

A summary of John 16:16-33

- 1. Christ grows in the believers corporately (vv.16-24)** Jesus compares the disciples to a woman giving birth to a baby (v.21). Before she delivers, she has pain and sorrow, but once she delivers, her anguish is replaced by joy because her baby has been born. This is an illustration of the process that Jesus went through, and also the process that we, as His believers, go through. During His whole life, He denied Himself, to carry out the Father's will and purpose. Satan tried to tempt Him, the world hated Him, and even His disciples did not understand or know Him. This was surely a sorrow and an anguish to Jesus. Yet He continued steadfastly to the cross, to die for us. On the third day, He resurrected from the dead. His resurrection was a birth. In His resurrection, all His believers were "born" to become His body. As the Spirit of reality (the Comforter or the Consoler), He now lives in each believer. We also go through the same process. Romans 6:5 says that "if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." This indicates that to be united with Christ, we must die to ourselves, even as He did. If we die to ourselves, we will be united with Him in resurrection. If death and resurrection are our living, Christ will grow in us. The "woman" in v.21 is corporate, not individual, that is, consisting of every Christian past, present and future. More practically, it should refer to the brothers and sisters around us. For example, a new brother or sister comes to the church gatherings and sees us, and sees the Christ in us (though they may not yet know that it is Christ in us). They are joyful. Christ in them will grow a little bit. Christ will also grow in us a little bit. This is fruit (the growth of Christ in us and in others). In Galatians 4:19, Paul wrote that he was again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ was formed in the Galatian believers. This shows that the real child is the Christ that is produced and grows in each brother and sister. Growth is not easy. The attraction of the world is very strong (see the summary on John 15:18-27). That is why we have anguish and sorrow. Yet we may grow a little bit. We come to the bread-breaking meeting. We praise the Lord, and we grow a little. We participate in the corporate prayers, and we may even join the pursuing of the Bible (even for a little bit). We go out to preach the gospel, or we accompany someone to care for his or her human and spiritual needs. Christ is formed a little bit more in us. We fight to come Sunday morning, even when it is snowing or the roads are icy (of course now it is almost summer, so we really have no excuse not to come!). This is how our sorrow may be turned into joy. Through all this process, Christ may grow more in us. How much He grows in each one is relative, and really not our concern, but God's concern. May we continue to go through the same process that Jesus went through.
- 2. Sorrow (caused by physical seeing) turned into joy (caused by spiritual seeing): vv.17-19.** Two Greek words for the verb "see" are used in v.17. The first "see" is the Greek word *theoreo* which signifies to see as a spectator, though with the thought of intensive acknowledgement. In this context, the disciples would not see Jesus because He was leaving them to go to the cross. The second "see" is the Greek word *optanomai* which signifies to gaze, with wide open eyes, as at something remarkable. In this context, the disciples would see Jesus because He would return to them in resurrection. What does this mean to us? For example, on Sunday morning, we may go to the church gathering. We see the brothers and sisters, but we may not see this brother or that sister. Or we may see brothers and sisters coming in late. This may cause us to have a little sorrow. This kind of seeing is physical. Yes, we see people, but we may not see the Christ in them. In a sense, Jesus has left us. We have not yet gone with Him to the cross (in our experience). We may look at people and judge or despise them, or put laws or obligations on them. No one meets our standard. We may be seeking a so-called "spiritual" level of life among the saints, and we may be sorrowful because no one seems to fulfill our expectations. However, when we see the saints, and we feel joyful, we may see the Christ in them. This may be the second "see," which is a spiritual seeing. This seeing is in resurrection. What does resurrection mean? It means that we are joyful. We love to be with the saints. We will open our mouth to praise the Lord, even if others are not doing so. We will be the first to pray, even if no one else prays. We will participate in the financial grace offering, regardless of who else is doing so.

