

The Community Faces Pain and Joy

Key Verse: *"A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father."*
—John 16:16

Selected Scripture:
John 16:16-24,
20:11-16

AS JESUS DREW NEAR TO the end of his earthly ministry, he began to impress upon the minds of his disciples the fact that he would soon die. They did not understand this, as they expected him, the great Messiah of Israel, to reestablish their kingdom in the full glory it had in the days of David and Solomon. In their minds, the thought of Jesus dying was totally out of harmony with these expectations.

It is in this setting that Jesus spoke the words of our Key Verse. In the verses immediately following, his disciples questioned the meaning of his words, not understanding how he could say, on the one hand, they would not see him, but then say they would indeed see him again. Jesus then stated the matter using different words, saying, "Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." (John 16:20) He continued (vs. 21) by comparing this sorrow to a woman in travail, and the subsequent joy to the delivery of a child by the travailing woman.

In the above words, Jesus was speaking of his impending

death, followed by his promised resurrection from the dead by the mighty power of God. He indicated they would have great sorrow when he died, not understanding its purpose, nor why he could not use the great powers he possessed to remove himself from such ignominy. He also foretold the fact that their sorrow would be turned to joy when they realized his resurrection on the third day. We see that Jesus' predictions of their great sorrow, followed by joy, were fulfilled exactly as he had said. Just a few hours later, as he was led to Calvary, the Scriptures state, "There followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him."—Luke 23:27

Following his resurrection, Jesus appeared unto his disciples on several occasions, each time further convincing them that this was he, their beloved master, and that their work of following after him was really only just beginning. After forty days, he ascended to heaven, departing from them once again to return to his father, as foretold in our Key Verse. This departure, though, did not cause sorrow among his disciples as had his death, for they now had begun to truly realize the reason and importance of the events as they had occurred. Rather than sorrowing, they now rejoiced. "They . . . returned to Jerusalem with great joy: And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God."—Luke 24:52,53

One of the most beautiful examples of this sorrow turning to joy is expressed in the experience of Mary Magdalene as she came to the sepulchre to anoint the body of Jesus. The already resurrected Jesus, seeing her (but unknown to her) asked, "Woman, why weepest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him . . . tell me where thou has laid him . . . Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him . . . Master." (John 20:15,16) Surely her pain had been turned to joy—her master had been raised from the dead! ■