

Grace, Mercy, and Joy in Christ

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the shadowed hours before His crucifixion, Jesus spoke words that cut through the disciples' trembling hearts: *"You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy"* (John 16:20). Imagine them, crowded in the flickering light of an upper room, their faces carved with dread, their whispers heavy with uncertainty. They could not fathom the storm approaching—a cross, a tomb, a world unraveling. Yet Jesus, His eyes burning with divine resolve, His voice steady as a cornerstone, promised that sorrow would not have the final word.

These are not fleeting words, scattered like leaves in the wind. They are the Gospel's foundation, forged in Christ's suffering and victory. They are for every soul crushed by guilt, every heart frayed by fear, every life shadowed by loss. They are for you.

I. The Sorrow of the Cross

"A little while, and you will see me no longer," Jesus said (John 16:16). That "little while" was a plunge into darkness. Betrayal struck like a viper's fang. Arrest echoed with the clatter of iron and the shouts of soldiers. The trial twisted truth, and the cross rose, a stark silhouette against a sky bruised with thunder. Jesus, the one they hailed as Messiah, was ripped from them—not by mere arrest, but by death's unyielding grasp. Their sorrow was a tempest, threatening to swallow hope. Yet it held purpose.

People of God, our salvation demanded this sorrow. Sin—yours, mine, the world's—stood as a fortress between us and God, its walls built of rebellion. It demanded justice. *"There is no one righteous, not even one"* (Romans 3:10). The wage of sin is death, and we have all inked our names to that debt.

But Jesus, the eternal Son, strode into the breach. He was no victim, no casualty of fate. He was the Lamb, bearing the world's sin to the cross's altar. Forsaken then that you are forgiven now. Condemned before His accusers so that now you are declared righteous. Judged, that on the Last Day, you will stand fearless.

In the fourth century, as the Arian heresy swept through the church, denying Christ's divinity, Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, stood like a lone sentinel. Exiled five times, he faced howling desert winds and the threat of imperial swords, yet he penned his defiance in *On the Incarnation*: "The Son of God became man so that we might become sons of God." Huddled in a desert hideout, his quill scratching parchment under a sputtering lamp, Athanasius clung to the cross's truth.

Christ's sorrow was your redemption. Jesus did not say, "*You might be sorrowful.*" He said, "*You will be sorrowful*"—because salvation comes at a cost. But then He promised: "*Your sorrow will turn into joy.*"

II. Joy That No One Can Take

Jesus offered a metaphor: a woman in labor, her cries piercing the night, her pain a fire that consumes. Yet when her child is born, her anguish melts into a joy that redefines her world. So it was with the cross and resurrection. So it is with you.

On the third day, the stone was rolled away and the tomb was empty of its former contents. Jesus appeared—not with judgment, but with a word: "*Peace be with you*" (John 20:19). The debt was paid. The judgment was served. The grave was stripped of its power. Nothing remained but joy.

This is no fleeting emotion, no spark put out by light rain. It is a deep, unyielding certainty: your sins are forgiven. You are reconciled to God, not by your deeds, but by Christ's triumph. "*I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you*" (John 16:22). No one. Not your failures. Not Satan's accusations. Not even death. Your joy is rooted in the unshakable truth of Christ's resurrection.

In 1521, Martin Luther stood before the Diet of Worms, the air thick with the scent of candle wax and the murmurs of emperors and bishops. Branded a heretic for proclaiming justification by faith, Luther's hands trembled as he clutched a Bible, his voice hoarse from sleepless nights haunted by his own sin. Yet, fortified by Romans 1:17—"*The righteous shall live by faith*"—he declared, "I will not recant what I have written and taught. My conscience is captive to the Word of God... Here I stand, I can do no other." Facing exile or death, Luther's joy in Christ's forgiveness held firm, a beacon in the storm. So, too, your joy endures.

III. The Gospel Goes to the Outsiders (Acts 16:9-15)

This joy is not a walled garden, reserved for the elite. It is a river, surging past every barrier. In Acts 16, we see its flow transform the unexpected.

Paul, travel-worn and salt-stung from the sea, saw a vision: a Macedonian man, his voice raw with need, crying, “*Come over to Macedonia and help us*” (Acts 16:9). Obeying, Paul landed in Philippi, a Roman colony bristling with pride. On the Sabbath, he sought a place of prayer by the river. There he found a group of women gathered in prayer.

Among them was Lydia, her fingers dyed purple from trading fine cloth, her eyes alight with devotion. As Paul preached Christ, the Lord unlocked her heart like a gate swinging wide. She believed. She and her household were baptized, the river’s cool waters sealing their new life. With bold warmth, she opened her home: “*If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay*” (Acts 16:15). From this woman, the Philippian church took root, a mustard seed in Rome’s shadow.

In 203 AD, Perpetua, a 22-year-old married noblewoman in Carthage faced the Roman arena’s roar. A new mother, she clutched her infant son one last time before prison chains bound her wrists. Defying her father’s pleas to renounce Christ, she wrote in her diary, her quill trembling: “I am a Christian.” As lions lunged and the crowd bayed, Perpetua’s faith, like Lydia’s, shone as a testament to God’s grace for the unlikely. The Gospel knows no bounds—not geography, gender, nor status. It is for all.

You may feel like an outsider, scarred by shame or unworthiness. But Christ came for sinners, for the overlooked, for you. The Jesus who opened Lydia’s heart opens yours. He forgives you. He calls you His own.

IV. No Fear in the Final Judgment

What, then, do you fear? Sorrow lingers—disease, loss, death. But none speak the final word. From the cross, Christ proclaimed, “*It is finished*” (John 19:30). Your judgment is done.

John’s vision in Revelation 21:9-14 unveils your future. An angel calls, “*Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.*” John sees the new Jerusalem, descending like dawn breaking over a weary world, its jasper walls aglow, its pearl gates shimmering. Twelve gates, etched with Israel’s tribes,

stand open, proclaiming God's ancient covenant. Twelve foundations, bearing the apostles' names, root the city in the Gospel of Jesus they carried.

This is God's dwelling with His people, where tears are banished, and death is a faded memory. You are part of this city, your name written in the Lamb's book through faith.

V. A Joy Secure in Christ

I heard of Jim, a 79-year-old from Missouri, barefoot in the mud where his home once stood and it's memories swept away. Yet he grinned for the cameras. "It's all just stuff," he said. "Jesus still has me. And I've got Him." That's joy—not chained to circumstances, but anchored in Christ.

Your Savior lives. Your guilt is erased. Your judgment is past. Your joy is eternal. Because of Jesus, your sorrow has turned to joy. And no one—no one—can steal it from you! Amen.