

I Have Overcome

John 16:29-33

Call: Ps 27:1, 13-14 (ESV)

Scripture: Phil 4:4-9 (NIV)

I. Intro

Good morning! The story is told of a group of seminary students and a janitor. The students were, for a season, playing basketball in a nearby high school gym. While they played, the janitor, who graciously allowed the seminarians to use the gym, would borrow one of their Bibles and spend the hour reading it. One day, one of the young men asked the janitor, "What have you been reading in the Bible?" "Revelation," he replied. The seminarian chuckled, "Yeah, right." "No, really," said the janitor. The seminarian then remembered that his professor said no one really understands the strange book, so he asked, "Do you understand what you have been reading?" "Oh, yes," replied the now smiling janitor. Chuckling again, the seminarian asked, almost sarcastically, "Well then, tell me what it means." The janitor looked to his right and then to his left, leaned into the seminarian's ear and whispered, "It means that Jesus is gonna win!"

Actually, it's even better than that. What the janitor could have said is "Jesus has already won," or to use the word from our passage in John today, "Jesus has already *overcome!*" (Johnson, 19-20).

Let's pray

Father, as we come to your Word this morning, we ask for you to help us understand and not only understand, but to make it come alive in our lives like never before. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Review

Today, we find ourselves at the end of the main section of the Upper Room Discourse. In September, we began this section in chapter 14 with Jesus telling his disciples to not be anxious or afraid. And, why? Because he is the way, the truth and the life. As we've progressed through chapters 14 – 16, we've explored Jesus' teaching about the Holy Spirit, the one whom he calls the Paraclete. We've also explored Jesus' teaching about realized prayer, abiding in the vine, friendship with Jesus, persecution by the world, the joy the Spirit brings and God's great love for us. And, now we come to the end of the main discourse where Jesus will once again encourage his anxious, frightened and confused disciples to take heart, to have courage, because he has truly overcome the world.

So, I invite you into our text today, John 16, beginning in verse 29.

II. I Am Not Alone (16:29-33)

29 His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! 30 Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we

believe that you came from God.” 31 Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? 32 Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. 33 I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” (ESV)

A. The Disciple’s Response

It appears the disciples think they have finally figured things out. Jesus – you’re finally speaking in words we understand.

B. Jesus’ Response

But, Jesus responds with essentially, “Are you sure? Let me repeat what I’ve been saying.” He then repeats the details of what is about to take place. Jesus is sure they do not understand the need for his crucifixion, and, yet, that hour has finally come. They will soon be scattered, leaving him all alone. He has promised to not abandon them, but they will abandon him. Isaiah 63:3 will be fulfilled: *“Alone I have trodden the wine press, and from the peoples no one was with me.”* In Jesus’ greatest time of need, when he will confront the ruler of this world, he will be left alone. Against the world that resists, rejects and rebels against God, Jesus will be alone. His disciples will leave him and take refuge in their homes.

Yet, when this happens, Jesus wants to ensure that his disciples understand his mission. Jesus will not be alone. The Father will be with him. And, because of his Father’s presence, Jesus will be right where he’s supposed to be. In other words, when all of it goes down tomorrow, everyone will think Jesus has been conquered, but the presence of the Father will proclaim the exact opposite.

C. Transition

And, then, the well-known words, *“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* In this famous verse, there are three key words which I want to spend the rest of our time exploring, in this order: tribulation, overcome and peace. So, first tribulation.

III. I Have Overcome (16:33)

A. Tribulation

1. Intro

In the world you will have tribulation. Jesus is always realistic about following him. We will have tribulation. Some translations say “affliction.” Some say “trouble.” Some even say “suffering.” Maybe no truer words have ever been spoken. Unfortunately this is a promise.

2. Thlipsis Explanation

The word here is “thlipsis.” A form of this word was used in Jesus’ illustration earlier in chapter 16 for a woman giving birth (John 16:21). After the baby is born, the woman no longer remembers the thlipsis because it has been turned into joy at the presence of the baby.

What can we say about this word thlipsis? Thlipsis is a strong word in the Greek that typically means “pressure,” even “crushing pressure.”

Since we live in California, a good analogy of thlipsis is geological. “Beneath the earth’s crust are tectonic plates, huge masses of rock that slowly, constantly move. Periodically they come up against one another and collide, resulting in an earthquake.” And, we had a pretty good one a few weeks ago didn’t we? “That pressure, the crushing pressure, experienced at the point where the plates collide is thlipsis” (Johnson, 180).

