciples, as we see portrayed throughout the Gospels over and over again, as was also common amongst all first-century Jews, was that they were anticipating a Messiah that would deliver them from the Romans. They were anticipating a conquering Messiah, a political Messiah, someone like King David that would establish an earthly Kingdom.

This is what they had their hearts set on, and this is what they believed was going to happen. And when they met Jesus and even when they started seeing Him do all His great miracles and heal the dead and command nature and all these things, in their head, they were still thinking that this is the Messiah that's going to deliver us from the Romans and establish this earthly, temporal, political Kingdom. One like King David, they had their heart set on this Kingdom.

Even to the point where Jesus started telling them, because Jesus knew all things, started telling them over and over again that He was actually going to die, that He's not going to set up in His first coming a political Kingdom. He's come as the suffering servant. He's come as the Messiah that would be crucified for our greatest need, which is not political or deliverance from political oppression, but our greatest need to be delivered from our sins. So He told them over and over again that He was going to die and rise again.

But they were so set on this political Kingdom, Peter even had the audacity to rebuke Him. Not only rebuke Him, even after He told them over and over again, not long after this passage in John 16, when the Romans came to

actually arrest Jesus, Peter pulls out his sword because in his head, there's no way He's going to be the suffering Messiah. He's going to be the one like King David. He's going to get rid of the Romans. What do you mean the Romans are coming to arrest Him? So they had their heart so set on this Kingdom.

When Jesus started telling them these things, they found it very hard to believe it. And in John 16, He knew that their world was going to come crashing down in a few hours' time as soon as He gets arrested. So He encourages them. John 16 is Jesus comforting them. Jesus Himself was comforting them. And then, of course, He promises the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who will descend after Jesus' ascension to be their Comforter. So He comforts them during this.

They were expecting this worldly Kingdom with worldly pomp, and that's why they were sort of fighting over title and position and so forth. But instead, in John 16, as Steve read for us, He tells them that they're going to be hated by the world. They're thinking they're going to rule the world, and they're going to have this political Kingdom where they're going to have prominent position and title and so forth. But instead, He tells them, no, no, you're going to be hated by the world, and you're going to be persecuted.

So they're in a really bad state during the Last Supper. They're very despondent, they're very discouraged, the world has come tumbling down. All their hopes and dreams of what they envisioned went down the drain. And then Jesus continues to comfort them.

I'll just pick it up at verse 16 and then just preach from 16 to 24. John chapter 16, verse 16, Jesus says, "A little while, and you will not see Me; again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." Then some of His disciples said among themselves, "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 go to the Father'?" They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'a little while'? We do not know what He is saying."

Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him and said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'a little while and you will not see Me, and again a little while and you will see Me'? Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. And you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore, you now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most

assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

This time, I invite you to bow your heads and close your eyes for a word of prayer. Heavenly Father, God, we are so thankful for who You are and for the work of Your hands. Thankful for Your gifts, but most of all for Your gift of salvation. We are so thankful for sending Your only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to come to this world, to become one of us, to be born of a virgin, to live that perfect life that we could not live. And we are eternally thankful for His sacrificial death and the power of His resurrection, to give us eternal life, to give us this abundant life, to bless us with this joy, this abundant joy that begins the day that You save us, that no one can take from us, that no person and no circumstance can rob us of. We're thankful for His resurrection, for His ascension, and for the Holy Spirit's descension. So thankful for sending our Comforter and our Teacher, the One that has given us spiritual life, the One that illuminates all Your truths unto us, the One that guides us, the One that leads us, the One that impresses Your will upon our hearts.

