

Three Keys to Enduring Peace

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Bible Text: John 16:25-33
Preached on: Sunday, March 4, 2012

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You probably saw the news of the horrific tornado outbreak that took place in the Midwest just 48 hours ago, not even 48 hours ago. Those tornadoes went right through where I'm going to pastor and no one in our flock was immediately affected by it, but family members lost homes, there was a fatality in an extended family, other people lost their homes and so it was a very devastating time. The news report said it's a once in 20 year kind of storm which would be comforting except that they had a similar one about 11 months ago, I guess. I guess the cycles are starting to accelerate there, but there are sweet people back there obviously tremendously affected by that. And I had the opportunity this morning to preach to them via video link this morning and I say that simply to say that what I said to them I'm going to say to you here this morning because my heart was heavy to give them something to kind of hang their thoughts on in the midst of that crisis as they are literally just picking through the rubble of homes and trying to find whatever keepsakes are left, and the devastation, of course, is very severe.

That's the background to what I want to bring to you here this morning. Turn in your Bibles to the Gospel of John 16. I have preached on this passage in the past. It has been several years but John 16, I love this passage for many reasons, one is that it's part of the inspired word of God and like you, I love all of the word of God whether it's Leviticus 15 or John 16. It's all equally sweet. "Thy words were like honey to my mouth," the Old Testament says. But John 16:25 is where we are going to begin. Jesus is speaking to his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion and he's speaking to them and I'm going to read down through verse 33 just to set the passage in your mind for this morning. Jesus said to his disciples, the 11 that were gathered around,

25 "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. 26 In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; 27 for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father. 28 I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father." 29 His disciples said, "Lo, now You are speaking plainly and are not using a figure of speech. 30 Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe

that You came from God." 31 Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe?
32 Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be
scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not
alone, because the Father is with Me. 33 These things I have spoken to
you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation,
but take courage; I have overcome the world."

That's a really lofty statement from the Lord there at the end of verse 33, isn't it? For someone to say, "I have overcome the world," to look at the world in its totality and its evil and its opposition and for Jesus Christ to say, "I have overcome that. I have conquered it," is a magnificent statement of highest proportions, and we will get to that in due time here this morning.

But as I said, Jesus here is spending his final night with his disciples and he is preparing them for a time that is just about to occur. You see that in verse 32 where he says, "an hour is coming, and has already come." It's an urgent moment that he is addressing with his disciples and what he is addressing with them is the fact that he is no longer going to be with them. Their Master, their Lord, their Shepherd was about to depart. Judas at this point had already gone off to betray him, taking his sin-sick, devil-dominated soul away to betray the Master that he had known for three years, would ultimately betray him with a kiss. But for this moment, Judas had been removed from the room and Jesus was left with his 11 disciples and Jesus knows exactly what's about to happen. He's about to be crucified and he knows that that is going to send severe shock waves through the disciples and it's going to be something that is going to test their faith beyond the breaking point. They would run. They would run home. They would abandon him. Despite the promises that all of them had made, Matthew tells us that they all said the same thing, that even if they had to die with him, they would not leave him, Jesus knew that that was all bravado that would not stand the test that was about to come to them. So with the cross hanging over his head, Jesus turns away from his own needs and strengthens his disciples for what is about to come, and in the process he gives them principles, principles that would give them peace.

Look again at verse 33 with me. He says, "I'm saying these things to you so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." What he said there was designed to strengthen them but the principles that he enunciates in that brief passage are principles that also give us peace while we live in a fallen world, in a world filled with disaster, a world filled with temptations and trials and sorrows that break the human heart. Jesus gives us principles and gives us things to see that give us peace that transcends the circumstances and we should love him for it.