This word is not usually used in the New Testament for the normal frustrations of life, of the normal struggles we face in our world. It is typically used, as here, in connection with the coming of the kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is where God is king, over against the kingdom of man where man is king. And thlipsis occurs when the kingdom of God collides with the kingdom of man. Crushing pressure is experienced where the kingdom of light collides with the kingdom of darkness; where the reign of justice collides with the reign of injustice; where the rule of life collides with the rule of death.

3. Thlipsis For Jesus AND Followers

An example of this happens right after Jesus is born. King Herod, one of the most brilliant but cruel leaders in ancient times, heard about this baby destined to be “king of the Jews” (Matt 2:2). He became threatened by this child-king and responded by murdering all male children under 2 years old around Bethlehem. This thlipsis then continued throughout the life of Jesus, culminating in the cross. And, here the night before the cross, Jesus says his followers will experience the same thlipsis. “*In this world,*” he says, “*You will have tribulation.*” As we seek to live the Jesus way, we will have tribulation. As we seek to abide in Jesus, we will experience affliction. As we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, we will have thlipsis. We will feel crushing pressure as we follow Jesus. That’s a promise.

4. Reason for Thlipsis

And why this pressure? It is *because* we are branches connected to the true vine that we will feel this pressure. And there is an evil one who hates the true vine. Behind all this pressure is the evil one. As Paul says in Ephesians, *12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Eph 6:12).* Jesus, the prince of peace, is opposed by the evil one who is the prince of chaos. Jesus, the light of the world, is opposed by the prince of darkness. Jesus, the resurrection and the life, is opposed by the prince of sin and death. And, we are connected to Jesus. John White says this, “Satan’s supreme object is to hurt Christ and Christ’s cause. You personally are of no interest to him. It is only as you relate to Christ that you assume significance in the enemy’s eyes” (Johnson, 71). As we get closer and closer to Jesus, who is the real target, we get more and more shrapnel, more and more pressure, more and more thlipsis. But, don't panic. This is expected, Jesus says. As they say, “It is live fish that swim upstream against the current; it is dead fish that comfortably float with the current” (Ibid, 72).

5. Practical Matters

I must say that during this time of moral relativity where there seems to be no truth, I feel thlipsis a lot. How do I live the Jesus way in this world today? How do I share the truth of Jesus in love? If all authority has been given Jesus, and he has the last word on everything – the last word in every sphere of human life – in the moral, the scientific, the economic, the sexual, the political, the legal, the medical, in business, in entertainment, in sports – if Jesus has the last word in all of it – how do I live it faithfully? How do I live the values of Jesus authentically as they collide with the values of the world? This is the crushing pressure I feel along the Jesus way.

I also think about our teenagers today who are seeking to be faithful to Jesus at school. They certainly know what Jesus is talking about here. For them, it's the pressure to compromise. Maybe even more so, college students feel the crushing pressure to conform. And, you parents who seek to fulfill your God-given responsibility to raise your children to follow Jesus certainly feel the pressure to live and teach the way, the truth and the life of Jesus. And then, you professionals who seek to work from kingdom values in the board room, in the classroom, on the construction site, in the cubicle, in the restaurant, in the theatre. There is crushing pressure. And, the bottom line is that the more faithful we are to Jesus as Lord, the greater the pressure, the more crushing the pressure. (Johnson, 68).

6. Release the Pressure?

And, notice, Jesus doesn't promise to release the pressure. He doesn't promise to lift the pressure. I wish he would. He doesn't. He allows the pressure to build on his people. That must mean he thinks it's good in some way for his followers. But, how? How can this be good Jesus? Because it is through thlipsis that we prove and improve our faith. It is through trials and tribulation that Jesus refines his people, that Jesus prunes his people, that Jesus strips away excess baggage, in order to bring us back to him, our first love. Jesus uses trials and tribulations to bring us back to clinging to him as our only security and our only hope. Everything else gets stripped away, and we are left with just Jesus.

In the west, we have a lot of other things to cling to. And for me, it is my trips to Liberia where the Liberians teach me all those things are simply excess baggage.

So, Jesus doesn't promise to release the pressure, but he does remind his followers that there is a limit to the pressure. The thlipsis is not forever. There is hope and it is this - he has overcome the world.

