

# “The Upsilon Vector”

John 16.16–22

<sup>16</sup>“A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.”<sup>17</sup>Some of His disciples then said to one another, “What is this thing He is telling us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father?’”<sup>18</sup>So they were saying, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is talking about.”<sup>19</sup>Jesus knew that they wished to question Him, and He said to them, “Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me’?”<sup>20</sup>Truly, truly, I say to you, that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy.<sup>21</sup>Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain, because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world.<sup>22</sup>Therefore you too have grief now; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.” [NASB]

HOPE  
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## I. Hearing

Happy New Year everyone! Okay, now can we get real? Russia’s announced they are starting to build offensive weapons, Iran’s preparing to launch satellites, and explosive devices are getting through airport security. Teasers of economic recovery diffuse like wisps, political correctness erodes all interest in the meaning of life, and the assault of perverse inanity that passes for entertainment staggers even the impious.

Society’s passion for overturning godliness and natural created order is unprecedented—except at those historical precipices over which exemplary empires have plunged. Churches holding to orthodox doctrines are dwindling while strange new emergent doctrines flourish. And despite last night’s snow, so far it’s been the warmest, most snowless winter. Happy New Year? Can we be real here?

There are four things I learned in seminary that I shall never forget. I may forget another thing or two. I may forget a bit of Hebrew. Let it not be that I forget my Greek and sentence diagramming. I’m not too worried about Church History; if we forget anything there, well, stay alive a little while and we’ll relearn those lessons whether we like it or not. But there are four things I learned in seminary which if I ever forget, well, you ken troe me right outta this pulpit.

One: the Bible is inerrant. If it seems opposed to what you observe in nature, well, then you don’t yet understand nature. If it seems opposed to the things you experience, well, then you don’t yet understand your experience. If it seems opposed to logic, well, then you have not yet built a sound argument. Two: God is Sovereign. There is nothing—*nothing*—you or I or any other creature has ever thought, said, or done on our own initiative as *first cause*. Three: You have it, so have it. You have peace with God, so have peace with God. You have liberty in Christ, so love with liberty in Christ.

And four: *The Upsilon Vector*. Now don’t get nervous, I’m not getting technical. Upsilon is the Greek letter “u,” and a vector is just an arrow that points somewhere. The Upsilon Vector is an arrow that makes a U-turn. Two of these memorable doctrines I can attribute solely to one professor, though he was unexcelled in his uncompromised championing of all four. I can vividly recall Dr Gruenler dramatically quieting his voice in front of the class with a twinkle in his eye, whenever he invoked *The Upsilon Vector*. You might think he had been here with the disciples listening to Jesus invoke the Upsilon Vector. As we begin this New Year, I call you to invoke the Upsilon Vector with me.

### A. *Painful Perplexity Today*

There are three states represented in this passage, although one of them is presumed rather than explicit. That one is the starting point; that one is where the disciples have been for the past three years. They’ve faced some rough spots. But overall things have been pretty happy if not a bit giddy at times, including a few heady speculations of powerful kingdom positions at Jesus’ right and left sides.

The second and third states on the other hand, are explicitly emphasized. We begin with the state of *painful perplexity*. The disciples are confounded with perplexity when Jesus says, <sup>16</sup>“A little while, and you will no longer see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me.” They just get completely stuck on this one. In the next three verses the very same question is repeated no less than three times; twice by the disciples and once reiterated by Jesus. It sounds like an old 33LP; every rotation the needle jumps back to the previous groove and repeats.

The disciples simply had no paradigm, no model, no category for this kind of statement from Jesus. They must have felt a little frustrated. They stood there shaking their heads saying to one another, “what’s He talking about?!” and yet they were afraid to ask Him.

Now He answers the question they are afraid to ask. Notice, Jesus does not tell them directly what events are going to take place. He does not say, “They will crucify me, I will be in the tomb, and on the third day I will arise from the dead.” He just says, “you won’t be able to see Me, and then you will be able to see me.” He emphasizes what they will experience on account of those events. That, actually, is all they need to know. And what they are going to experience is weeping, lament, sorrow, anguish.

Likewise, you do not need to know all the details about what is going to happen in your future. What you *do* need to know, is what you will experience and how you will respond to those details. Your perplexity is going to get painful and sorrowful. You will know weeping, lament, and anguish. The circumstances of your sorrow are not most important. You cannot prepare for it, if by “prepare” you mean “avoid” or “lesson” the sorrow. God is sovereign, and we cannot outwit Him. That is why you need *The Upsilon Vector*.

