

John 16:16–22

1 Introduction

As we come to John 16 this morning, let us remember that chapters 13–17 are a single section encompassing the conversation between Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper. Jesus' love for his followers is made clear at the very beginning of this section.

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.¹

With those words, Jesus begins preparing his innermost circle for the traumatic events that will follow in the next few hours.

Please turn to John 16:16 with me. This morning we will concentrate on Jesus' analogy in verse 21.

1. First, we will examine the analogy itself.
2. Then we will apply that analogy to Jesus' circumstance in this text.
3. Thirdly, we will apply the analogy to us all.
4. Finally, I would like to bear witness to a personal application of this analogy.

2 Analogy Analyzed

The analogy itself is straightforward: childbirth.

New life is conceived, as it were, in a mysterious way. The truth of that new life is hidden for a short time. Then slowly there is evidence of

¹John 13:1.

new life. Some small changes began to take place, then larger changes. Eventually birth pangs begin and they cannot be halted. It's unpleasant, frightening, occasionally even dangerous!

Then, a child is born, hopefully safely and healthily, and it seems as if the previous hours, days, weeks, and months of hardship, sleeplessness, discomfort, and finally pain are all forgotten in a moment when the child is born.

That's the analogy itself.

3 Analogy Applied: Jesus

What is the purpose of Jesus' analogy? Go back to verse 16.

A little while, and you will see me no longer; and again a little while, and you will see me.

Jesus is going to be taken away from them forcefully. Jesus is the framework of their world, the leader of their little movement, and the power behind all their hopes and expectations. And yet, from the beginning of chapter 13, he repeatedly makes it clear that the time is coming when they will be on their own.

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me.

I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me, and none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.²

²John 13:33, 14:18-19, 16:4-7, among others.

It's hard for us to imagine how frightening these words must have been for the 11 remaining disciples in that room. "Wait, you're going somewhere? And we can't come with you? And you say, 'don't worry!'"

As we can see from verse 17, the disciples cannot fathom what he is saying. Or maybe they don't want to! It's a frightening thought that he always be around.

As we know with hindsight, Jesus is referring to what will be at occurring in the coming hours. How true his words will prove to be. Jesus will taken away. And the well-intentioned disciples are going to be thrown into a chaos of panic.

- Peter will deny him three times.
- Mark, when he is grabbed by a guard, throws off his tunic and runs away naked.³
- All of the disciples are scattered and Jesus is left alone.

These are horrendous moments. This great revolutionary moment led by Jesus of Nazareth suddenly disintegrates. His closest disciples are scattered. And he dies. What a victory for the leaders and for Satan himself!

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful . . .

But we know how the rest of the story goes, don't we? The hours of waiting. The women at the tomb. The guards are frightened away. The stone is rolled away. The uncertainty. The rushing around. Mary Magdalene meets the gardener; except he's not the gardener. And all the rest.

The analogy of a woman giving birth fits perfectly!

New life is conceived, as it were, in a mysterious way, literally in the incarnation. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men."⁴ With the exception of a few recorded instances (such as the mother of Jesus

³Mark 14:51-52.

⁴John 1:4.

listening to the strange words of Simeon and Anna and Jesus being found by his parents in the temple), that life is hidden from the world for 30 years.

However, there is slowly evidence of this new sort of life. Some small changes began to take place — Jesus changing water into wine, his first miracle. Then larger changes, reading from the prophet Isaiah and say that Isaiah’s words were being fulfilled in himself!⁵

There are moments of burgeoning life, larger evidences of Jesus’ origins and purpose. His baptism by John, for example.⁶ There are some great moments of success. Gathering his disciples must have been interesting, especially when they left their nets behind without question!⁷

But inevitably the birth pangs begin and they cannot be halted. They are unpleasant, frightening, even dangerous! He has a direct run-in with Satan in the wilderness. He initiated the running fight he has with the Sadducees and the Pharisees.⁸ Ultimately, those pains and labors come to a culmination in his crucifixion.

Then a child is born, or in Jesus’ case, reborn. Death is killed in his death. Unlike Lazarus, Jesus would never die again.

Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.⁹

All of the previous hardships, humiliations, and shame are thrown aside. And the disciples saw him again, just as Jesus had said. They saw him in his resurrected glory. Didn’t Jesus say, “You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy”?

4 Analogy Applied: Generally

The analogy doesn’t stop here though. It isn’t supposed to. The analogy in John 16 reminds me of another text of Scripture in the same book quite a bit earlier. Do you remember Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus?

⁵Luke 4:17–21.

⁶Matthew 3:13 ff.

⁷Matthew 4:19 ff.

⁸Matthew 3:7.

⁹Hebrews 12:2.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.¹⁰

In the section of Scripture we're looking at, the theme of being with Jesus, knowing him, seeing him, and being received by him is coupled with keeping his commandments occurs numerous times.

'Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.' Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, 'Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?' Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'¹¹

What does this have to do with childbirth? In us, the pain of childbirth can be likened to the labor of our obedience to Christ. Being born of God costs something. It was pain for the Lord Jesus, who died to pay the penalty of our sins. And it's pain for us to be corrected for those same sins.

Think of Peter's first meeting with Jesus after the resurrection.

Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."

He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third

¹⁰John 3:3.

¹¹John 14:19–23, among others.

time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”¹²

Of course Peter was grieved! He knew what the Lord was doing. Can you imagine Peter’s embarrassment, shame, sorrow, even fear! And yet the Lord invites him back in to the inner circle when he says, “feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep”. Don’t you think that was painful?

Likewise Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus. Likewise the two disciples on the road to Emmaus when Jesus met them right after his resurrection. How embarrassing that must have been! Likewise Thomas’ resolute denial of the resurrection in the face of the testimony of his closest friends — just before Jesus shows up in their midst to confront him.

And what about you? As your faith was conceived, you may not have even been aware of what was happening. Some of you point back to a moment when John Guest spoke to this congregation. For others it was the testimony of your parents. It was an experience in college. It was a moment of despair. It was loneliness. It was an intellectual choice. Whatever the case may have been something was conceived and you.

But because of our natures, that new life is never “one and done”. We could almost say that the living faith of a disciple of Christ is born over and over again. Each time, the new growth, the new realization, the deeper faith, the renewed commitment often comes out of pain, hardship, sorrow, helplessness, maybe even utter hopelessness and helplessness.

Nevertheless, many of us can bear witness to the fact that when we continued in following Christ it gave birth to something better, deeper, and richer. Out of the pain of sin and distance from God, we saw Jesus more clearly.

5 Analogy Applied: Jesse

Let me share an illustration of what I’m talking about.

A little over two years ago, our grandson Jesse was born. We knew before he was born that things were not entirely normal. About midway through gestation he was diagnosed with a very rare syndrome called

¹²John 21:15–17.

Pallister–Hall. The condition is so rare that medicine can't estimate its frequency in the population. Our reading suggested that "although the signs and symptoms of this disorder vary from mild to severe, only a small percentage of affected people have serious complications".¹³

Lynn and I prayed as mightily as we knew how. We prayed for a wrong diagnosis. We prayed for mild complications. We prayed for miracles. We went back to mild complications or a wrong again.

Then Jesse was born—with everything and then some.

He has gone through 11 surgeries; five of which may have been unnecessary. He was recently discovered to have another problem called Hirschsprung disease, which only occurs in 1 of 5000 live births and is *never* associated with Pallister-Hall syndrome, except for three cases in the world. Oh wait, now four.

Aaron and Miriam's family have gone through incredible hardships. They have spent many consecutive weeks in the hospital. Their children have been under the care of grandparents and others during absences. Aaron's efforts to chase the career of his dreams with the FBI finally came to fruition: a few weeks after Jesse was born! Aaron had to turn it down. I have talked to Jesse's parents numerous times, when there was reasonable belief that Jesse would not live more than a few more days. There have been tears, exhaustion, doubts, the whole gamut of emotions.

I confess to you that when Jesse was born with all the complications, it threw me for a loop. At the time, my diagnosis of cancer was relatively fresh and surgery loomed in front of me. We were in the process of losing our house, because of a painfully broken relationship with a long-time friend. Our finances were threatened by the circumstances surrounding that matter. And it was just too much to absorb.

Now here is where I'm supposed to tell you how God appeared in a vision, or miraculously relieved our sorrow and pain, how God answered prayer and Jesse became all better. But you know that's not true.

The analogy of childbirth is still in process in our souls and will be for a long time. Yet, out of the pain, we have learned to see Jesus. Many times, he didn't seem to be there. But we have kept his commandments. We have followed Jesus through the valley of the shadow of death. And

¹³en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pallister%E2%80%93Hall_syndrome.

our faith has deepened.

There are certainly bright aspects in all this. Jesse is a true joy. He has a delightful, even sophisticated, sense of humor. The faith of Aaron and Miriam and Jesse's three siblings is richer for this circumstance.

But the process continues. New life is constantly being born out of this pain and difficulty. There are times when we weep, lament, and sorrow. And there are times of real joy and thankfulness as well.

I do not share this story because my hardship is worse than yours, my sorrow deeper than yours, or my problems more insurmountable than yours. I don't find that comparing my pain with others relieves my own.

Instead, I bear witness to the Lord's work, that out of pain and labor, when Jesus appears to be absent, if we continue to follow him, keep his commandments, and love one another, that he will show up, by the power of his Holy Spirit.