

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN16C_Jesus Explains His Departure)

John 16:16-33

A “little while” – As Jesus continues to prepare His disciples for His departure, He uses some interesting phraseology and language in these verses. From the disciples’ point of view, it’s almost as if Jesus is speaking in riddles.

16 “A little while, and you will no longer behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.” 17 *Some* of His disciples therefore said to one another, “What is this thing He is telling us, ‘A little while, and you will not behold Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’?” 18 And so they were saying, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is talking about.” (Jn 16:16-18)

The phrases “a little while” and “you will [not] see Me” have been interpreted in various ways. After Jesus’ resurrection, He spent forty days in His pre-ascension and post-resurrection body making appearances and ministering to His disciples. In the forty days between Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, there are approximately ten or eleven appearances of Jesus that are recorded (e.g. Acts 1:1-10 cf. Matt 28:9-10, 16-20; Lu 24:13-49; Jn 20:14-29; 21:1-19). Was Jesus referring to 1) the coming of the Holy Spirit (a figurative interpretation); 2) His 2nd Advent (an interpretation consistent with the kingdom focus of His earthly ministry); or 3) to the brief forty day ministry between His resurrection and His ascension?¹ An analysis of some of the various interpretations follows:

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.		
Interpretation Source	Interpretation Paraphrased	Comments
Blum in The Bible Knowledge Commentary ²	A reference to the forty day ministry between Jesus’ resurrection and Ascension.	A good interpretation and certainly consistent with the context and with what actually happened. However, it is a little confusing because it associates the first “little while” with the resurrection when Jesus states that “you will not see Me.” Yet, they did see the resurrected Jesus. This problem might be resolved by the adherents stating that the first “little while” is a reference to the period leading up to His

¹ Edwin A. Blum, “John,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary – New Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 329.

² Ibid.

		death.
J. Dwight Pentecost ³	The first “little while” was a reference to His death and the second “little while” was a reference to His resurrection.	This interpretation makes a lot of sense. It fits not only the context, but reconciles nicely with what transpired.
Charles Baker ⁴	Interprets the “little while” to be a reference to the period between His death and resurrection. He also mentions that two different Greek words are used for seeing in this passage and states that when they see Him again in His glorified state, they will see Him in His true nature.	Consistent with Pentecost.
Darrell L. Bock ⁵	Interprets the first “little while” as a reference to Jesus’ death and the second “little while” as a reference to Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances.	Essentially, the same as Pentecost and Baker, except with emphasis upon Jesus’ post-resurrection ministry versus the resurrection event itself.
Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher ⁶	The two uses of the phrase “little while” are references to His time in the tomb between His death and resurrection. Explains this interpretation with reference to Jesus’ statement that He goes to His Father. This serves to relate the disciples to what Jesus had already said – that He is going to the Father and that as a result, they would receive the Holy Spirit.	Same as Pentecost and Baker. Only interpretation to incorporate an explanation of the phrase “I go to the Father.”
Alfred Edersheim ⁷	The first “little while” refers to His death. Doesn’t state explicitly, but it is implied in his interpretation and comments on the passage that the second “little while” is a reference to the resurrection.	Essentially the same as Pentecost, Baker, Bock and Radmacher.

I tend to favor the interpretation that Jesus was referring to His death and subsequent resurrection in verse 16. Not only does this make the most sense, but it has the support of a number of well-regarded and published theologians.⁸ What this means to us is that the disciples really didn’t comprehend the events that were unfolding before their eyes and about which Jesus

³ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 446.

⁴ Charles F. Baker, *Understanding the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1978), 261-2.

⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 514-5.

⁶ Gary Derickson and Earl Radmacher, *The Disciplemaker, What Matters Most to Jesus* (Salem, Oregon: Charis Press, 2001), 235.

⁷ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 7th Printing (United States: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 838.

⁸ In addition to the theologians and publications mentioned already, I would add Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1932, 1960), Volume V, 269 in which he states that the first “little while” is a reference to the “brief period now till Christ’s death as in 7:33; 13:33; 14:19.” Robertson interprets the second “little while” as a reference to “the period between the death and the resurrection of Jesus.” This interpretation seems to fit best, especially when the two different Greek words for “seeing” are in view.

had prophesied for so long. This interpretation is also supported by Jesus' choice of words for beholding or seeing in verse 16.