B. Overcome

1. Introduction

"In the world you will have thlipsis. But take heart; I have overcome the world." Near the beginning of the main section of this upper room discourse, Jesus encouraged his disciples to *"not be anxious or afraid. As you trust God, trust also in me"* (John 14:1). And, now he ends with this, *"You will have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world."* Trust God,

trust also in me, he says. In other words, be strong and courageous because the final outcome is not up for grabs. The end is secure. Jesus wins, as the janitor told the seminary students.

2. “Nikao”

The word “overcome” here comes from the Greek word “nikao.” It means to be victor, to conquer, to prevail, to overcome. You know this word because you wear Nikes on your feet. Nike, the proper name, means victory.

For you ladies who studied Revelation last year, the majority of this word group occurs in Revelation. And, John uses it there as an encouragement to the church to follow the lamb who has overcome. It occurs so much, John Stott suggests that “*We Shall Overcome*,” a gospel song that became the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement of the 50s and 60s, could actually be “the signature tune of Revelation” (Stott, 246).

3. Fact and Prediction

Jesus says, “*In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*”

In this setting, this statement by Jesus is both fact and prediction.

- The fact is that at that moment in Jesus’ life, the night before the cross, Jesus has not given into the world. He has not cowered before the world. The world has not had its way with him. He has lived his whole life obeying his father. So, at that moment in time, it is already true that he has overcome the world in this way.
- But, it is also a prediction because the next day at the cross, he will overcome the ruler of the world. And, then in the resurrection, a new order will emerge, a whole new world will emerge where sin, evil and death are defeated foes and all authority is given to him. Then, in the ascension, he will take the throne and reign as Lord, where one of his first actions is pouring out the Spirit-paraclete at Pentecost. The point is that now, as Jesus sends us out in the power of the Spirit-paraclete to be salt and light in this world today, we do so not moving toward the victory, but from it. He’s already overcome. Sin, evil and death are already defeated. So, we’re not sent to overcome. We’re sent to move into his overcoming and bear witness to his overcoming. And, how do we bear witness to his overcoming? By following in his footsteps.

4. The Lamb Overcomes

At the beginning of the Gospel of John, John the Baptist points at Jesus and says, “*Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). Jesus overcomes by being a lamb. Yes, Jesus is the lion of Judah, but he overcomes by being a lamb (Rev 5:5). And, not only a lamb, but a lamb that has been slain. The lamb overcomes by going to a cross. The lamb overcomes by sacrificing himself. As Darrell Johnson says,

“This is the secret of history, that the almighty lion reigns as a lamb, ... a lamb, a slaughtered lamb, who doesn’t destroy the small ones to gain power, but who takes the hurts of others onto himself. The lamb reigns by taking the sin [and suffering] of the world upon himself (Johnson, 147)!”

5. Our Witness

Jesus overcomes by being a slain lamb, and we bear witness by following in his footsteps as a lamb; not as a ferocious lion destroying others in meetings or in classrooms or on fields or even in churches; not as a ferocious lion destroying those that look different than us; not as a ferocious lion destroying those not in our tribe. Rather we overcome by being a lamb, by choosing the way of the cross. This is the secret of history. The cross is not only the ground of our salvation, but also the pattern of our salvation. The cross is the throne from which he reigns. And he calls us to join him on that throne. He calls us to take up the cross and deny self daily (Matt 16:24). This is the Jesus way. This is the way of truth and the way to life. This is the way of sacrificial love, a *“just as”* kind of love (John 13:34).

You have heard it said in the newspapers and on the internet, *“An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!”* But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil: But whoever slaps you on the right cheek, Turn to him the other also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, Go with him two. Love your enemies, Do good to those who hate you, Bless those who curse you, Pray for those who mistreat you” (Matt 5:21-48)

You have heard it said in the newspapers and on the internet, *“If it feels good, do it! Go ahead and take revenge! Take out that bad guy! Talk behind their backs!”* But, Jesus says to you, *“Forgive that person, not only seven times, but seventy times seven”* (Matt 18:21-22).

And the newspapers and internet screams, *“It’s foolishness! It’s weakness! It’s utter ridiculousness!”* If we’re honest with ourselves, sometimes we think the same thing.