Well, look at verse 25 with me. What I'm going to do here is I'm just going to quickly go through the first eight verses of this passage to kind of get a running start into verse 33, and then in verse 33 is where I'll give you the structure to the message basically. But I want to do the run up into it, look at verse 25 with me again. Jesus here has been speaking in the Upper Room since the beginning of John 13 and so he has been speaking

at length about the coming of the Spirit, the future where he will go and prepare a place, he is the vine and they are the branches, and there are a lot of figurative things that he was saying to them. Look at verse 25. He said, "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father." And basically what he's saying here is you can kind of think he's calling a little bit of a time out. He's taking a little pause in what he's saying and he says, "I know that I have been saying things to you that are hard to understand. I've been speaking in figurative things that are difficult, but understand," he tells them, "an hour is coming when you're going to hear things plainly. There is an hour of clarity coming that will transcend and be better than what you have heard so far. It's going to click with you." And as you study this passage in its context, we don't have time to go into it, it seems clear especially in what he had said in earlier verses, that he is referring to the time when the Holy Spirit would come and indwell the disciples after the resurrection of Christ. The Holy Spirit would come and indwell them, he would illuminate them, he would expand their capacity to understand, he would deepen their understanding, and the things that they now only saw in figurative ways in shadows would suddenly become clear because Christ was going to come in the person of his Spirit and explain to them the things of the Father.

So as he goes on, look at verse 26, he says, "In that day," you can see he's looking forward, "In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father." What's going on here with what Jesus is saying to them? What does this have to do with the context of the crucifixion, the resurrection and the coming ascension? What does this have to do with the disciples being left alone physically in the world? What Jesus is doing here is he is giving them assurance and he is giving them comfort. He wants the disciples to understand that God the Father himself loves them. God the Father himself has their best interest at heart. And even though Christ was about to depart from them in bodily form thus leaving a physical absence when they had been accustomed to him over the prior three years, what he wanted them to see was that there was an enduring principle of the love of the Father that was going to continue to be operative in their lives even after he departed. He said, "Things are going to change but understand that in a profound way, things are not going to change at all because the Father's love is going to abide, the Father's providence, the Father's guidance in your life, the Father's provision for your life, the Father's protection in your life, is going to abide even after I depart."

That's the sense that he's enforcing upon their minds and to reinforce that point, to emphasize it, to show to them conclusively that the love of the Father was something that they could depend upon, look at what he says in verse 28. I like this. He says, "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father." Look at that verse. It starts with a sense of the Father, "I came forth from the Father," and now he says, "I'm going back to the Father." He is telling them that his mission began in the heart of God the Father to begin with. God the Father sent the Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins and it's really a statement, it's a statement of his deity, of his preexistence, that he existed before he came into the world.

He came forth from the Father into the world in the Incarnation, but that was only for a time. He was always designed to do his work on Calvary and then ascend back to the Father and Jesus is telling them, what he's saying to them here in the context of the love of the Father is to understand that, "My mission here on earth, my purpose here, the whole reason that you have come to know me in this physical body and the whole reason that you have received my love and instruction and witness to my miracles, understand that the whole loving purpose of God the Father was operative in all of that. It started in eternity past, it started with the Father, I came forth from him, and now I am going back there. My whole mission began and ends with the Father. Understand, therefore, that when I leave, his mission carries on. The whole reason that he sent me carries on and so you can have confidence in the love of the Father because it was the love of the Father that sent me in the first place." In a sense, he's transferring their affection and their loyalty and their expectations from tying it strictly to his physical presence to the greater sense of the mission of the Father. That's what he's doing there and in the process he is teaching them that this loving Father who sent Christ in the first place, certainly isn't going to abandon them in the absence of Christ. The Father was intrinsic to the DNA of what the disciples loved in Christ. They are of one essence. They were united in purpose and, therefore, that summary was what was designed to give them a sense of assurance that would endure after Christ was physically gone.

Now, Jesus having said that, the disciples had a flash of understanding, or so they thought, in verse 29. Look at verse 29 here. Remember, Jesus is leading up to give them peace and that is why he emphasized the love of the Father to them and his disciples responded. They interacted. They talked back and forth and in verse 29, "His disciples said, 'Lo, now You are speaking plainly and are not using a figure of speech. Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God.'" And there's a statement of confidence in that. "Now we understand. Now we get it. Now we see. We believe. There is no need to question you. You know all things." So they are very excited about what they have just heard and they are verbalizing their sense of understanding. The disciples think that their difficulties had been cleared up. They didn't get the picture, really. They were assured of Christ's divine origin and they are feeling confident. They say, "Hey, we get it. This is great. Now we have it."

