

Jesus Has Overcome the World

John 16:16-33

Key Verse: 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.”**

We live in a world where we face many challenges that make us anxious. The most common mental issue in the USA is anxiety. Even though we believe in Jesus, we are not free from the troubles of the world. People are anxious about the future of our country and about their own future; the unstable political situation, demanding school study, financial burdens, conflicts between generations, raising disciples, parenting, marriage, health issues, and many more things. Today's passage concludes the Upper room discourse (John 13-16). What was the dominant emotion of the disciples there? It was anxiety. Why? Jesus talked about something shocking to his disciples: his imminent leaving, their persecution and even death. Their hearts were deeply shaken and darkened. For them, this was a bleak and ominous moment. As we struggle with difficulties we may think we are fighting alone. But we'll see that Jesus does not overlook our troubled hearts. He deals with anxieties that accompany discipleship.

Today's passage reveals that Jesus has overcome the world. Jesus helps us to take heart in this world. Jesus gives amazing promises to each of us. We'll meditate on the passage in three points: 1) Joy in Jesus, 2) prayer in Jesus, and 3) victory in Jesus.

1. Joy in Jesus (16-22)

At the end of the upper room dialogue, Jesus said, **“In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me”** (16). Jesus' words puzzled his disciples and they kept asking among themselves: **“What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We don't understand what he is saying.”** (18) The expression “a little while” occurs 7 times in verses 16-19. Jesus' enigmatic word, “a little while” confused them. (Bible scholars are still asking about its precise meaning.) The disciples sensed that something big was coming very soon. They were fearful and confused. They had burning questions for Jesus but didn't ask him directly because they didn't want to face any bad surprise.

Jesus saw their troubles. He is a compassionate, fatherly shepherd who understands our troubled hearts. But he didn't sugarcoat the hardships they would have to face. In v 20, Jesus opened his words with the phrase, **“Very truly I tell you”** (Amen, amen) which introduces a solemn truthful statement; it's like saying, “everybody, listen up!” The truth was that they would weep and grieve, while the world would high five over their sorrows.

But this is not the end of the story. There is a great reversal. **Jesus said, “You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy” (20).** This great reversal is directly related to Jesus’ death and his resurrection. The ungodly world would think it had finally destroyed Jesus and rejoice. The hope of Jesus’ followers would be completely shattered. This would result in unbearable suffering for them. Jesus endured the cross, scorning its shame, for the joy set before him (Heb 12:2). Eventually he came out triumphant, conquering death by his resurrection. Through the resurrection from the dead, Jesus’ own sorrow turned to joy!

Jesus uses an illustration of a woman giving birth: the labor pain is unbearably intense; a pregnant woman gets anxious as delivery is near, but the anguish eventually gives way to joy soon enough. This is a unique experience of women. (Still I remember vividly Oct 12, 1996 when my wife gave birth to our first child. I saw how much she suffered from birth pangs all night. To my surprise, she decided not to take any pain medicine due to her curiosity to know the extent of birth pain. Later, she regretted her decision. When she almost died of exhaustion, I myself panicked. But when a new life arrived, the joy was matchless.)

Likewise, when the disciples met the risen Christ, their grief turned to joy. This joy comes from the resurrected Christ. The gospel of Jesus is about a great reversal: from death to life; from grief to joy. How is this possible? It’s because Jesus defeated death by the power of his resurrection. He can take your sorrow and turn it into joy. He gives **“a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning” (Isa 61:3).** He takes what is lowly and makes it beautiful. If we go through a dark tunnel and don’t see the end, we tend to become afraid and anxious. But Jesus gives us a wonderful perspective and promises a beautiful outcome: Joy that the world cannot take away.

Our Christian life is characterized by joy in Jesus. This joy doesn’t depend on our circumstances. The source of joy is Jesus. When we meet the risen Jesus through the Word and prayer, our sorrows and worries turn to joy. There is no reason to live a joyless, sorrowful life even amid sufferings. (We are praying for those who are struggling with sickness, including Mei & Peter Kim’s family). The gospel of Jesus gives a wonderful perspective on suffering. When the apostles were persecuted and flogged, they were not discouraged, but rejoiced “because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name” (Ac 5:41). It is not that afflictions are joyful, but that we are joyful because of Jesus. Apostle Paul who went through many hardships, testifies about this: **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (Ro 8:18).** When Jesus comes again, all pains will completely be swallowed up by the glory. This glory can transform any sorrow or suffering into joy in our lives. Praise Jesus who takes our sorrows and transforms them into matchless joy and glory! Do you experience this joy? May God help us to be full of joy in Jesus!