But this is true wisdom. The Lion does not win by being a lion. Lion-ness, destructive power, is actually weakness and foolishness, for the Lion overcomes by being a lamb, a little lamb. (Johnson, 150). The way of the Lamb is the wise way. It’s the way to true life. Blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are the meek, blessed are the merciful, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who overcome evil with good, who overcome with sacrificial love. That’s how we bear witness to the overcoming one. We love just as he loved us.

And, in the midst of the thlipsis and the bearing witness, Jesus says we can have peace.

C. Peace

1. Introduction

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” Peace: what most people want more than anything else. Peace: that settled state of wholeness and well-being; that settled state of flourishing that God intends for us. Throughout this discourse, Jesus has told us that if we follow him, we’ll be hated by the world, and that we’ll be persecuted by the world. And, now he tells us that we’ll have tribulation in the world. And, yet, in the midst of it all, we can have peace, a flourishing of life? Wait what? What does Jesus mean here?

2. The Kind of Peace

How can peace and tribulation be used in the same breath? Indeed some people interpret this passage to mean that by “possessing the victory of Jesus” means escaping from tragedy, conflict, struggle and trials” (Burge, 516). Is that what Jesus means? Is Jesus describing peace *from* the trials or peace *within* the trials? Perhaps picturing our Thanksgiving events this week will help:

It is not noteworthy for the host to be at peace about all the housework that needs to happen if there are no children, little company, every modern convenience and live-in housekeepers to do menial tasks.

It is astonishing, however, when the host has six children, several visiting relatives, few modern conveniences and no housekeepers, and yet, moves seamlessly through the confusion and chaos of overburdened days without fretting and without worry and with poise and dignity.

This kind of peace – peace in the midst of the confusion and chaos – is superior because it happens within the trials, rather than avoiding them. This is the peace that Jesus is talking about here.

Gary Burge summarizes Jesus’ words here like this, “The peace of Jesus is a condition that takes the uncertainties and struggles of this world seriously, but like a seagull riding the surface of a turbulent sea, is able to climb swells and drop into valleys without worry” (Burge 517).

3. Why No Worry?

And, why “no worry”? Because we know that he has overcome! We can have “*a peace which transcends all understanding*” within the valleys, within the thlipsis, because we know the end is not up for grabs (Phil 4:7). The end is secure. Jesus has overcome and is sitting on the throne of the universe. There is a headquarters of the universe, and Jesus is there on the throne. We have a blessed assurance that Jesus has already won! And, we can have peace.

IV. So What?

So, what do we do? Well, two things:

- Take courage: Jesus commands one thing in this passage: take courage. Take courage to live the Jesus way. We need courage to live lives loyal to the lamb in a world that pressures us to compromise or conform. We need courage to follow Jesus with abandon in the midst of crushing pressure. Are you anxious right now? Are you fearful right now? Maybe over a decision to live the Jesus way? Maybe over spending time with family this week? Maybe over needing to bear witness by being a lamb. Take courage. Be assured, Jesus has really overcome by being a lamb. His way really is truth and life, so take courage.
- Be thankful: And, secondly, be thankful. Of course, this is the week of being thankful, but as I reflected over this entire discourse, I became thankful for the many gifts from a good, good father:
 - I’m thankful for a God who loves us unconditionally.

- I am thankful for a God who washes our feet in servant love.
- I am thankful for a God who hears and answers our prayers.
- I am thankful for Jesus being the true vine, who shares his very life with us.
- I am thankful for the gift of the Spirit-Paraclete who is with us, even in us,
 - and will never leave us or forsake us.
- And, I am thankful for the gifts the Spirit-Paraclete brings in the midst of hostility, persecution and thlipsis:
 - the joy of Jesus and
 - the peace of Jesus.

Yes, we can be very thankful for the many gifts from a good, good father.

V. Conclusion

So, as we end this section of the upper room discourse, take courage and be thankful. Jesus has faced our enemy and defeated him. He has fought the battle for us, and has routed our foe! We could never do it; but he has already done it. The janitor was right: “He has already won.” *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* Amen.

Benediction

As you leave here, have courage and be thankful and – may the amazing grace of Jesus, the unconditional love of God and the intimate friendship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.
Amen. Go in peace.

Resources

Burge, Gary, *John (NIV Application Commentary)*
 Carson, Don, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*
 Johnson, Darrell, *Discipleship On The Edge*
 Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John (Regent College Course)*
 Klink, Edward, *John (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)*
 Newbigin, Leslie, *The Light Has Come*
 Stott, John, *The Cross of Christ*