Time out here. Look at it from the perspective of what ultimately unfolded. In that snapshot moment of time, they're saying, "We know. We understand. We get it. We are so encouraged and confident." A few hours later, they were going to flee. They were going to scatter. When the Roman army came, they were going to run for their lives. Jesus, of course, knew that and Jesus knew what was coming but the disciples at that moment were not aware despite all the warnings that Jesus had given them. Here's what I want you to see in that and this is directly personal, directly applicable to each one of us: their confession of faith as they stated it there was fine as far as it went. They were absolutely accurate in what they said. Jesus does know all things. There is really no need for anyone to question him. He did come from God and everything that they were saying was true and accurate. But they were not as advanced as they thought. They were not at all where they thought they were spiritually. They thought they were up here, they were

actually down below ground level in terms of where their actual faith and their actual courage would be.

So Jesus questions them and tests them and pushes back against them and Jesus does this so often. It would be a great study to pursue sometime and hopefully sometime in the future I'll have a time to do that. You would think if you just read this passage superficially, you would think that Jesus would affirm what they just said and applaud them because, after all, the whole context of this passage was to try to encourage them, right? He wants to give them peace. So they say some things that are true and Jesus pushes back and says, "Do you now believe? Do you think you've really arrived?" You see, their faith was sincere as far as it went but it was about to be exposed to a more severe test than they could imagine. The Roman army would soon take Jesus captive. They would run. And what we see here in this passage is that overconfident disciples are not prepared for difficult trials. These disciples were confident, "Lord, now we understand," and you could snap your fingers and then you couldn't find them because they had run. They thought they were stronger than they really were. Jesus knew in advance that they were going to fail and he was preparing them for their temporary failure before later on, after the coming of the Spirit, they would go out and establish the church.

Two things that I want to reemphasize here. Overconfident disciples are not prepared for difficult trials and Jesus knew that failure was going to come and he loved them anyway and was preparing them for what would come after that. If you think about it, those words can bring encouragement to you today if you are a broken disciple of Christ. You thought that you were a giant for Christ. You thought that you were ready for whatever life could bring and you would stand like a rock, stand like a pillar, and not flinch in the face of adversity, not flinch when the trials hit. Oh, you've seen the others that have fallen away but you would stand firm. You would be strong. You would be the one who would stand like a man and not be afraid. You were the one who was going to resist temptation and not fail. And then here you are today with a sad experience teaching you that your life didn't prove to measure up to all of the lofty boastful claims that you had made in the past. Maybe it's just the internal reality of your spiritual life, not a visible outward failure that any of us would see, but you sit here and you are broken and you realize, "I have fallen short and my life has not measured up to the boasts of my youth." A giant for Christ but now a trial has shaken you to the core and you are torn, torn between the real struggles of your heart and the outward pretense that you have established before men.

Well, there is encouragement here in this very point for you. Understand this, it's humbling but it's graciously encouraging: Jesus knew all along that you were not as strong as you thought you were. Jesus knew all along that your lofty claims to understanding and depth of insight and spiritual strength, that the reality didn't measure up to the boasts of your lips. And now that these present trials have come or the past trials that humbled you, understand that God designed all of that for your good. And here's what was going on in the midst of that in whatever other permutations of implications you could say about your trials: when trials come that humble you that deeply, when life comes and crushes you in the crucible, in the mortar, as it were, and grinds you up and

you just see all that is left is your weakness and your boasts simply taunt you from the past, understand this, God is doing a good spiritual work in your life. God is teaching you and has been teaching you to abandon your self-trust and to put your confidence in Christ alone; that all of those lofty claims were simply the boasts of spiritual immaturity.

What did Paul say in his maturity at the end or on the other side of all of his pastoral trials and the thorn in the flesh, whatever that was the tortured him and humbled him? In 2 Corinthians 12 he said, "I had the surpassing greatness of the revelations but for this reason to keep me from exalting myself, God gave me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me to keep me from exalting myself." And if you know something about being tormented under trials, understand that one of the primary purposes of God sending that trial into your life was to humble you and to keep you from exalting yourself; so that those foolish boasts of youthful spiritual immaturity would no longer come from your lips and be purged from your heart.