2. Prayer in Jesus (23-28)

This overflowing joy is closely related to prayer in Jesus. In the upper room discourse, Jesus repeatedly teaches about the importance of prayer (Jn 14:13-14; 15:7-8,16; 16:23-24,26-27). If we neglect our prayer life, we cannot experience true joy in Jesus. Without prayer, Christian life will become a joyless burden. Prayer in Jesus' name produces fullness of joy (24). Prayer leads to fullness of joy because prayer is "the nerve center of our fellowship with Jesus" (J. Piper).

In v 23-24, Jesus draws our attention to the privilege of prayer that we have constant access to. The importance of this teaching is emphasized through a double amen ("Very truly I tell you"). Jesus invites us to prayer: **"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"** (23-24). Here Jesus emphasizes a new dimension of prayer, that is, praying in the name of Jesus. God will give us whatever we ask in Jesus' name. Wow! What a promise! In public prayer, we usually end our prayer by saying, "In Jesus' name," don't we? What do those words mean? Surely, it is more than a mere indicator that the prayer is over and we can open our eyes. What does it mean to pray "in Jesus' name"? It means to pray in the authority of Jesus. Specifically, it means that first, we come to God, relying on the perfect merit of Jesus; second, we pray as Jesus' representative for his kingdom (cf. Jerry Bridges, "In Jesus' Name").

The name of Jesus has authority to grant us direct access to God. In the Old Testament, people didn't have direct access to God because of their sin. When God revealed himself in his holiness, he was not approachable. People were afraid of God talking to them directly. So, priests were necessary to approach God. **"God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords" "lives in unapproachable light"** (1Ti 6:15-16). But in Jesus' name, we can come to God freely. This means that we pray by depending on the righteousness of Jesus, who took away our sins through his sacrifice. Jesus does not need to pass on our prayers to the Father (Jn 16:26). Now, the name of Jesus is like the passcode to heaven. We are not hackers, but authorized users. In Jesus, we are authorized to have full access to God the Father who is the infinite resource of life and love.

How do we have these incredible privileges? It is because God loves us. Jesus says, **"the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God"** (27). Does this mean that we must love God first to gain access to him? No. God loved us first by sending his only Son to take away our sins and all we have to do is to respond to this love. It is by faith that we receive this love. We live in an intimate love relationship with God as we believe in Jesus as our Savior and Friend (Greek: *phileo*).

V28 summarizes what believing in Jesus entails: **“I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”** Jesus came from God the Father and entered the world to serve; he died for our sins, and through his resurrection and ascension, he went back to the Father. So, Jesus is much more than a religious teacher. Jesus is God incarnate who came from the Father and went back to the Father. Jesus’ mission begins with the Father and ends with the Father. So, when you believe in Jesus’ name, you commit your life to him, and you become God’s child (Jn 1:12). In Jesus, God is so near that we can call him Abba Father. We are his loving sons and daughters. You may feel like you are not good enough. But in Jesus, we can “approach God’s throne of grace with confidence.” We can boldly come to God as we are and “find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb 4:16).

Do you see now what a wonderful gift is given to us? We are granted full access to the Father in the name of Jesus. We don’t need to live as orphans in this world. We have many things to worry about, but we don’t need to live in anxiety or despair. We can pray in the name of Jesus! May God continue to awaken earnest prayer among us. When we pray in the name of Jesus, we pray that the Father may be glorified in the Son (Jn 14:13). When we pray in Jesus’ name, we pray as his representatives for his kingdom. When we pray in the name of Jesus, God gives us God-sized visions that reach beyond our human abilities. As God answers our prayers, we can experience overflowing joy because God himself answered us. Praise the precious name of Jesus!

3. Victory in Jesus (29-33)

When Jesus addressed the disciples’ troubled hearts, they felt like dark clouds cleared up. They 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”** (29-30). Wow! Through Jesus’ patient conversation, they grew in understanding and faith.

How did Jesus respond? He said, **“Do you now believe?”** Jesus was happy about their faith, but said, **“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”** (32). It was too early for them to celebrate their faith because they needed to go through a reality check. Jesus knew how they would fail and be scattered. He knows us in both our high and low moments. Are you afraid of failure? It is comforting when we realize that our failure does not surprise Jesus. The beauty of Jesus is that while he knows all our flaws and failures, he doesn’t rebuke us. Instead, he sees beyond our failures and gives us promise and encouragement.