There is no condemnation of others. We are aware of the condition of the church (this may cause us sorrow). But we continue to exercise and live in death and resurrection. This kind of seeing is the result of seeking the Lord. It is not automatic. If our heart is not seeking the Lord, we will not see Christ, even though Christ desires us to see Him.

- 3. Why does Jesus speak in parables? (vv.25-33).** In v.25, Jesus told His disciples that He said these things in parables, but that an hour was coming when He would no longer do so, but would speak plainly about the Father. What are parables, and to whom and why did Jesus speak in parables? Why did He not speak plainly? Parables are figures of speech, usually simple stories with a background similar to that of the audience, and that illustrate a spiritual principle or lesson. Matthew 13 may give us a clue. In that chapter, Jesus spoke to three groups of people. The first group was the great crowds (v.2). Jesus spoke to this group of people from a boat, and He spoke in parables. This group, in principle, did not know Jesus. The second group of people was His disciples (presumably a larger number, v.10). This group of people knew Jesus somewhat, as seen in the fact that they come to Jesus to ask Him why He spoke to the first group in parables. The third group of people was also Jesus' disciples, but perhaps a smaller number than the second group of disciples, since they came into the house where He was after leaving the crowds (v.36). What does all this mean? Did Jesus speak in parables so that they would not understand? No. We must say, based on the Bible, that God loves every human being (John 3:16), and desires every human being to be saved and to come to the full knowledge of Him (1 Timothy 2:4). Jesus, in His dealings with men while He was on this earth, was in every way pure. His heart was pure. Whatever He communicated to people was surely with the intention that they understand. Why then the parables? Firstly, because parables, in story form, are easy to follow, and easy to remember. Secondly, parables convey an extremely elementary level of revelation to the audience, based on their level of receptivity. Much depends on the audience. Again, Jesus wanted everyone to understand what He was saying. But not everyone did, and not everyone does today. The Lord knows our heart. He wants to reveal Himself to us. Do we want Him to? If not, the Lord will continue to speak to us. This is His mercy. But He will speak in parables, according to the level of the divine life in us, and our heart and desire to receive. On our part, we also need to learn to speak to others in parables. For example, when we speak to two or three year olds, how do we speak to them? Like we would speak to 15 or 16 year olds? We must use parables, that is, we must consider our audience and adapt our speaking to their level so they can understand. We also need to check with them after our speaking, to see if they understood. Jesus often asked His disciples if they understood. Often, though, it is a losing battle. Jesus' disciples claimed that they understood (vv.29-30). They might have been able to remember, but they did not understand. Jesus quickly adjusted them (vv.31-32). Even if we say we understand, do we really? When we speak to people, may our heart be pure so that we desire everyone to know Jesus, even a little bit. Even if someone does not want Christ, are we able to speak in a way that they can understand a little bit?
- 4. Ask the Lord concerning Christ and the church (vv.23-24).** Do we ask the Lord many things concerning Christ and the church, in His name? Do we pray for the brothers and sisters? Do we pray for one brother or one sister? Do we pray for those who are sick? Do we meet someone that we have not yet met Sunday morning during the gathering, and then pray for him or her? These are specific prayers, and not general prayers, based on our knowing of people. The more we know people, and their needs, the more specific our prayers may become. Then, when we pray, we can pray specifically, and the Lord can answer us, also specifically. Such prayers may grant us to be joyful, and to have more faith and trust in our Lord. Indeed, the Lord will answer our prayers, but if they are general, He will answer them in a general way. When was the last time the Lord answered our prayer, either individual or corporate (with companions or a team of brothers and sisters)? Was it three minutes ago, three hours ago, three days ago, three years ago, or thirty years ago? It is a "travail" to participate in prayers. For example, the Thursday night English/French speaking prayers are sparsely attended. This may cause us to be sorrowful, but also incite us to joyfully exercise more to visit saints and pray for them. It is not easy for Christ to be formed in us. This needs not only our heart, but our person to cooperate with the Lord.