Paul goes on to say it's a good thing. He said, "I prayed three times that it might leave me." You can read in your own quantity there: 40 times, 80 times, 2,000 times. It only took Paul three. He was a quick learner, I guess. And look at what God said to him in response, verse 9, 2 Corinthians 12:9, God "has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." Understand, beloved, that what the Lord has been doing in your life if this resonates with you at all, the whole point of this was to humble you and to make you realize that you cannot depend upon your own strength, you cannot boast in your own understanding. You must learn to get rid of that self-trust and put your focus on Christ and Christ alone and trust in him. Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding."

I can say this in love and I can say it because I'm still learning it myself, but for all of us in this room, we are still far too prone to lean on our own understanding; that our confidence and courage rises or falls based on what we see, what we understand and whether the path ahead looks smooth or rocky. Now, understand that when that is what causes, you know, when your confidence rises and falls based on what you see, understand that that is the mark – this is so humbling but it needs to be said – that is the mark of spiritual immaturity because the God who rules over circumstances is not constrained by few or by many. So if you're truly trusting the Lord to lead your path, truly trusting him to provide for you no matter what, truly satisfied in his all sufficiency, then the external circumstances fade into insignificance because your mind is so engrossed with the greatness of God and that never changes. But when you fluctuate, when you see yourself fluctuating – I am trying to help you here – understand that it fluctuates because you're trusting in yourself, trusting in your own strength, trusting in your own understanding, instead of divorcing yourself from that and saying, "Lord, thy will be done. Give us this day our daily bread. Lead us not into temptation." The whole Lord's prayer is a statement of dependency and seeking the glory of God.

So to the extent that those trials have weighed down on you, understand that God has designed them for your good, for your spiritual good, and part of the spiritual good that is meant to come out of that is that you would learn to be satisfied in weakness just like the Apostle Paul described for us. You all get that, right? It's okay to nod your heads. Look, I'm not going to be here much more. You might as well just nod your head and, you know, tell me that you get it.

Now look at verse 32. Jesus hints at, a pretty broad hint, at their coming defection in verse 32. "Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone." Just look at that for a moment. These are the men that were closest to Christ and they were all going to scatter and Christ was going to be left alone. And what is he doing in the midst of that solitary confinement, if I can put it that way? He was ministering to them. He was loving them. He was preparing them. This is just another evidence of the total self-denial of our Lord that knowing that he was about to be left alone, he is continuing to minister to his disciples and strengthen them.

He says, "You're going to scatter but I'm not alone because the Father is with Me." Even Christ manifested this total satisfaction of being in the presence of God the Father. That is what sustained him even though men abandoned him, even though men betrayed him. And even though men betray you and sometimes, you know, you feel the weight of that, come back to this. "Okay, they've left me alone. Do you know what? That's okay because the Father is with me."

Now, with all of that said, we use a little bit of radar of the context of this passage to understand what Jesus is doing here. Jesus is not rebuking his disciples here. Even as he tells them that they are going to scatter, even though he challenges them and pushes back, "Do you now believe?" he's not rebuking them. He is saying this to encourage them and build them up.

Look at verse 33, he says, "These things I have spoken to you." What things? The things he had just said. This isn't complicated. "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me," what? "You may have peace." One source defines "peace" in this way, it says that peace is a state of being that lacks nothing and has no fear of being troubled in its tranquility. Just that sense of confidence, that sense of present satisfaction and a lack of fear looking into the future. Confidence looking to the future, that I have a tranquility that is grounded in eternal and changing spiritual realities and therefore my present position of peace cannot ultimately be assaulted.

