

# God Came Down

(The Fourth Gospel)

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## Second Farewell Discourse, Pt 3 (16:16-33)

### **Monologue: Soon You Will See Me No More (16:16-28)**

This block of material is something of a summary of what has gone before with an introduction to what is to follow. Johannine scholar, C. K. Barrett, says:

This paragraph gathers together the striking language of the last discourses – of going and coming, grief and joy, tribulation and peace, asking and receiving, seeing and not seeing parable and open speech, unbelief and faith, the world and God . . . the saying about going and coming can be interpreted throughout of the departure and return of Jesus in his death and resurrection . . . (C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p 491).

### **His Departure and Return (16:16-22)**

“No longer will you see (*theoreo* – behold) me and again a little and you will see me (*horao* – to allow oneself to be seen, to appear [Abbott-Smith.321]).” Jesus is referring to his death and resurrection [cf. 20:19-20, 26-29; 21:-1-14]. The response of the disciples: “What is he talking about?” Jesus had said something like this before in 14:19; again in 16:10, here in 16:16; then again in 17:11; but this is followed by 20:15-18. Jesus knew (*ginosko* - experiential knowledge, cf. John 2:24-25; 6:61; and Matt

9:4) what they were saying to one another and that they wished to ask him what he was talking about.

The NIV reads, “I tell you the truth (*amen amen*), you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices.” The expression “*amen amen*” has always been a challenge for translators of the English versions. The Greek word *aman* is from the Hebrew word *aman* meaning “to trust, to believe in.” To utter this expression twice before making a statement is the same as saying, as a storyteller often does, “Hear what I am about to say,” or “Believe what I’m about to tell you.” More literally, this may be translated, “Believe me,” or “Trust my words,” or as was often heard in the Appalachians where I was raised, “Mark my words!” The repetition of a word that has a dual meaning is often used as a way of emphasizing the dual aspects of the word’s meaning. As with the Greek word *kalos*, which means “good, pleasant, or beautiful.” If someone asks another in Greek, “*Pos se semeron?*” (How are you today?) and the one addressed replies, “*kalos, kalos!*” he has said, “Pretty good,” in that the Greek *kalos* means both. So also with the repetition of the Hebrew *amen*; Jesus is saying, “Believe this,” or the equivalent of the Hebrew expression “*Shama, shamar* – hear and heed!”

“Soon you will weep and mourn (as John 19:28-30, 38-42 records), but the world (the realm of darkness) will rejoice.” That darkness appears to have prevailed over the light is a reoccurring theme in the writings of John, especially in Revelation. “But your grief will be turned to joy,” as John 20:18-23 records (cf. also Matt 28:8; Luke 22:5).

When a woman gives birth she experiences grief, because her time has come; but, when she gives birth to her child, she doesn’t remember the affliction (*thlipseos* - tribulation), because a new person has come into the world. The “labor” of a woman giving birth is a common piece of imagery in the Hebrew Scriptures: Gen 3:15; Isaiah 26:16-19; 66:7-14. This latter text was used by the rabbis of the second century AD to support the view of the travail of the Messiah. C. K. Barrett, commenting on verse 21, says:

The parallel is in itself a simple one: the short travail pains give place to satisfaction at the birth of a child – the short sorrow of Good Friday and the following day give place to the joy of Easter. But the analogy has a deeper meaning. It belongs to the Old Testament; see especially Isa 26:16-19; 66:7-14. In these passages the messianic salvation which relieves the affliction of the people is compared to the relief and joy of

childbirth, and from them (and like passages) was drawn the later Jewish doctrine of the *heble ha-mashiah* (the ‘travail of the Messiah’), a period of trouble which must intervene before the final consummation. (C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, p 493).

“Now, you will have grief,” says Jesus, “but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice.” He continues to speak in riddles or ambiguous sayings. His words are a continuation of verse 20, “But your grief will be turned to joy;” and so it was, as John 20:18-23 records (cf. also Matt 28:8; Luke 22:5).