### **B. Joyful Jubilation Tomorrow**

The other state following painful perplexity, is joyful jubilation. This joy will be so great that you won’t remember the sorrow, even as <sup>21</sup>“when the woman gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world.” Note carefully that the joy comes on account of what brought the pain. The joy of the child born comes on account of the child being born.

The painful perplexity and the joyful jubilation are not separable, independent experiences. You do not get one without the other. The painful perplexity of not seeing Jesus and the joyful jubilation of seeing Him again are not separable, independent experiences. You don’t get the joy without the pain, and you don’t get the pain without the joy. They are part of the same vector... *The Upsilon Vector*.

### **C. Doctrine**

A vector is an arrow showing both direction and magnitude. When you ask Mom where the peanut butter and marshmallow fluff is, she may raise her hand just a little and point to the cupboard. Her finger points in the direction, but doesn’t indicate that you need to retrieve the peanut butter and marshmallow fluff in any great hurry. Her finger is a small vector indicating direction of travel and low velocity.

On the other hand, when you make mischief of one kind and another like a wild thing, and your mother sends you off to bed without eating anything, she probably is standing there with her whole arm stretched straight out pointing to your bedroom. Her whole arm is a vector indicating direction of travel and high velocity.

The Upsilon Vector indicates direction, though it is a little more difficult to determine velocity. The Upsilon Vector is not a straight line. It looks more like the letter “u.” It points downward... and then turns around and points upward. And upward. And upward. And so you see the doctrine Jesus presses home once more: *Life in Christ follows the Upsilon Vector*. You see, we can’t really say Life in Christ follows “u” in an age of texting, because somebody will think we mean Life in Christ follows “you.” So, *Life in Christ follows the Upsilon Vector*.

## **II. Examining**

When the disciples Andrew and John first went to Jesus, He asked them, “What do you want?”<sup>Jn1.38</sup> But He was really asking them, “Are you willing to know sorrow that you might know joy? Are you willing to learn from Me so that I might live for you? Are you willing to follow One

who has no place on earth to lay His head so He might bring you to an eternal home in heaven? Are you willing to die in Me so that I might live in you? Are you willing to be identified by a vector that points down before it turns around and points up, and up, and up?

### III. Investigating

#### A. *The Upsilon Vector is the testimony of Scripture*

Are you? If we are to investigate this matter, we shall find that the Upsilon Vector is the testimony of Scripture. Adam and Eve had the Garden, but once they fell in sin they must be ejected and return to the dust that they might gain heaven. Noah had the world, but he must be entombed in the Ark that he might gain a cleansed world. Abraham had Ur of the Chaldees, but he must descend into Egypt that he might gain flocks and a tent in the promised Canaan. Moses had the sonship of Pharaoh's daughter,<sup>Heb11.24</sup> but he must spend 80 years in the wilderness that he might gain a full and lofty view of the Promised Land from the height of Pisgah.<sup>Dt34.1</sup> The Upsilon Vector.

David had the title of King, but he must spend years buried in caves and wilderness gullies that he might gain the throne of King. His testimony? <sup>Ps30.3</sup>“O LORD, You have brought up my soul from Sheol; You have kept me alive, that I would not go down to the pit. <sup>4</sup>Sing praise to the LORD, you His godly ones, and give thanks to His holy name. <sup>5</sup>For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.” The Upsilon Vector.

Israel had the presence of the Lord in Palestine, but must go down to captivity in Babylon that she might ascend to Zion. Her testimony? <sup>Ps126.5</sup>“Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting. <sup>6</sup>He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed, shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.” The Upsilon Vector.

Her testimony is that of the Church. That testimony? <sup>Isa54.1</sup>“Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child; break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not travailed; for the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous than the sons of the married woman,” says the LORD.” The Upsilon Vector.

Her testimony? <sup>Isa54.7</sup>“For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. <sup>8</sup>In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD your Redeemer.” The Upsilon Vector.

But you'll notice these last two testimonies follow straight on the heels of another testimony... the same one to which Jesus directs His disciples' attention. It is His own testimony to the Upsilon Vector. He who had great exaltation in Heaven from all eternity as the Son of God descended to Earth, and there <sup>Isa53.3</sup>“He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him... <sup>7</sup>He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth...” Down, down.

But His Upsilon Vector turns around. <sup>Isa53.10</sup>“The LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. <sup>11</sup>As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. <sup>12</sup>Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to

death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.” <sup>Act2.24</sup>“But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power... <sup>26</sup>Therefore my heart was glad and my tongue exulted; moreover my flesh also will abide in hope; <sup>27</sup>because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Hades, nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.” The Upsilon Vector.