Let's pray this morning, Lord God, for this amazing fellowship, this amazing work that You have done, that You have started, Lord God, that You plan to do a great work. We're thankful for what You plan to do, Lord God. Thank You for Your servants, Josh and Natalie. So thankful, Lord God, for the way You've blessed Josh with a shepherd's heart. Thank You that this is a gift from You to the church. And thank You, Father God, that You have knit these precious souls, Your children, together to form this fellowship. Thank You for this great and mighty work; we stand in awe before You because of Your great work in this body of believers. Pray that You would strengthen Josh and Natalie and strengthen them from grace to grace, and that as You formally constitute this church towards the end of the year, that You would knit their hearts together more and more, that You would bless them and increase them, each of them in spiritual growth, that You would bless them as one body, Father God. And that You would increase them not only with spiritual growth but with more and more precious souls that You would save, Father God, that these precious souls would be saved and baptized and be added to this, Your church, this local body. Be honored and glorified, Father God, through all that You have done and all that You plan to do in the future. And bless us now, Father God. And just thank You so much for this joy that You have blessed us with, in all circumstances and all seasons of life. Let's pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, during His last supper, the very night before He's crucified, a few hours before He's arrested, He says to His disciples in John 16:16, "A little while and you will not see Me; and

again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." Jesus is saying that He's about to be arrested and crucified, and they won't see Him for three days. And then they'll see Him again after three days. And then they'll see Him in that period of 40 days between the resurrection and ascension, where He continued to appear to them and teach them the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. Notice with me the response of the disciples. And remember that they did not believe in the suffering Messiah at this point, and they did not want to believe it. Notice how they respond in verse 17, "Then some of His disciples said among themselves, '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 go to the Father'?" They said therefore, 'What is this that He says, 'A little while'?' We do not know what He is saying."

The reality is that they were so anticipating a temporal kingdom, they could not fathom that Jesus was going to be crucified by the Romans. They could not fathom that the Jewish leadership was going to hand Him over to be crucified by the Romans. Their heart was so set on the temporal kingdom that they had envisioned. They were ignorant and overwhelmed by the words spoken by Christ. The reality is they only heard what they wanted to hear. And this is very, very common to human nature. This is not just a problem with the disciples. This is a common problem with you and I. We only, by nature, hear what we want to hear. Of course, it's by God's grace that when He did appear to them, the Word of God tells us that He gave them understanding. He gave them comprehension to understand the Scriptures, to understand the death and resurrection. And it's only by God's grace that He gives us comprehension to remove our bias, to remove our prejudices, to understand and to comprehend the very words of God.

Notice with me Jesus' response, what He says in verse 19: "Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, 'Are you inquiring among yourselves?'" So they were inquiring amongst themselves. And Jesus didn't, humanly speaking, hear it because they were inquiring about themselves. And they said, "Oh, none of us want to ask Him." But yet Jesus still knew that they were inquiring amongst themselves. And this is one of many instances we see throughout the Gospel of John, the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, who knew all things. He was indeed 100% eternal God, very God who became a man. And being God, very God, He knew that they were inquiring amongst themselves. He says, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'?"

Notice with me verse 20: "Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament." They're not expecting weeping and lamenting; they're expecting this worldly joy of this kingdom. But He says, "No, no, the other way

around. You're going to weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. And you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy."

What Jesus is saying is, at His death and resurrection, which was not far away from this point onwards, Jesus is saying to His disciples that the world is going to be glad to kill Jesus, who was the light that exposed the darkness of this world. They're going to rejoice in His death, thinking that this is the end of Him. The world is going to rejoice, thinking that they can continue in sin and not be accountable. At the death of Christ, the world will be glad, and the disciples will grieve and mourn. But at the resurrection of Christ, the tides will turn instantly. At the resurrection of Christ, the disciples will go from grief to gladness.

In Mark 16:10, the Word of God there tells us that the disciples mourned and wept at the death of Christ. But in John 20:20, it says that the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord, when they saw the resurrected Jesus Christ. To comfort them through the imminent grief that they're about to experience during His last supper with them, He gives them an illustration in verse 21 of John 16. He says to them, "A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for the joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore, you now have sorrow. But I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice." And please notice with me this next phrase, "And your joy, no one will take from you."

After the resurrection of Christ, the disciples were filled with joy, a joy that no one and no circumstance could take away from them. Of course, this did not mean that all their problems ceased, and this did not mean that all of a sudden they had a rosy road. Actually, the opposite was true. Their persecution actually increased after the resurrection, but so did their joy.