### **The Transfer of Power (16:23-28)**

*In that day you will no longer ask me anything [here we have a critical saying with reference to the apostolic role they will soon have to assume]. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. <sup>24</sup>Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. <sup>25</sup>Though I have been speaking figuratively, a time is coming when I will no longer use this kind of language but will tell you plainly about my Father. <sup>26</sup>In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. <sup>27</sup>No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. <sup>28</sup>I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.*

Jesus informs the eleven, “In that day [i.e., after this transfer of power or reception of the apostolic mantel] you will not ask from me, but what you want to know will be given to you from the Father. In my name he will give to you [what you ask].” What Jesus is speaking of here is a transfer of power (the prophetic spirit) from himself to them as was the case with Elijah to Elisha in 2 Kings 2:1-18. In verse 24 he explains what he has said in verse 23. Before now they had no reason to ask of God “in the name of Jesus;” soon all that would change. They would call upon his name as a means of accessing power to work miracles (Acts 3:6, 16) and to deliver to the world the divine message he would later charge them to deliver (Acts 2:18ff; 4:12, 17, 16,30; 9:27-28), and they would also suffer for his name (Acts 5:28, 40, 41; 9:14, 16).

Then he further says in verse 25, “I have spoken these things to you in *paroimiais* - riddles or obscure sayings.” This Greek word has created a world of curiosity and debate. It is a compound of *para* (along side) and *oimos/oimia* (a direction or train of thought), hence the meaning “something not as it usually is, not in its usual place; not the usual way of saying something as with a figure of speech, an obscure saying, or a riddle.”

It is found in the LXX in Psalms 78:2; Proverbs 1:1 and 25:1, for “a meaningful or difficult saying – a proverb.” In the Apocryphal book, Sirach 39:3, it is used of the one who searches the *Torah* for the wisdom of the ancients, “he will seek out the hidden meaning of the sayings/proverbs (*paroimiais*) and be at home with the obscurities of parables.” In John 10, it is used of the metaphor of the good shepherd and his sheep. John says, “Jesus used this figure of speech (*paroimiais*), but they did not understand what he was telling them,” (10:6). Then here in chapter 16, he uses this expression three times (twice in verse 25 and once in 29). In verse 25 he says, “A time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in *paroimiais* (figures or obscure sayings) but will speak clearly (*parrhsia*) concerning the Father.

John is painting a portrait of these disciples that is honest, revealing, and self-critical. What Jesus is saying is completely lost on them. They can make little or no sense of what he is saying to them, but Jesus doesn't expect them to. Such a view of the men who later changed the world in which they lived is useful to those who find themselves having great difficulty understanding many of the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. With these eleven fishermen or people of the land, it took almost two years of training in addition to the gift of the Spirit of God to bring them to the insights they passed along to us through their preaching and writings; and on this occasion they did not appear to be grasping well what they were hearing from their esteemed rabbi.

One only has to think of the tremendous implications of what he was saying to them and their inability to grasp his teaching to appreciate the way he chose to reveal these things to them in dark, esoteric, or ambiguous sayings. This was especially the case as related to his death and the meaning and significance of that event. His talk of death was completely unintelligible to them at this point; but there's something about seeing “a crucified Messiah” as “a risen Lord” that puts a different perspective on

things. What he had been saying during this time would soon become clear, as is evidenced in their speeches of Acts of Apostles. On that day, the day of the anointing from the *Ruach HaKodesh*, as with Elisha of old, “You will ask,” he says, ”and I will not have to ask the Father for you.”

**Dialogue: The Reaction of the Twelve  
(16:29-33)**

*Then Jesus' disciples said, “Ah, so now in clearness you are speaking and you're not speaking in figures or obscure sayings? We know that you know all things and have no need of questions/answers, in this (or “this is why”) we believe that you came from God.”* <sup>31</sup>*“You believe now,” Jesus answered.* <sup>32</sup>*“But a time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.* <sup>33</sup>*“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

Here again we are given a view of the eleven that portrays them as somewhat clueless with reference to what Jesus was saying to them. The English translations miss a very rare piece of Johannian humor. The Greek text of verse 29 reads, very literally, “Lo, (*Ide* - an interjection which is the equivalent of the Hebrew “Ah!”), now in clearness you are speaking and not in ambiguous sayings (*paroimiais*)?” This statement is usually translated as a declarative sentence. But, what Jesus has just said to them is as clear as mud, which is obvious from the continuation of this narrative and the behavior of these disciples in the following events of the night.

