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SAYING GOODBYE WITH JOY!

Today's Text: Matt. 28; Luke 24: 50-53

Extracts:

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshipped Him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, *I am with you always, even to the end of the age*" [Matt. 28: 15-20]

Now it came to pass while He blessed them, that *He was parted from them and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy* [Lk 24: 51-52]

One verse in the Jackson Five's ever popular song, "Never can say Goodbye," (1971) says, "Even though the pain and heartache seems to follow me wherever I go, though I try and try to hide my feelings, they always seem to show. Then you try to say you're leaving me, and I always have to say no..."¹ After Michael Jackson's sudden death on 25 June 2009, the words that he sang as an innocent 12-year-old vocalist for the Jackson Five took on a more painful meaning. For example, one of his fans wrote, "The day you died you took a piece of me with you and I will never get that piece back. As much as I miss you I know you are in a better place now and you are finally free. Michael you live in my heart for the rest of my life."²

Goodbye is used when people part, either by death or by relocation. As in Michael Jackson's song, parting evokes pains and sadness. The occasion may be on graduating from college or children leaving home to work in another city or country or to make a new life with a spouse. The pain is worse if it involves death. That means that you may not see them again, at least physically. That is why saying goodbye is usually painful. But on the day that Jesus ascended to heaven, His disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy! What did they know about saying goodbye that the rest of us do not? Let us find out from this week's interesting study.

¹ 'Never Can Say Goodbye Lyrics,' Artist (Band): Michael Jackson, <http://www.sing365.com/music/lyric.nsf/Never-Can-Say-Goodbye-lyrics-Michael-Jackson/E6E4C6F1E9BFDBAB4825688F00278693>

² Ibid.

1. Introduction: What is good about goodbye?

Our need for companionship began from the Garden of Eden. After God had made Adam, He said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” That was what led God to bring Eve out of her husband. Adam woke up from the “surgery” and instantly, Eve became bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. They were naked in each other’s company but they were not ashamed [Gen. 2: 18-25]. Immediately, we see the origin of our social needs. We come to grow used to those who are closest to us. We come to depend on their company, contribution and comfort. Then, suddenly, the need to part arrives. Immediately, we see gaping holes that cannot be immediately filled. Uncertainty, love and other factors soon draw tears from our eyes. Yet, we use the word, “goodbye” to describe such painful parting of the ways. What is good about that?

The way we see goodbye gives a clue as to whether it is good or bad. Consider the following situations:

a) *Goodbye may mean “See you soon!”*

Some people that we have lived with over some time may have cause to relocate elsewhere, temporarily or permanently. However, we know that we are going to see them again, sooner or later. For example, your children leave home to go to a boarding school. You know that they will soon come home on break or holidays- in a matter of weeks. Even if they have to travel abroad for further studies, you can still reach them by Internet or telephone; you can visit them or they can come home. The departure may be permanent, such as when your children get married and move out to raise their own families. However, you will still be able to see them. So, goodbye in such circumstances actually means, “see you soon.”

In spite of the happy reasons for the goodbye, we still find tears to mark the occasion! For example, you may come home from dropping your children at the airport or train stations or bus terminals and find their rooms stripped and empty. The noise level has been dramatically reduced. There is no more fight over which channels to watch on television. In fact, the house becomes too clean for comfort! Tears will certainly flow. Even in this era of mobile phones, where you can continue speaking with them while in transit, the home is not the same again. This feeling can also be found in the office when your best friends retire or resign, in the school when they complete their studies and depart, and so on.

The goodbye between Jonathan and David is a good illustration of this type. They were both very good friends. Jonathan was the son of king Saul and heir-apparent to his throne. However, following his father’s disobedience, God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint David in his place.

From that point on, Saul sought to kill David but Jonathan ranked his friendship with David superior to his own royal blood. So, he did everything to help David to escape from the palace. Before David's departure, Jonathan made a covenant with him that he would not cut off his kindness from his (Jonathan's) house forever [**1 Sam. 20: 15**]. That suggests that he knew that David would one day return to ascend the throne as king of Israel. Yet, when David said goodbye to Jonathan, "they kissed one another, and *wept* together but David more so" [v. 41].

b) *Goodbye may mean "I may never see you again!"*

Sometimes, people part never to see each other again. It may not necessarily be due to death although death is the commonest cause. A good illustration of final farewells was Paul's last missionary journey. At Ephesus, he told the church elders, "Indeed, now I know that *you all* among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, *will see my face no more.*" When he had thus spoken, "he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all *wept freely*, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him; *sorrowing most of all* for the words which he spoke, *that they would see his face no more*" [**Acts 20: 25, 36-38**].

However, goodbye by death is a special case. We know that we will not see the departed physically again. If we are believers, like the sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Mary, we may believe that the dead shall rise again and that gives hope that we shall see our loved ones again [**Jn 11: 24**]. But at the point of losing them, heaven may not be your first thought. Even Jesus that knew that He was going to raise Lazarus from the dead shed tears for him when He saw Mary and the Jews who came to comfort her weeping [v.35]!