Now, in saying that and what we're going to see in the rest of verse 33, we're going to see three principles for having peace in a troubled world, three principles for having peace in a troubled world in what's left in our time together and in the last half of verse 33. It really falls out very nicely from the words that Jesus gave. Let's look at the last half of verse 33 and then I'll take you through them. Jesus said, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." Right there is what we need for peace, beloved. He gives us three things for us to look at and the first one I would say is this, we would put it this way. First of all, if you want to have that kind of enduring

peace, first of all, the first point for today is: recognize the obstacles. Recognize the obstacles.

Look at the first clause in that last sentence. Jesus said, "In the world you have tribulation." This word "tribulation" includes the idea of pressure. It's a multifaceted word that can refer to outward circumstances that squeeze us, but it can also be used to refer to the internal afflictions of the heart, the fears, the anxieties. And in this context, Jesus is immediately referring to how the disciples were going to scatter. Pressure was going to come upon them as they saw the power of the Roman army exercised against their Shepherd, and that pressure was going to be too much and it was going to cause them to scatter. But in the broader context of what Jesus is teaching here, in the broader context of what that word "pressure" means, understand that Jesus here is referring to all of the troubles that come from a fallen world. You and I are going to face pressure in this world. We live in a fallen world. We live in a sin-cursed world. The world is turned upside down. The natural disasters and the sorrows and death that come are all a result of the fact that man has sinned against his Creator and this world is cursed. So of course you're going to have difficulty. Of course you're going to have trouble. It's the nature of the environment in which we live.

Think about it this way: if Jesus had sufferings, those of us who are his disciples are going to have our own sufferings as well. The trials, the nature of them, will differ from person to person but they will all be divinely orchestrated for your good. You are uniquely suited to rise to the occasion of the trials that God brings into your life, but at this point, the point is to realize that there are going to be obstacles to your peace, to your spiritual growth. There are going to be obstacles that come. Trouble will be part of your fabric of life here on earth.

Now, I have a question at that point: how does that encourage peace? I mean, if he had said, "Look, I'm going to clear out the troubles and it's going to be a four lane wide road for you, smooth. You're going to see ahead." I could see that leading to peace and that bringing comfort. You know, if that was the case, then, you know, pedal to the metal. Let's go. But Jesus is saying there are going to be sharp curves and potholes in the road and it's going to be a tough drive. How does that help have peace, I want to know?

Well, I understand it this way: what Jesus is doing here is an illustration of the principle to be forewarned is to be forearmed. If you know in advance that troubles are going to come, if you know in advance that your trials are an expected part of Christian living, then they do not have to throw you off of your game, so to speak, when they happen. No matter what the manifestation of them is, you step back and you realize, "Oh, pressure. Oh, tribulation. Oh, trials. This is what Jesus said to expect. I am not on unfamiliar terrain. This was to be expected all along. I get it. If Jesus suffered, I'll suffer. If it was hard for Christ, there will be times where it's hard for me. It's not a question of if they will come, it's only a question of how they will come, only a question of when they will come."

It's not wise for me to speak about commercial airplanes in the presence of commercial pilots of which there are multiple ones in here so I'm just going to make a really simple point and try to keep myself out of trouble. Commercial airplanes have instruments that are designed to give the pilot reference points to stay on course even when he can't see where he's going. He's flying through a storm, he's looking at the altitude readings, making sure the wings are level, then radar and all of that, all of those things designed, the instruments designed to show him that he is on track even though he can't see it physically with his eyes, right? Simple point. Well, understand that one of your spiritual instruments in your trials is to recognize that obstacles are an inherent part of the Christian life. It is woven into the fabric of your existence as a disciple of Christ. Take heart. That's the whole point. Understand. Be encouraged. Jesus warned you in advance. Your life is not off course simply because you're having trials no more than a plane is off course simply because it's going through some storms. You can be going through the storm and be right on track.

That's what Jesus is teaching us here. He warned us. He told us that tribulations aren't a sign that something is wrong. You're just having the expected experience of Christian life so relax. This was to be expected. This was something that God orchestrated for your good from the beginning of time. You're just having tribulation so recognize the obstacles and don't let them throw you off course spiritually. Don't panic. Do not panic in the midst of your trials. You must stop that. You must stop the restless anxiety that you allow to compel your mind into unfruitful ways of thinking. You've got to stop that. These obstacles were to be expected all along.