In Acts 5, not long after the resurrection, the apostles went around telling everyone about the death and resurrection of Jesus, pleading with people to repent and believe the gospel. The Jewish authorities put them in prison, plotted to kill them, and threatened to kill them. The authorities decided to give the apostles a beating and just threatened them to stop preaching about Jesus. Of course, the unbelieving Jewish leadership were very politically savvy, and they realized it wasn't the opportune time to kill them. So they decided to just give them a beating, try to rob them of their joy because, in their thinking, it would just be a bit intimidating, rob them of their joy, and this will scare all their followers, and this will kill Christianity. So they thought, "We'll just intimidate them, give them a beating, and this should solve the problem."

But notice with me, if you keep your finger in John 16, we jump to Acts

5. This is after the apostles were given a good beating to try and intimidate them. Acts 5:40, I'll just pick it up from there. It says, "And when they (the Jewish authorities, the governing authorities) had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go," trying to scare them, rob them of their joy. But notice with me the response in verse 41, "So they (the apostles), they just received the flogging. They departed from the presence of the council," and then let's say this next word together after three: One, two, three, "Rejoicing!" So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And then notice with me, keep in mind the authorities gave them a beating just to keep them quiet, to scare them, rob them of their joy so they can tell it's not worth being a Christian anymore. But notice, not only were they rejoicing, but notice what happens in verse 42, "And daily in the temple and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." That's what Jesus promised them, that no one, nothing can rob you of your joy.

This teaches us, beloved brothers and sisters, that joy is not dependent on external circumstances. The world likes to tell us if you own this and have this and if you do this and if you achieve this, you'll find happiness. But the Word of God tells us that joy comes from God, and that joy that comes from God is a joy that no one can take from us and is not dependent on our external circumstances.

I just want to, as a way of application to post-ascension saints, and what I mean by post-ascension saints is Christians that lived after the ascension. Just as a way of application for us Christians living in the day and age that we're living in, I just want to encourage you with this: because of the death and resurrection of Jesus and the ascension, or should I say the descent of the Holy Spirit, we have this same joy of the Lord that no one and no circumstance can take from us. But of course, like the apostles, we'll still experience persecution. The Word of God tells us that all who will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution and that through much tribulation, we will enter into the kingdom of God. We'll still experience persecution, tribulations, sicknesses, trials, but nothing and no one can take away our joy.

Peter encourages post-ascension saints, you and I, with this. Notice what the Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 4:12: "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings."

Then, notice what he encourages them with: "But when His glory is re-

vealed..." He encourages them with the Second Coming. With the apostles, he's telling them that they're not going to see Jesus, but just in a few moments, in three days, they'll see Him again. So, he encourages them with the resurrection. With us, he encourages us with the Second Coming. We are encouraged with a double barrel: with both the death, resurrection, ascension, and descension, plus the coming or the Second Coming of Christ.

He encourages them with the Second Coming of Christ, and he says there that "you also may be glad with exceeding joy." And he encourages the Corinthians that their present sufferings are not to be compared with the coming glory that awaits them. Of course, on this side of eternity, we have joy that no one can take from us. We have eternal life now. We have an abundant life now. We have eternal joy now, but it's also mixed with trials, persecutions, and suffering. But at the Second Coming of Christ and when we enter into that eternal state, we have joy. Our salvation is complete, and we have that perfect eternal joy without the pain and suffering. He encourages us to look to the Second Coming.

Of course, the greatest encouragement comes from the greatest preacher that ever lived with the greatest sermon that was ever preached: Jesus. In Luke 6:22, He says, "Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake." I don't know about you, but I find that evil. I find that very painful when people cast your name as evil, when they falsely accuse you and character assassinate, and when they exclude you. I find it painful because it is painful. When the disciples were flogged and beaten, it was painful. When Paul was put in prison as an innocent man, it was painful mentally, emotionally, and even physically.

I'm not being superficial to say that, "Oh, they were so joyful they didn't experience the pain." No, they experienced the pain, and like the illustration that Jesus gave us of a woman giving birth, she does experience the pain. But the reason why she still goes through it is because her eyes are on the baby, the joy of having a baby. That's why a mom will have one and then have two. Like when I saw my wife have that first baby, I almost had a heart attack just seeing her go through the pain. As soon as she has the baby, she wants another one. Not because she didn't go through the pain, but because her eyes were on the prize.