### **B. Painful Perplexity of Not Seeing Jesus**

The disciples’ Upsilon Vector is inextricably linked to Jesus’ Upsilon Vector. He will go to the cross and die and be buried in the tomb. Their grief, sorrow, and anguish will be crushing. In addition to the utter grief of losing their Friend, their Teacher, their Lord, and their Hope, Peter would lament his denial of Jesus. In their bewildered heads, James and John would not be able to prevent reruns playing of their conversations about greatness. And when it all became unbearable any longer, they’d shuffle in despair down to their boats to go fishing and catch nothing... until Jesus appears.

When you love Jesus, it is perplexing and painful not to see Him. All around you there is giddy celebration, intoxication with entertainment that shocks even the most frayed strand of rightness. Or your health is failing. Or your family, or your marriage is coming apart at the seams and there is no direction but down. Or the spiritual condition of the church is insipid and lukewarm, and haughtily unaware of the gathering storm and armies marching against her. She has forgotten her history lessons and is unwilling to remember that she will have to relearn them. Nevertheless she is the beloved child of God, and in His love He will not fail to chasten His Church. And the most painful and effective chastening is that in which it seems impossible to see Jesus anywhere.

### **C. Joyful Jubilation of Seeing Jesus**

But Jesus will return, just as surely as He arose from the dead. The disciples would see Him again, and You will see Him again. <sup>Isa35.10</sup>“And the ransomed of the LORD will return and come with joyful shouting to Zion, with everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.” The Upsilon Vector.

The Lord graciously gives glimpses of it even in this life. His Word itself is the greatest and the only perfectly reliable glimpse. Our senses and our emotions fail us, but in the Word we find the way of escape from every temptation that we may be able to endure it. <sup>2Co4.16</sup>“Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.” The Upsilon Vector.

## **IV. Receiving**

Scripture is inerrant. If your experience does not seem to accord with Scripture, you don’t yet understand your experience. If you do not believe in Jesus, you do not yet have an Upsilon Vector. But if you are a believer, your Upsilon Vector is inextricably linked to Jesus’ Upsilon Vector. As surely as Jesus has an Upsilon Vector, so surely do you.

God is sovereign. Your Upsilon Vector cannot come from you. Don’t make the mistake that various monastic orders have made throughout history. They thought they had to create their own Upsilon Vectors. You cannot gain your exaltation by afflicting yourself with external ascetic actions. You have been freed to live in and with joy; to live in and with community. You have peace with God, so have peace with God. You have life, so have life and live life for Christ. You have comfort, so comfort God’s people.

Nevertheless, when God brings humbling circumstances into your experience, <sup>1Pe5.6</sup>“humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, <sup>7</sup>casting all

your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you... <sup>10</sup>After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. <sup>11</sup>To Him be dominion forever and ever.” The Upsilon Vector.

This is a new year. You have experienced the Upsilon Vector in the past year, and you will experience it again this year. Joyful jubilation will not come without painful perplexity. But always remember this: painful perplexity will not come without joyful jubilation. This was true for Christ Himself, and it is true for all who are united to Him by faith. The world enjoys (for a short while) the superstition of expecting life to get better due to some calendrical power that emanates from the descent of a well-lit ball. It is worthy of notice that you never see that ball turn around and go back up. The ball of confusion—no matter how well-lit—has no Upsilon Vector. Only a straight vector. But you do have an Upsilon Vector, and you’ll see it this year.

And remember: Jesus has borne your sins in His painful perplexity on the cross. Though you will grieve and lament your sins, *you will not bear their guilt*. Christ became sin for you, that you might become the righteousness of God in Him. Jesus has borne the corruption of your soul in His painful perplexity on the cross. Though you will suffer the ardor of the refiner’s fire and the launderer’s soap, <sup>Mal3.2</sup> *you will not bear the punishment for your iniquities*. Therefore you may consider it all joy when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. <sup>Jas1.2</sup>

Whether your trial be health, career, business, or church viability; or even spiritual darkness, if you are in Christ you are on the Upsilon Vector. Life in Christ follows the Upsilon Vector. Painful perplexity will not come without joyful jubilation.

Yes, we can be real here: Happy New Year! Expect painful perplexity and expect joyful jubilation. Expect them both... confidently. Anticipate them both... eagerly.

After all, you are not far from Christ who *is* your Upsilon Vector.