

TAKE HEART! I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD

John 16:16-33

Key Verse: 16:33

“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.”

In this passage, Jesus once again teaches us that we will have trouble in this world. But we can take heart in Jesus, because he has overcome the world. Persecutions are hard to endure, but Jesus reassures us that our sorrow will turn to joy. May God help us to be encouraged as we listen to the words of Christ!

I. IN A LITTLE WHILE AND AFTER A LITTLE WHILE (16-22)

Look at verse 16. *Jesus went on to say, “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”* After teaching about the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus again talked to his disciples about his upcoming death and resurrection. Soon Jesus would die on the cross, but he would rise on the third day.

What was his disciples’ response? They were puzzled by what Jesus said. They asked each other, *“What does he mean by saying, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,’ and ‘Because I am going to the Father?’”* They kept asking, *“What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We don’t understand what he is saying”* (17-18). Their response is puzzling to us. When Jesus taught them about the work of the Holy Spirit, no one asked him a question. None of them said, *“What does he mean by saying, ‘When the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world about sin, righteousness and judgment’? How will the Holy Spirit lead us to all the truth?”* The work of the Holy Spirit is not easy to understand. I don’t think they fully understood it. Yet they remained silent. They were like students in my economics class who rarely ask questions. But as soon as Jesus said, *“In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,”* they showed a keen interest in what Jesus said. They kept asking, *“What does he mean by ‘a little while’?”*

The timing of a future event was a topic that captivated them. Once, Jesus and they were sitting on the Mount of Olives overlooking the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus had just told them that the magnificent temple buildings would be destroyed. Not one stone would be left on another. It was a shocking prediction. They could have asked Jesus many questions such as who would destroy the great temple, and how and for what reason. Do you know what they asked instead? They said: *“Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”* (Mk 13:1-4) Like many people today, Jesus’ disciples were more interested in the timing of an event than its significance in history.

Look at verse 19. *Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, “Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me’? Being their shepherd,*

Jesus knew what was on their minds. He answered their questions even before they asked him. Look at verse 20. *Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.* Jesus had told them about his upcoming death and resurrection many times before. But they did not like the idea. They heard him but did not listen to him. So they neither understood nor accepted his words in their hearts. Still Jesus tried once again to help them to be ready for his suffering and death. He said, “In a little while you will see me no more...” By this he meant that he was going to die on the cross for the sin of the world. They would weep and mourn over his death. But Jesus also said, “After a little while you will see me...” By this he meant that he would rise from the dead on the third day and would appear before them. When they would see the risen Lord, their sorrow would turn to joy.

Jesus compared this sorrow and joy to a mother’s birth pain and joy. Look at verse 21. *A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.* A mother undergoes excruciating pain during her labor and delivery. Soon, however, she forgets the pain when she holds her baby in her arms. I heard that many women swear during their labor pain that it’s going to be the last child they will have. Then later on, they change their minds and want to have another child. The pain of child birth is short, compared to the joy of holding the baby and watching him or her grow. Jesus says in verse 22: *“So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.”*

The disciples were anxious because they thought that his death would be the end of everything—their dreams and their future. But in fact, it was just a beginning. Jesus’ death would be followed by his glorious resurrection on the Easter morning. His resurrection crushed Satan’s head. The sin problem of mankind was finally solved once and for all. The long night of darkness was gone. His cross and resurrection opened the way to heaven for all of us. We now have a living hope in the kingdom of God. This hope enables us to be joyful in the midst of persecutions.

During our trip to Turkey, we learned that many early Christians under the Roman persecutions escaped to the region of Cappadocia. For over 300 years, they lived in mountain caves and underground cities to hide from the Roman soldiers. Many were born in a dark cave, grew up and died in it. Why? Why didn’t they just melt into the society and live like everyone else? It’s because they believed that they would be with Jesus in heaven in eternity after their short life on earth. Christian suffering has a meaning because it will end with joy. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. Jesus assures us that our suffering will end after just a little while.

“In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.” Even if we suffer persecutions all our life, as the early Christians in Cappadocia did, this duration of time is only a little while, compared to the time we will be with Jesus, that is, eternity. May God help us to endure hardships to keep our faith and carry out our mission so that we may be with Christ in eternity in his kingdom!

II. WHATEVER YOU ASK IN MY NAME (23-28)

Look at verses 23-24. *“In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”* The disciples were full of fear and anxiety because of their uncertain future. They didn’t like it when Jesus told them he was going away. They didn’t like it when he talked about his death. They felt terrible when Jesus told them they would be persecuted severely by the unbelieving world. They were not joyful. How did Jesus help them? Earlier, he told them it was for their own good that he was going away, because he would send the Holy Spirit to be with them (7). Here Jesus told them another reason why it was good for them. Until now, his disciples asked him in person whenever they needed his help. Once Jesus was praying early in the morning in a remote place. A crowd of people came to see him. His disciples didn’t know what to do with the crowd. They searched everywhere for him. When they found him, they exclaimed, “Everyone is looking for you!” (Mk 1:35-37). Now Jesus told them they won’t have to do this any longer because he was going away. All they would have to do was to pray to God in Jesus’ name. He told them: *“Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”* I believe that this promise is for us as well. We can always come to God and ask for his help in Jesus’ name. God will certainly hear us when we pray in Jesus’ name.