And Christ is encouraging us with the fact of His death and resurrection, and the fact that the Holy Spirit is our Comforter, and the fact that He completes our salvation at the Second Coming. He's got our eyes, or instructs us to keep our eyes, on the Person of God.

It says in verse 23, "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy." Like, leap for

joy when you suffer persecution. When you suffer that pain, He's saying leap for joy, "for indeed your reward is great in heaven." He keeps our eyes on the eternal state, "for in like manner their fathers did to the prophets."

Beloved brothers and sisters, look with me again at verse 22: "In your joy, no one will take from you." We are going to experience setbacks, trials, pain, and suffering in the world that we live in, but no one can take away this joy.

I just want to give you an illustration from an early church martyr. In the year 202 or thereabouts, a lady by the name of Perpetua, some of you may be familiar with her, a remarkable martyr that lived or died in the third century around the year 202. She was arrested for being a Christian. She was a Roman citizen and she was of nobility. In the third-century Roman Empire, there was kind of no middle class. You were either of noble birth or you were a slave.

And she was from a very well-off family and well-off home, becomes a Christian, and from the data that we have, and a lot of the information we have about her is her own diary and then also eyewitnesses to the fact. And her diary is the oldest Christian literature ever written by a woman that we have preserved today. And you've got plenty of resources that you can even see online written about her life.

So she was arrested in the year 202. She had become a Christian and she was still being disciplined. She hadn't been baptized yet. She was very active in her Christian witness. So, she was arrested by the Roman authorities. Christianity was illegal, of course, in the year 202. She was arrested with a friend by the name of Felicity and three other men, three other Christians. So, five of them were arrested, put in prison, and like the Romans did with all martyrs, they gave them the option to just not even renounce their faith but more so just stop speaking about Jesus, stop being a nuisance because the Roman authorities saw it as being divisive. They didn't want multiple religions; they wanted control, similar to any dictator-type state. So, they gave them chance after chance after chance just to sort of be quiet, recant their faith, burn a bit of incense for the Roman gods, and everything would be sweet. But Perpetua was steadfast and she couldn't do it.

She did not compromise. She was a married woman and she was only 21 years of age. She had already given birth to a child that she was still nursing. So, she was put on death row and she was nursing her child in death row while she was awaiting trial. Her father, who was not converted and was a Roman, visited her on multiple occasions, pleading with her to recant the faith and put every guilt trip under the sun, saying to her, "What kind of Christianity is this that you're going to do this to your father? This is an unashamed culture that you're going to shame your father like you're

a noble woman. You're going to die with this illegal cult." On multiple occasions, he visited her, tried to plead with her. On another occasion, he grabbed her son and said to her, "What kind of Christianity is this that you're going to do this to your own son? That you're going to be killed and you're going to leave your son motherless?"

Of course, that evokes feelings in us like, "Oh, what would I do? My son, my..." And some might even think, "Oh, hang on a minute, isn't she being neglectful? Like, she's got a role as a mother." And I'll vehemently say that no, she's not being neglectful. If she was in prison for stealing or doing something wrong, then I'd say, yeah, she was being neglectful. But she's in prison as an innocent woman. And she took the words of the Lord Jesus Christ literally and seriously, whereby He said, "Anyone who loves father, mother, brother, sister more than Me is not worthy of Me." She didn't bring this thing on herself by her own negligence. She was just a faithful Christian who trusted in God and could not renounce. This was no negotiation. She could not renounce Christ. And she did it.

Eventually, they took her baby away from her. And of course, the saints of God, especially in the early centuries, were big on adoption. And that baby was taken care of by God through the children of God. Don't you worry about that. And don't you worry about that. That lady gave her child the greatest gift any parent can give to their children. And that is a near-perfect example of what it means to be a Christian.