Look at v 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.”** Thus

far, Jesus talked about his departure and their upcoming difficulties. Why? It was to address their troubled hearts (anxiety and fear). Jesus wanted them to have peace in him. The level of peace that Jesus grants us, is like the deep current of an ocean that is not affected by little ripples or surface waves (cf. Jn 14:27).

Jesus said, **“In this world you will have trouble.”** John’s Gospel does not teach superficial discipleship, nor the peace of the world. If we belong to Jesus, we should not expect an easy and comfortable life in this world. Numerous early Christians went through hardships and fiery ordeals because of their faith. We live in a culture where many avenues are available to avoid suffering. Many things can be comfortably controlled by the tips of your fingers; and even many Christians have left out suffering from their understanding of a Christian life. But there is no way around tribulations, trials or sorrows in this world. In fact, we are destined for them (1Th 3:3).

But while Christians take suffering seriously, we are not defeatists or fatalists. We take on sufferings for the sake of Christ. Jesus says, **“Take heart!”** (take courage or cheer up!!) This is not a suggestion, but a command. This command “take heart” (occurring several times in the Gospels) is used by Jesus only. For example, when the disciples were in panic on a stormy sea, Jesus said, **“Take heart!”** (Mk 6:50). We have no power over our circumstances. There are things that are unavoidable in our lives (sin and death). The legendary boxer Muhammad Ali used to say, *“Impossible is just a big word; impossible is not a fact; It’s an opinion; impossible is nothing!”* I like his invincible spirit. But he was not invincible; he was also a human who fell into sickness later in his life. But when Jesus says, “take heart!” he is different.

We have a solid reason for joyful confidence because Jesus has overcome the world. The verb “to overcome” is a military term and refers to “victory in warfare.” Notice the perfect tense: **“I have overcome the world.”** This means that Jesus has already overcome the world. He proclaimed this victory even before his crucifixion and resurrection. With this sense of victory, Jesus went to the cross. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus has defeated the devil and every power hostile to God. The decisive victory has already taken place!!

Now we live in the era of Jesus’ victory. So what? We will still have to endure tribulation in this world, but the fact that Jesus has won the decisive victory, makes a huge difference for us. His victory enables us to conquer the evil one (cf. 1Jn 2:13-14). We live on a battleground. Everybody is fighting. But we’re not fighting for victory; rather, we are fighting from the place of victory. Sometimes, God’s people are put through the fire. We may be afraid of being overcome by the power of darkness. But we overcome the world, “because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1Jn 4:4). Jesus lives in us through the Spirit. The power of darkness is no match for Jesus.

Neither the power of darkness nor worldly weapons prevail. We stand here in the victory of Jesus.

(As I suffered under the darkness of sin, I wanted to take my sins to my grave. But when the risen Jesus showed me unconditional love and forgiveness, the joy of heaven came into my heart and I could experience a new start. I love this gospel of reversal. For me, Christian life is about fighting one battle after another. When I was a student missionary in Germany, often I had to fight against my fear and anxiety due to multiple challenges. But by God's grace, I overcame these challenges by depending on his promise, "**Have faith in God!**" My missionary life today is also a spiritual battle for me. Living and following Jesus in his ways constantly challenges me. When I worry about problems, I tend to become impatient with people. But thank God that he humbles me through these challenges to awaken me into earnest prayers. Meditating on today's passage, I can fight for the cause of the gospel by claiming Jesus' victory through his death and resurrection.)

What troubles your heart? Is it worries about your future? Is it the demands of school study? Paying back school loans or career challenges? The tension between generations in community and society? Health issues? Your ministry or family troubles? Emotional crises? Pray in the name of Jesus. "**Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**" (Php 4:6-7). Amen! As the community of Jesus, we are not enemies of each other; we don't fight against each other. Together, we are the victorious army of Christ! The devil's strategy is simple: to divide and conquer. The enemy's scheme is to make us focus on problems and lose hope. But as we stand in Jesus' victory, we can pray together. When we stand in Jesus' victory, we'll be united as Jesus' army for his kingdom. This fall, each campus ministry is engaging in his kingdom work. Let's remember the truth: our battle is not about us trying to win the war, but about trusting in Jesus who has already won the victory. His victory is ours as well.

Is your heart troubled? Turn your eyes upon Jesus Christ, the Victor! He can turn your sorrows into joy so that we live with joy in Jesus. We don't need to waste time with our worries and problems. We can pray confidently in Jesus' name. In Jesus, we are not losers; we are more than conquerors (Ro 8:37). Because we stand in Jesus' victory, we can engage in spiritual warfare with the confidence of victory. Let's expect and experience victory in Jesus everyday.

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