John makes an interesting choice of two Greek words for seeing or sight in verse 16. In the first instance translated "behold," John uses the Greek word *theo reo* which means to "be a spectator, look at, observe, perceive, see (w. physical eyes)."⁹ In the second instance in verse 16, John uses the Greek word *horao* which means to "see, catch sight of, notice."¹⁰ It is a word that carries the notion of seeing a person that becomes visible in a supernatural manner such as the vision of Christ that Paul had in 1 Corinthians 9:1.¹¹ This combination of Greek words supports the interpretation that Jesus was referring to His death followed by His resurrection in verse 16.

In verse 18, John uses the imperfect tense of the Greek word *lego* which has a basic meaning of to "utter in words" or to "say."¹² The imperfect tense denotes that the disciples were continually speaking among themselves, so we get the picture that there was a considerable amount of discussion that took place.

Jesus comforts His disciples – In these verses, Jesus attempts to comfort His disciples with predictions of joy after their impending sorrow and loss over His departure.

19 Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, "Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, 'A little while, and you will not behold Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me'?" 20 "Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned to joy. 21 "Whenever a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she remembers the anguish no more, for joy that a child has been born into the world. 22 "Therefore you too now have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you. (Jn 16:19-22)

Of course, the world (led by the unbelieving, religious Jewish leadership) rejoices at Jesus' death because they believe that they have put a blasphemer to death in accordance with God's wishes (the Mosaic Law).

1 So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. 2 Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." 3 And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This man blasphemes!" (Matt 9:1-3)

62 And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do you answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" 63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" 64 Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." 65 Then the high priests tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! 66 What

⁹ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1957, 1979), 360.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 577.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 468.

do you think?" They answered and said, "He is deserving of death." (Matt 26:62-66)

30 "I and My Father are one." 31 Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. 32 Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" 33 The Jews answered him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a man, make Yourself God." (Jn 10:30-33)

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. (1 Pe 4:14)

Jesus' analysis that is reflected in the phrase in verse 20 – "the world will rejoice" – is more profound than one might first understand. The "world," as we've come to understand, can be defined as the composite of all anthropocentric systems of thought to include "religious" thought that focuses upon what man can do to satisfy "God" or "god."

The vast majority of the earth's population that lived during the period of our Lord's earthly ministry and death gave no thought to Who He was and did not even know about Him. So, the vast majority of the earth's population for whom He died did not "rejoice" at Jesus' death since they did not know or even care that He had blasphemed the God of a small nation of people called Israel. Those who rejoiced the most at Jesus' death were the Satan inspired religious leadership of Israel who thought they were doing God's will. This is Satan's greatest deception – those who consider themselves His own, but who are religious. The fact that it was the "religious" leadership of Israel, God's select and chosen nation and race, who were considered to be the "world" that "rejoiced" at His death is what makes this passage so profound. The rest of the population of the earth at that time that was a part of Satan's cosmic system of thought and influence, but who was largely ignorant of what was transpiring in Israel, did not necessarily "rejoice" at Jesus' death since they had no regard for the nation of Israel or her God or His Law.

This fact raises an interesting question or thought. Who do you think would rejoice the most if Jesus were alive and to be crucified today? As the world's population becomes more enmeshed in what we've termed "cosmic #2" thought and moves closer toward that period of human history known as the Tribulation, who do you think will rejoice the most when Christ's own are put to death for opposing "religion?"

An anecdotal comment – Recently, the movie "Luther" was released. It is a movie about the 16th Century Reformation leader – Martin Luther. One thing about Luther that anyone has to admire and respect, regardless of agreement or disagreement with his teachings and thought, is the man's utter devotion to Christ and the Truth as he understood it in the face of incredible opposition to the corrupt, powerful, evil oppression of the Truth that was foisted upon the ignorant masses by the Roman Catholic Church. The only instance in history where organized religion exceeded the Roman Catholic Church of Luther's day in terms of insidious oppression was the organized and politically entrenched religious establishment in Israel prior to, during, and after our Lord's earthly ministry. The Roman Catholic Church that opposed Luther and other reformers is just a later example in history of the "world" of whom Jesus spoke in verse 20.

In verses 21-22, Jesus provides an illustration of pain replaced by joy to provide comfort to His disciples because of the pain that will result from the confusion and disappointment in their mind once Jesus is crucified. The pain of childbirth is followed by the joy of a new life just as the sorrow of the disciples will be replaced by the joy of the resurrection of Jesus after His death. "Joy" in the believer's experience is always linked to the fact of Jesus' resurrection (Lu 24:33-52 cf. Ro 6:9-10; He 7:24-25).

Jesus teaches His disciples a principle of prayer – Until this point in Jesus’ ministry and life, the disciples came straight to Him with any of their needs and talked to Him in person. However, Jesus predicts a time to come when they would need to ask the Father directly in His name.