And so recognizing them, what do you do? It's not enough simply to recognize the obstacles, you have to go further. That's a starting point. You say, "Okay, this is to be expected." Well, what do you do? Second point, when you face the obstacles, when they come into your life, what do you do? Point 2: you rise to the occasion. You rise to the occasion. When overwhelming trials come into your life and the challenges to your faith are great and you don't know what tomorrow is going to bring, you must be a spiritual man and stand up and say, "I am not going to cower to fear, I am not going to buckle to anxiety, I am not going to distrust God in the midst of this. I'm going to rise to the occasion and be the man of faith that Christ has called me to be." You rise to the occasion.

Look at verse 33 with me again. Jesus said, "In the world you have tribulation," here it is, "but take courage." Take courage. This word calls us to manifest strength in the face of adversity. Let's get a sense of its meaning. I want you to see the kind of adversity. It's a word that Jesus used a lot and let's just go back to the book of Matthew for a few illustrations of how Jesus used this particular word. Keep your finger in John 16 and we'll come back there in just a moment. Just a couple of three illustrations here of Jesus using this word.

Look at Matthew 9 and I'm going to assume your familiarity with these incidents, these historical incidents from the life of Christ. Matthew 9:1, Jesus got "into a boat, Jesus crossed over the sea and came to His own city." Look at verse 2, "And they brought to

Him a paralytic lying on a bed." Stop right there. Paralytic so incapacitated that his friends had to carry him to Jesus. What does Jesus say to him? "Seeing their faith," not only his faith but the faith of his friends who brought him to Christ, "Jesus said to the paralytic," in the midst of these adverse circumstances that had no human solution, Jesus said, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven. Take courage. Manifest strength. Rise to the occasion. Trust me. Your sins are forgiven."

Turn over to verse 20 of Matthew 9. A paralytic told to take courage, that's contrary to human experience but the Son of God can say that because he is not bound by human experience. He is not bound by human limitations and so he can speak into our troubles and say, "Take courage," even if you don't see the solution. Chapter 9, verse 20 of Matthew, "a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind Him and touched the fringe of His cloak; for she was saying to herself, 'If I only touch His garment, I will get well.'" The simplest of faith. Reaching out to Christ. Jesus turned and said to her, "'Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.' At once the woman was made well." After a 12 year trial that no doctor could obviously solve for her, Jesus looks at her and says, "Take courage, your faith has made you well. Be strong in the midst of your adversity. Rise up to the occasion and triumph over it."

One more, Matthew 14:22, the account of Jesus walking on water. Matthew 14:22. I hear those pages turning and it's a good encouragement to me. Matthew 14:22, Jesus "made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away. After He had sent the crowds away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray; and when it was evening, He was there alone. But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea." Don't you love how Scripture just incidentally says things that are totally miraculous and impossible? "Ah, he's walking on the sea." Wait a minute, what? He was walking where? "He's walking on the sea." Keep going, verse 26, "When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, 'It is a ghost!' And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, 'Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.'"

In the midst of a storm that was beyond human control, in the midst of hemorrhaging that was beyond human control, in the midst of paralysis that was beyond human control, Jesus spoke to each one and said, "Take courage. Be strong in the face of this adversity and trust me and do not be afraid." Take courage, then, means to have confidence; to have firmness of purpose in the face of danger or testing. Adversity comes but you gather strength to face it and to fulfill the duty of faith and trust that your Savior calls you to. You rise to the occasion, in other words, and say, "Whoa, this one is big!" Okay, then you be big too. Just rise to whatever level of the occasion it is, rise beyond it and trust in the supernatural power of Christ to sustain you through it and trust his love and goodness to be faithful to you in the end.

Now, I want to say something really important here. When we talk about rising to the occasion, when you hear stories of spiritual greatness, we usually hear that illustrated from preachers who want to talk about the really dramatic encounters where the very

faith of the Scriptures was on the line. Luther standing before the Catholic Church and saying, "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me. Amen." And you know, faith is on the line, the Reformation in its infancy is on the line and now Luther rose to the occasion. And he did, praise God that he did. We all stand on his shoulders, in a sense. But I want you to understand something really important: if that is the only way that we think about it, if that's the only way that we think about the greatness of faith, the greatness of rising to the occasion, we have made it far too distant, we have made it far too remote and we have missed the application of the principle.