As they approached the day of martyrdom, it was a big spectacle where they would take them out to the stadium and make a big event. Perpetua, Felicity, and her three other friends saw this day as a joyous occasion. You read her diary, her prison diaries, she speaks of the approaching day as if she's talking about a wedding. Like they're approaching their martyrdom like as if it's a joyous occasion. This is how she wrote as a 21-year-old, like they're approaching this day like as if it's a wedding.

Her friend Felicity was pregnant, and the Romans would not execute a pregnant woman. So, the Romans planned on executing the other four and leaving Felicity until after she had the baby, then executing her. Felicity didn't want to miss out on this big celebration with her friends, so she prayed that she would have the baby earlier so she could be a martyr together with her friends. God answered her prayer. She had the baby at eight months rather than the scheduled nine months, nursed the baby as much as she could, and then handed it over to the saints to raise because she would not compromise the faith.

Here's my point regarding the joy that nothing can rob us of: On the day of their martyrdom, they walked out to the arena, and it was said by eyewitness-

nesses that they were trembling, not of fear but of joy. They were so filled with joy that they were about to be in the presence of Almighty God. This is overwhelming, astonishing, but this is the power of the Holy Spirit. This is the power of the joy that God gives us.

It is even recorded by eyewitnesses that when they sent out the beast to attack Perpetua, the beast attacked her a few times. She started gushing blood from her stomach, and as she was wrestling with the beast, her hair got out of place. It is said that she had actually done up her hair as if she was preparing to go to a wedding because she did not want to appear to be grieving when it was actually a joyous occasion.

Just keep in mind this honor-shame culture, which is still active in honor-shame cultures today. When we have a funeral, we wear black, we don't put makeup on, we mourn in sackcloth and ashes, so to speak. But when we go to a wedding, we do our hair up and wear nice clothes. So, when you go to a funeral, you're grieving; you don't do your hair up. That was her culture. She purposely made sure she did up her hair for the special occasion. And when her hair got messed up, she kept brushing her hair because it was a joyous occasion for her.

As the beast came to attack her, it took a bit too long, and the Romans ordered a soldier to go chop off her head so it wouldn't linger on too long. This Roman soldier saw this petite 21-year-old and was a bit nervous to actually slice her throat. So, Perpetua grabbed the sword and guided him to her throat. I know that this gives us mixed emotions and a lot of questions, but whether you think they were mad or not, the point is they were so filled with joy that not even martyrdom, not even the pain they still experienced from being attacked by wild beasts while they were still alive, could take their joy away. Their eyes and their affection were on the things above and not on the things of this earth.

I guess the only way I could apply this to us is this: I believe that martyrdom is a gift of God. It's a privilege that He gives to some and not all. It's not something that we seek after. We value life as Christians. Even Jesus, when it wasn't His time, evaded the persecutors, and the same thing with the apostles. But when it's out of our hands and when we're being faithful to Christ, and it comes our way, we are faithful to the point of death. But not all of us get that privilege. I'm thankful to God that we're living in a time of peace, prosperity, and in a wonderful country. I do not glorify martyrdom in such a way that we go seek it, but I still look at those people who have gone before us and had no choice. Christianity was illegal in their day, and they were going to be faithful regardless.

I apply this to us, and I would apply it to myself. What more can we do

when we go through trials, sicknesses, or opposition that we may experience? By the power of God's grace and the power of God's Holy Spirit, are we filled with the joy of the Lord?

Jesus goes on to say in John 16:23, "In that day you ask me nothing." In the direct context of John 16, "in that day" is a reference to the resurrection, ascension, and descension of the Holy Spirit and the days that would follow. It is in that day, He says, that you ask me nothing.

Now, specifically, He is talking about their questions about the day of resurrection, resurrection, and the kingdom of the Messiah. They will stop questioning Him and stop constantly questioning Him, even to the point where Peter rebuked Jesus. In other words, the penny would drop in that day after the ascension of the Holy Spirit. He says that He would lead them into all truth, the whole body of truth.

Notice with me in Acts 1:3, even before the ascension of the Holy Spirit, it says, "To whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God." So He kept teaching them the things of the kingdom of God, that it is not what they envisioned. And He gave them the whole body of truth that is recorded for us in Scripture today.