The immediate concerns of the bereaved are around physical and emotional needs. Your companion and best friend is gone. Who will fill the immediate void? Your bread winner has been taken away. Who will take care of the family needs? Take the case of a disciple called Dorcas (also known as Tabitha) who was sick and died. The disciples there in Joppa sent for Peter who was nearby in Lydda. When Peter arrived there, "all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them" [**Acts 9: 36-39**]. In other words, they were not merely losing a fellow disciple, they missed the services she used to render to them. Thank God for bringing her back to life through Peter's ministry!

c) *Goodbye may mean "Good riddance!"*

Perhaps, one occasion where goodbye may call for celebration is when it helps you to get rid of an unprofitable relationship or situation. It can be a

divorce out of an abusive marriage, the end of an oppressive era or death of a loved one from a debilitating illness.. In most cases, you feel a sense of relief. A few examples will make this clearer:

- When David’s son, the product of an adulterous affair with Bathsheba was sick, David lay on the ground, fasted and prayed for seven days. But when he died, David arose from the ground, washed up and went to the house of the Lord and worshipped. Then, he went to his house and ate food [**2 Sam. 12: 15-20**]!
- The children of Israel spent four hundred and thirty years in bondage in Egypt. On the day that God set them free by the hand of Moses, they asked favours in the form of articles in silver, gold and clothing for “the Lord had given (them) favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus *they plundered the Egyptians*” [**Ex. 12: 35-36**]. I doubt if there was sadness on either side that day! It was good riddance.

Of the three circumstances of goodbye discussed above, it is only where it is to end a miserable or unprofitable relationship that the parting is an occasion to celebrate or, at least, not be sad. But we know that the disciples did not want to get rid of Jesus on the day that He ascended to heaven. In fact, they would have loved to have Him around much much longer. So, like the church elders in Ephesus on the occasion of Paul’s final departure, the disciples of Jesus should have been sad. Why then were they so happy? Let us find out the secret of their joy!

2. The Disciples rejoiced when Jesus said goodbye!

During the three years of His earthly ministry, Jesus had said so much to His disciples concerning who He is, why He came and how He would die and rise again. You cannot blame them for not being able to take it all in. You need to see the behaviour of people who are around people of influence. For example, outriders in the convoy of the political head of state in most countries drive so roughly that you think they will never die in the event of an accident! Do you think they pay attention to opinion polls or the possibility that the person who is the source of their power and influence would not be in office a few years hence? Can you then imagine working for a Man that could heal all kinds of diseases, cast out demons and raise people from the dead? Would you yourself believe such a Man if He came talking about His suffering, death and resurrection?

However, as the dramatic end began to unfold, the disciples’ morale went from exhilaration on Palm Sunday to disorientation and despair on Good Friday. Then, suddenly on Easter Sunday, disbelief turned into temporary relief and later great expectations. It was only during the next forty days (between resurrection and ascension) that Jesus finally got through to them. [**Acts 1: 3**]. Luke tells us, “He

opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures” and that all things had to be fulfilled “which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets, and the Psalms “ concerning Him [**Lk 24: 44-45**]. John adds that “Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written” in his gospel [**Jn 20: 30**]. That is not a hyperbole!

So, what did Jesus show His disciples during His intermittent appearances to them before His final ascension to heaven? Here are the highlights:

a) *Infallible proofs of His divinity*

He presented Himself alive to the disciples “after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them” [**Acts 1: 3**]. In fact, He was *seen physically, not in visions*, by “over five hundred brethren at once” [**1 Cor. 15: 6**]. Doubting Thomas touched a person, not a ghost, and acknowledged Jesus as his Lord and God [**Jn 20: 24-28**]. Therefore, by the time of His ascension, His disciples knew that the Messiah had come and they had had a rare privilege to be close to Him for three years. This same Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth [**Matt. 28: 19**]. At that name, “every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth; and ... every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” [**Phil. 2: 10-11**].

b) *The message of the kingdom of God*

He commissioned the disciples to go and make disciples of “all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” teaching them to observe all things that He had commanded them [**Matt. 28: 20**]. Therefore, Jews and Gentiles became admissible into this kingdom provided they sought it by the grace of the blood of Jesus, not by their human effort [**Eph. 2: 8-9**]. Without the baptism of water and the Holy Spirit, nobody can enter that kingdom [**Jn 3: 5**].

c) *Spiritual empowerment from above*

The kingdom of God is not meat or drink but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit [**Rom. 14: 17**]. Jesus assured His assembled disciples on Mount Olivet on the day of His ascension, “You shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit *not many days from now*.” With His power, they would become His witnesses in Jerusalem, all of Judea and Samaria, “and to the end of the earth” [**Acts 1: 5, 8, 12**]. Would you not be excited in anticipation of that day that would soon come?

d) *He is with them always till the end of the age!*

He made it clear to them that He was actually not leaving them but only stopping His intermittent physical appearances to them. He would remain with them always even till the end of the age [**Matt. 28: 20**]. As the disciples looked up at the ascending Christ, two angels [two men in white apparel] told them, “*This same Jesus*, who was taken up from you into heaven *will so come in like manner* as you saw Him go into heaven” [**Acts 1: 11**]. Armed with such assurances, the disciples worshipped Jesus and “returned to Jerusalem with great joy” [**Lk 24: 52**].

Clearly, that is not the kind of goodbye that we are used to. He was leaving them but He was actually not leaving them! He was taken to heaven from them but He was actually going there to prepare a mansion for them in His Father’s house and then return to take them with Him so that they would be where He is [**Jn 14: 2-3**]. Who would not jump up for joy on the occasion of such a goodbye?

3. Conclusion: Jesus is always with you!

What is it *right now* that has made you depressed or distressed? Economic hardship? Marital disharmony? Severe illness without adequate medical insurance protection? Jesus says to you, “In Me, you may have peace; in the world, you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” [**Jn 16: 33**]. He has added, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age!” He has not left you. He never said goodbye. He is the Christ in you, the hope of glory [**Col. 1: 27**]. So who can separate you from His love?

Say goodbye to Satan. Say “good riddance” to sin and shame. Say welcome to Jesus Christ who is always with true believers. From now on, you can say goodbye with joy!