Three times Jesus says that we should ask “in his name” (23,24,26). Why? Does this mean God will answer our prayer automatically whenever we finish our prayer with the words, “in Jesus’ name”? No. This is not a magician’s incantation such as “abracadabra.” So what does it mean to pray in Jesus’ name? The name Jesus means “God saves.” When we pray in Jesus’ name, we approach God, believing Jesus as our personal Savior. We are forgiven sinners. We don’t deserve any favor from God. But in his great love, Jesus sacrificed his life to redeem us. Now we come to God in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Savior. A person’s name represents his or her character. When we pray in Jesus’ name, we pray in Jesus’ character. A person’s name also represents his authority. Suppose you are appointed as the U.S. ambassador to New Zealand. The people there will welcome you, not because you look handsome, but because you carry the name of the U.S. president, that is, his authority. Likewise, God would not ignore our prayer when we pray in his Son’s name, knowing that we are his own children.

Jesus continues in verse 24: *“Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.”* Jesus taught them the secret of a victorious life in faith. He would not be among them physically any longer, but they could always turn to God for help in his name. Their sorrow would turn to joy as they would learn to depend on God through prayer in all circumstances. Their joy would be complete (15:11).

Look at verses 25-28. *“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. In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”*

Jesus had often used figures of speech to teach them about God and the kingdom of heaven. To teach them about the love of God, he told the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32). He said, “The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son” (Mt 22:2). He even used figures of speech to teach them about himself and his mission. To teach them about his crucifixion and resurrection, he said: “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” The temple he spoke of was his own body. The disciples had no idea what he was talking about at that time. Only after he was raised from the dead, they recalled what he had said (Jn 1:18-22). But now, a time came for him to tell them plainly about God and himself. He was leaving the world and going back to the Father. He would die on the cross to take away the sin of the world. That is why he had come to the world. Through his cross and resurrection he would prove to the world how much God loves the world. He would show them the love of God plainly for everyone to see. He would no longer have to use figures of speech to teach them about his love for them.

III. I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD (29-33)

How did the disciples respond to Jesus when he told them he was going back to the Father? Look at verses 29-30. *Then Jesus’ disciples said, “Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.”* Jesus’ words of promise and assurance made their troubled hearts calm down. A ray of hope began to dawn on their hearts. They felt that they were beginning to understand the secret things of God’s world. They exclaimed, “Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God.” More than anything, they were impressed by the fact Jesus knew what was on their minds even before they asked him.

Jesus was happy with their confession. He was happy to hear them say, “This makes us believe that you came from God.” Look at verse 31. *“Do you now believe?” Jesus replied.* This was not a full endorsement about their faith. Jesus knew that their faith in him was not yet solid. He continued in verse 32. *“A time is coming and in fact has come when you will be scattered, each to your own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.”* In just a few hours, Jesus would be arrested by the temple police. And his disciples would run away, leaving him all alone. Jesus knew this. It pained him to say this. How could his disciples, whom he loved and cared for more than three years, abandon him and leave him all alone to face

the suffering and death? Sometimes we feel pain when our Bible students whom we care deeply leave us. But there is no comparison between this and what Jesus felt about his disciples. Jesus, however, was not discouraged. What was his secret in enduring such pain? He said, *“Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me.”* Jesus found comfort in the love of God. Likewise, we can always find comfort and solace in God and his unfailing love for us.

Let us read verse 33 together. *“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.”* Jesus was still concerned with his disciples. He had told them the painful things in advance so that they would not be surprised. He wanted them to have peace in him. He wanted them to know how much he loved them. Then he said, “Take heart! I have overcome the world.”

What does it mean to take heart? It means to cheer up, to be encouraged, and to have hope in the midst of troubles. It means not to lose heart despite troubles. It means not to be discouraged by our trials in Christ. Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart!” Jesus warned us that we would be persecuted by this unbelieving world. We must expect trials in this world as we struggle to live a life of faith and mission as his committed disciples.

So how can we take heart? What does Jesus say about this? Jesus says, “Take heart! I have overcome the world.” Jesus was about to be arrested. He would be falsely accused of crime he did not commit. He would be tried by the Jewish leaders, King Herod and the Roman Governor. He would be beaten severely and mocked. He would be spit on. Then finally, he would be led to the Golgotha hill to be killed. His hands and feet would be nailed to the cross with huge nails. Then he would die. And his disciples would be watching it from a distance. So how could they take heart? How could they not be discouraged?

Still Jesus said, “Take heart! I have overcome the world.” What does it mean he has overcome the world? It means that he conquered the sinful world. How? Jesus did what he came to do, that is, to suffer and die as the Lamb of God who takes the sin of the world. Most of all, his resurrection crushed the head of Satan. His resurrection defeated the power of sin and death, the ultimate enemy of mankind. This is how Jesus overcame the world. Jesus opened the way for us to enter the kingdom of heaven. We will have to endure our trials for a little while. But we will enjoy love and peace in heaven eternally. We can take heart if we really believe in Jesus and have a true hope in the kingdom of God.

From today’s passage, we learned that our sorrow will turn to joy if we endure our trials by faith in Jesus. We must take heart, knowing that Jesus has overcome the world. His death and resurrection defeated sin and Satan and open the door to heaven for us. We will reign with Christ in eternity in the kingdom of God. May God help us to depend God everyday by praying in Jesus’ name!