23 “And in that day you will ask Me no question. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name. 24 “Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be made full. (Jn 16:23-24)

It is important to note that Jesus states that the day is coming (i.e. after His death) in which the disciples are not to ask Jesus anything directly. Rather, they are to ask the Father in the name of Jesus (verse 23). While He had been with them, they could come to Him and ask of Him; however, going forward, they would ask the Father in the name of or on behalf of Christ. Of course, Jesus was not referring to simply ending all prayers with the phrase “in Jesus’ name.” The believer can pray in accordance with God’s will without ever saying that phrase at the end of the prayer. Jesus was referring to the mental attitude and the spiritual reality that should be associated with the prayers of all believers after His death – acknowledgment that the only way to the Father was through Him.

This passage also connects the believer’s experience of “joy” to answered prayer. Of course, for prayer to be answered, it needs to be prayed with an attitude and approach to the Father that acknowledges Jesus’ work (v. 23). The result of answered prayer is joy in the life of the believer as the believer incorporates into his/her experience the undeserved benefits associated with the work of Christ – e.g. access to and love from the omnipotent God of the universe and eternity.

Had Jesus not spoken plainly about the Father ‘til now? – Jesus states that He had spoken in figurative terms to the disciples ‘til now and predicts that soon He would speak in plain terms about the Father.

25 “These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will speak no more to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. (Jn 16:25)

This is an interesting statement by Jesus for it implies that He had not spoken plainly about the Father yet. In a sense, that is true. Look at the following verses with emphasis upon the underlined phrases.

16 And He said to those who sold doves, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!” 17 Then His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.” 18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?” 19 Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” 20 Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said. (Jn 2:16-22)

57 As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. 58 This is the bread which came down from heaven – not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.” 59 These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum. 60 Therefore many

of His disciples, when they heard this, said, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?” (Jn 6:57-59)

7 Jesus answered and said to him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.” (Jn 13:7)

9 Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? 10 Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. 11 Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves. (Jn 14:9-11)

In Jesus’ post-resurrection teaching, He spoke plainly about the Father through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to them.

25 These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (Jn 14:25-26)

Jesus teaches His disciples the basis of the Father’s love for them – In verses 26-30, Jesus provides His disciples further instruction regarding the mechanics of the interaction between the Father, Jesus and their prayers.

26 “In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request the Father on your behalf; 27 for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father. 28 “I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again, and going to the Father.” 29 His disciples *said, “Lo, now You are speaking plainly, and are not using a figure of speech. 30 “Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God.”

In these verses, the disciples are assured that they are loved by the Father because of the Father’s love for the Son and those who belong to Him. Jesus would no longer need to pray on their behalf in the role of an earthly priest, but He will intercede for them as a heavenly priest (see Ro 8:34 cf. 1 Jn 2:1-2). Jesus’ point was to encourage His disciples with the assurance that they were about to enter an even more personal relationship with the Father because of His death. Only children have this type of access to the Father (see Ro 5:2).

Verse 28 is virtually a summary statement of Jesus’ mission in the world – came from the Father to the world and now leaves the world to return to the Father. In this verse, Jesus alludes to His incarnation, His humiliation, and His resurrection, Ascension and exaltation.¹³

Jesus responds to the disciples profession of belief – In these final verses of chapter 16, Jesus responds to His disciples’ statement of belief with a prediction of the hardship and testing that they would face.

31 Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? 32 “Behold, an hour is coming, and has *already* come, for you to be scattered, each to his own *home*, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. 33 “These

¹³ Blum, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 330.

things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

Jesus predicts that His disciples would be scattered after His death. Jesus knew this to be true based upon the prediction in Zechariah 13:7 – “strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; then I will turn My hand against the little ones.” This passage in Zechariah has long been understood as Messianic and that argument is bolstered by Jesus’ use of it in reference to Himself here in the closing verses of John 16.

Jesus took comfort knowing that the Father was with Him (Ps 23:4; 73:25-26). He was never alone because the Father was always with him with the exception of the three hour period on the Cross when He paid for the sins of the world (Matt 27:46). Jesus overcame the world (Satan’s kingdom) just as the “strongman” who overcame the owner of the house in Jesus’ parable of the strongman in Matthew 12:25-29.

When Jesus refers to the “tribulation” that His disciples were to face in His prediction, He is not necessarily referring to the seven-year period of the Tribulation even though it was still a possibility at the time that Jesus uttered these words that the disciples would live into the Tribulation had events played out differently in that period of months and even years following Jesus’ death, resurrection and Ascension. (Post-Tribulationists base their argument upon this verse in part). Rather, Jesus was referring to tribulation as in testing.