This statement of these disciples should be translated as an interrogative. They are responding to Jesus with a rhetorical question, “Ah, so now in clearness you are speaking and you're not speaking in figures or obscure sayings?” They are being facetious! There are no punctuation marks in the earliest Greek manuscripts of the NT. The punctuation must be supplied from the sense of the statement in its context. This is the case here. These disciples didn't follow his words at all; not a clue what he was talking about! This is obvious from verse 30. They say, “We know that you know all things and have no need of questions/answers, in this (or “this is why”) we believe that you came from God.” With verse 29 being taken as a rhetorical question, verse 30 follows nicely. They appear to be attributing their lack of comprehension to their human limitations, contrasting their lack

of insight with Jesus' divine insights. He knows all things because he has come from God, they are not from God and do not know what he is talking about.

Jesus then shifts to a new piece of information for them to consider. "Behold, the hour is coming and has come that you will be scattered on your own and you will leave me alone. But, I am not alone, because the Father is with me," (verses 31-32). Here is, perhaps, an allusion to Zech 13, a text in which the prophet, who returned with Ezra from the exile in Babylon, gives an "oracle" from God concerning the restoration of Israel. The parallels of this text with what is about to happen to Jesus are striking. In this text, the prophet is revealing to the returned remnant of Israel that God had promised to bring back a remnant to their homeland.

*On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. <sup>2</sup>"On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more," declares the LORD Almighty. "I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land (Zach 13:1-2).*

Zachariah then appears to suggest that the one not expected to be a prophet is the one to whom they should listen:

*He will say, 'I am not a prophet. I am a farmer; the land has been my livelihood since my youth.' <sup>6</sup> If someone asks him, 'What are these wounds on your body [the Messoretic Text reads, literally, "The wounds between the hands of you]?' he will answer, 'The wounds I was given at the house of my friends.'<sup>7</sup> "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" declares the LORD Almighty. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones. <sup>8</sup> In the whole land," declares the LORD, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. <sup>9</sup> This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.'" (Zach 13:5 -9).*

## Concluding Words of the Second Discourse (16:33)

*These things I have spoken to you, in order that in me you may have peace (shalom). In the world you will have tribulation (thlipsis), but be of good courage (tharseo) - to be confident, hopeful, courageous), "ego nenikeka ton kosmon" - I have conquered the world!" (16:33)*

The word *nike* (conquest) is a frequent and, obviously, important word in the writings of John; *nike* & *nikao* are found in John's writings more than in all other NT writers combined (of 29 occurrences in the NT, 25 of them are in John's writings. This is an especially important theme in John's letters written to encourage the followers of Christ in times of tribulation (*thlipsis*).

*I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome [nikao - conquered] the evil one, (1 John 2:13).*

*I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome [nikao - conquered] the evil one, (1 John 2:14).*

*You, dear children, are from God and have overcome [nikao - conquered] them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world, (1 John 4:4).*

*. . . for everyone born of God overcomes [nikao - is conquering] the world. This is the victory [nike - conquest] that has overcome [nikao - has conquered] the world, even our faith. <sup>5</sup>Who is it that overcomes [nikao - has conquered] the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God, (1 John 5:4-5).*

One of the essentially messages of John's Gospel is that Jesus has overcome or conquered the world and "in Christ" so shall we. John obviously heard what Jesus said the night he gave these discourses to the eleven. Three day later he saw them fulfilled and from that moment he never forgot Jesus' words, "Ego nenikeka ton kosmon" – I have conquered the world!"