For each one of us there is the opportunity to rise to the occasion. Listen, you and I rise to the occasion when we trust God and refuse to cave into fear of the future. Even if it's just a private little thing that you're concerned about, that you say, "No, I need to rise to the occasion here. I need to trust Christ and I am not going to capitulate to that fear," you are rising to the occasion. You don't have to be Luther, is what I'm saying, in order to be faithful to what this text is teaching us. You rise to the occasion when you find contentment in times of need. You rise to the occasion when you serve a spouse that is difficult to live with. The spiritual success is not diminished simply because it occurs in the mundane details of life. The spiritual success occurs when you are responding to the words of Christ as they are recorded for us in Scripture. And when Christ says, "Don't fear. Take courage. Rise to the occasion," and you do that, when you do that, you are doing something of eternal significance. You are doing what your soul was created to do. You are doing what the purpose of your life is which is to glorify God and be satisfied in him.

So don't discount the opportunities that are in front of you and say, "Oh, you know, this isn't what books are written about." Not on earth it's not, but the book's being written in heaven and no act of faithfulness to Christ will be forgotten by him. Jesus said, "A cup of cold water in my name, you won't lose your reward." Cold water, a cup of cold water? We throw that out. Jesus says, "I don't. I don't throw out those acts of faithfulness. I keep track of them and I'm going to honor you and bless you for them." And that is your motivation to rise to the occasion and to be faithful on Tuesday afternoon and Thursday morning and Friday at noon.

And you don't let sorrow detract you from that. You don't let disappointment and confusion and questions detract you from that. No, you rise to the occasion. You look beyond the circumstances. And every one of us, every single one of us in this room that names the name of Christ should have it deep in our hearts to say this, to say, "My Father, my heavenly Father, loves me. My heavenly Father is in control. My heavenly Father intends good to me and therefore I will not yield to anxiety or discouragement in the midst of this adversity." That is the duty of every one of us in this room to respond to all of life that way.

And beloved, it is our privilege to respond to life that way. This is supernatural living. This is taking God at his word and letting it shape the entire way you view life. It's a big deal. Of course it's a big deal, we are speaking about it straight out of the inspired word

of God. The God who created the universe spoke these words and we are responding to him. It's a big deal to God even if it never appears in the newspapers of life.

Now, we've said that you recognize the obstacles, you rise to the occasion, thirdly, your ultimate rising to the occasion is this, point 3 is this: you rest in the Overcomer. You rest in the Overcomer. Look at the end of verse 33 with me. So much in this simple sentence, huh? A sentence that is so simple that a child could understand it, so deep and rich that it takes a lifetime to work it out. Jesus said, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage." On what grounds, O God? On what grounds, O Christ, should I take courage? Here it is, Jesus says, "I have overcome the world." That's an astonishing statement. On so many levels, that is an astonishing statement. Number 1, understand that it's Jesus' self-assessment of how he is approaching the cross. He is approaching the cross without fear. It's a statement of the total defeat of the world system that someone has overcome it and defeated it.

Now, outsiders, the mockers that were around the cross, saw in the cross the defeat of Christ and of course they did. You know, nailed to a cross, hands, feet, crown of thorns mocking you on your head, people standing around mocking you, looking on your shame. At least that's what atypical crucifixion was. They look at that and see defeat. Jesus says, "Here's my victory." He goes to the cross not in gloom but as a victor.

How could he say that? How could Jesus say that, "I have overcome the world"? I mean, stepping back from it looking at it from an outside perspective, that's almost delusional. "You've overcome the world? You have no wealth. You never had a place to lay your head in your adult life. You have no status. Your own disciple is betraying you to the authorities as you speak. You can't even generate loyalty to one of your inner circle and you call yourself a victor? Your closest friends are about to abandon you. You're going to be left alone. By what criteria do you declare victory over the world, that you have conquered the world when the world is just about to crucify you?" This is insanity by human standards.