In Acts 1:4-5, He says, "And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'" Of course, He is promising them the coming of the Holy Spirit, who would lead them to all truth and give them an understanding of the complete body of truth, whereby they will no longer question the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.

After the resurrection, ascension, and descension of the Holy Spirit, they never doubted the death and resurrection of Jesus again. To the contrary, they preached it to the point of death.

Of course, the apostles asking Him nothing, in that their questions regarding the death and resurrection of the Messiah will be answered, does not mean that they will never ask anything in prayer or that they will become all-knowing. In John 16:23, He says, "In that day you ask me nothing." Remember, they are questioning what He just said to them about the death and resurrection of Jesus, saying this is going to be covered. They will stop questioning Him in that sense.

No more doubting questions that stem from unbelief, from their biased prejudices, and wanting what they wanted regarding the kingdom that they had envisioned. But He goes on to say, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give it to you." Now, they will no longer be asking according to their own will, according to the kingdom they had envisioned. They will be asking according to His will, in His name.

Asking in Jesus' name is not like a magic formula where we ask for whatever we want, like a Lamborghini, and expect Jesus to give it to us because He said He would give us anything we ask in His name. It is not like a magic formula in that sense. When we see these other statements throughout Scripture and even this verse on its own, asking the Father in Jesus' name is asking according to the will of Jesus, according to the purpose of Jesus. It is praying in such a way where we say, "Not my will, but Thy will be done."

In John 16:24, He goes on to say, "Until now you have asked nothing in My name," meaning that up until this point, they had not prayed through the one and only mediator. But at the death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus, and the descent of the Holy Spirit, they will pray to the Father through the one and only mediator, Jesus Christ.

What is also true, of course, is that they were constantly praying according to their own will because they were worldly, wanting a worldly kingdom. But after the resurrection, ascension, and descent of the Holy Spirit, they no longer desired and no longer prayed for a rosy road on this earth but began to pray for God's glory. They began to pray for the will of God at all costs.

Notice with me also in the book of Acts, after being threatened with death, notice with me what they prayed for in Acts 4. This is after they were threatened with death. Acts 4:29 says, "This is how they responded to persecution."

Modern-day Christianity responds to hardship, and typically that is not all Christians or churches, but typically, sort of modern-day Christianity is so filled with this prosperity gospel. Even sort of non-prosperity gospel churches, like we're all influenced by it to some degree because it's appealing to our flesh. We sort of pray, "Oh Lord, take away this sickness and take away this and take away that."

But notice what they pray for here in Acts 4:29, "And now, Lord, look on their threats and grant Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word by stretching out Your hand to heal, that signs and wonders be done through Your name, through the name of Your holy servant Jesus."

And yes, they did pray for signs and wonders, and we ought to pray for

that because God is a God and a miraculous God that still does great and mighty things to this day. But we pray for His glory, not for selfish purposes. We pray for it according to the will of God.

And notice in verse 31, the gist of their prayer: "And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit." Notice how their prayer was answered, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

Again, to pray according to the will of God for the increase of His kingdom, the increase of His gospel. John 16:24 goes on to say, "Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."

Beloved brothers and sisters, there's no greater joy when we pray and receive according to the will of Jesus. Even when I was chatting to Josh, Steve, Vicky, and Eric earlier on, and we were talking about the joy of people coming into the house of God, of God doing a great work amongst these people. And there's great joy as we were talking about this great work of God.

There's no greater joy when we pray for these things according to the will of God. There's no greater joy when we pray for these things according to the will of God, and He answers our prayers.

The apostle Paul was in prison in Acts 16 as an innocent man. And yet he bursts out with hymns of joy. And the apostle Paul had more joy in that prison, even though he was full of physical pain, but he had more joy in that prison than the guards that were guarding him. He had more joy in that prison than the authorities that were living in luxury. He had more joy than they had.

They probably had less physical pain, but they couldn't sleep like the way the apostle Paul could sleep. He had more joy because joy is not dependent upon external circumstances. Our joy comes because of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, because of the Holy Spirit who is our Comforter.

This time, let us bow our heads for a word of prayer.