

6

Anticipating the Future

John 16:16-33

Human beings live very much in their future; things that we expect to happen affect us right now. Christ teaches us to foresee endless joy with himself, and tells us that keeping this prospect on our minds will give us present peace and strengthen us to work through whatever spells of grief may come our way.

For Christians, the future is guaranteed to be better than the past ever was, or the present now is. The best is yet to be. The famous tag line "You ain't seen nothing yet" is always a word in season for the servants of Jesus.

GROUP DISCUSSION. What would you like to know (and not know) about the future? Why?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. When you consider the future, either in this life or eternity, what is your general feeling? Apprehension? Anticipation? Joy? Fear? Worry? Frustration? Contentment? Challenge? Trust? Some mixture of ... ? Why? How do your feelings about the future connect (or not connect) with your relationship to Christ?

Today's Scripture passage is Jesus' final words of teaching to his disciples prior to his death. (The remainder of this "Farewell Address" is a prayer-to God.) Not surprisingly, Jesus asks his disciples to look ahead. Read John 16:16-33.

1. This dialogue contains several shifts in mood. If you had been part of this scene, what would you have been feeling at various points of the conversation? Why?

2. What events do you think Jesus has in mind when he tells his disciples to prepare for both joy and grief in their immediate future (vv. 16-22)?

Does joy or grief seem most important in this text? Why?

3. Jesus says, "You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices" (v. 20). Do you think the disciples are surprised by this statement from Jesus? Why or why not? (Review 15:18-16:4.)

4. Jesus says that "no one will take away your joy" (v. 22). Does this mean they will never be sad again? Why or why not?

5. How is Jesus' coming death and resurrection in some ways like childbirth?

6. For the fourth time in this conversation, Jesus speaks of powerful praying (v. 23). How does his coming death and resurrection change the relationship between the disciples and God (vv. 23-28)?

7. "The Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God." Do you believe that Jesus could say these same words about you? If so, mentally skip back through your past twenty-four hours, and play it again in slow motion, imagining in each scene that you are sheltered by the phrase "Loved by God." What do you see, hear, think, feel as you review these scenes?

8. "You believe at last!" shouts Jesus near the end of their conversation (v. 31). How would these words and the rest of his closing statements help his disciples keep on believing through and beyond the difficult days ahead (vv. 29-33)?

9. What kinds of faith support has God provided you in your own difficult days?

10. Take a look at your future: near future, far future, eternal future. How do the words of verse 33 affect your plans, thoughts and feelings about your future?

When you think of your future, what feelings are likely to rise? Hope? Anticipation? Fear? Worry? Dread? Confidence? Bring these feelings (both positive and negative) to your loving Lord.

Now or Later

Write out the words of John 16:33 in the space below. Meditate on each phrase, looking for ways that it touches your own life. These words are as much for Christ-followers today as they were for his first disciples. Respond in prayer.