Jesus sure doesn't look like a world beater here, does he? Motley crew of people that are about to leave him. He does not meet any worldly definition of success. Let me say it again: he does not meet any worldly definition of success. Ah, but maybe there's the key, any worldly definition of success. Maybe we have our definitions wrong. Maybe we totally don't get it. Maybe we should look at it from God's perspective. The whole fury of hell had been unleashed against the Son of God and he did not flinch. He did not flinch from obedience to the Father. He spoke the truth even though the truth cost him his life. He did not return evil for evil but he gave a blessing instead. He looked down on those who were crucifying and said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they are doing."

The world can't do that. That's a total victory over what the world would demand. He loved his own, he loved these unfaithful disciples all the way to the end. He shed his lifeblood as a sacrifice as the Prince of Peace, the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God. He shed his blood in total self-sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins for everyone who

would believe in him. In spite of the provocations, Jesus never failed once. In spite of the personal cost, he lay down his life. You and I should be the first ones to acknowledge, "Yes, Jesus did overcome the world." You and I should be the first that feel the weight of humility on our hearts, that just want to bow at his feet, to bow in utter humility, to bow in utter worship to him and say, "Lord, there is no one like you and there never will be. There never has been, there never will be. You own a position of unique prominence in the universe. You own a position of unique prominence in all of eternity and my heart responds to you in humble worship." Did he overcome the world? Of course he overcame the world. His tranquility was intact. His obedience to the Father was undiminished. Jesus Christ was an impeccable spiritual success. He has overcome the world.

Now, go back to verse 33 with me. Look at this. In the context of everything that we've said, let the power of these words from the lips of our Lord permeate your spirit, permeate your understanding, change the way that you live life. Jesus said, "In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." How does the victory of Christ help us take courage, that's the question? Listen beloved, by the immeasurable grace and goodness of God, the victory of Christ belongs to you. By the immeasurable grace and goodness of God, the same power that enabled Christ to have that kind of victory over the world, is the same power that dwells in you. We who have the indwelling Holy Spirit as believers in Christ have the same power that enabled him to have victory over the world. Romans 8:11 says, "if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." The Spirit raised Christ, the Spirit is going to raise you. The power of Christ is the power that dwells in you. Everything pertaining to life and godliness God has planted in you through the indwelling Holy Spirit. You have already resident within you the power to rise to the occasion of every trial that you have ever faced, that you are now facing, and that you ever will face in this life. There is no reason for any one of us not to be a spiritual success in the sense that we have defined it here by the life of Christ. That is what God has given to us as his children. You have Christ's power now and you will share in his heavenly glory in the future.

Turn back to John 14, speaking of peace, speaking of confidence. John 14:1, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." It's not just that we have the spiritual power now, the immediate presence of Christ is the future of each one of us that believe in him. He will come again. You will be with him forever in that place that he is preparing for us. And the whole point of this is let that powerful unconquerable truth bring peace to your heart, peace that gives you the power to overcome.

Now listen, if you are not a Christian, this does not belong to you. You don't need that subjective peace, you need objective peace, you need to be reconciled to God through faith in Christ. Jesus died so that sinners could have peace with God. John 1:12 says, "as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name." If this has all been foreign to you, outside your

experience, if there is no resonating in your heart with your past spiritual experience, realize that the Holy Spirit is opening your eyes to see that you are outside of Christ and you need to come to him in saving faith. You need to repent of your sins and trust in Christ and find that true peace of God and enter into this life that leads to glory.

Father, we come. We thank you for the wonder of the cross. We thank you for the wonder of our Savior who truly did overcome the world and now shares his victory with us. Lord, open the hearts and minds of those who do not believe so that they might see the glory of Christ, that you would lead them to saving faith. For those of us that know you, Father, O God, help us to be faithful and help us to rise to the occasion. When anxiety nips at our heels, let us turn to Christ in humble dependence, recognizing our weakness but finding the perfection of strength in our glorious, matchless, wonderful Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ. It's in his name we pray. Amen.

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