

John 16:23-33

The Overcomer

Let's open our Bibles to the book of John. It's a rich gospel, full of theological truths about the words and nature of Jesus.

In fact, everything John has written in this book was written so that you and I would believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

In these last few chapters, we have been reading about what's known as the Upper Room Discourse, which covers Jesus's final teachings and prayer with his disciples the night before his crucifixion. It is only found in the Gospel of John.

Last week, Pastor Mike led us through the middle section of John 16 and he described the waiting. There can be stress or confusion in your waiting, but the promise of the Lord can bring us joy. And he ended with this sentiment: Joy is coming sooner than you think. It's coming in a little while.

Today's passage will be a continuation of that scripture, and there will be some promises straight from the mouth of Jesus.

And as we get into it, I always like to start with a question that I think the text is going to answer.

So let's imagine a scenario for a minute.

Tomorrow, you are going to start a new job.

You get in on Monday, your supervisor comes, and what's the thing that ideally, they should be doing on your first day? Training you.

What exactly do I do in this job, what's expected of me, what should I look out for.

The goal of this is to get you to a place where you're capable enough to work independently.

In some way, we have all been prepared for something. You were trained maybe to do the role you have, maybe through schooling or hands-on experience.

What if God was preparing you for something, too?

What if He too was equipping you to do something? Not independent of Him, but dependent on Him.

I was thinking about these last few chapters, everything Jesus is saying to the disciples before the cross.

He's told them He will be betrayed. He's told them trust in God, trust also in me. He said I am the way, the truth and the life. I am the true vine; abide in me. The world may hate you, because it hated him, but Holy Spirit is coming as an advocate for them. And they will experience grief. But that will one day turn into joy.

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Right after this, he will pray for them, and then he will be betrayed and the soldiers will come.

So what is Jesus preparing them for? I think this is the question for the disciples:

How do they face a world filled with uncertainty, suffering, temptation and opposition when Jesus is no longer physically walking beside them?

The question for them is the same for us.

How do we face this world? How do we live in it?

I believe today we will find our answer in the text.

John 16:23–33.

“23 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. **24** Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

25 “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. **26** In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. **27** No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

28 I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father.”

29 Then Jesus' disciples said, “Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech. **30** 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.”

31 “Do you now believe?” Jesus replied. **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.

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.”

There are three ways in which I believe Jesus prepares us to face the world.

1. Jesus empowers us to approach the Father in prayer.

In that day you will no longer ask me anything, but you'll pray to the Father, God, in my name.

The day Jesus is referring to is after he is resurrected and ascends into Heaven. He will no longer be physically present with the disciples. They can't literally ask him a question face-to-face anymore.

But they are still going to have a connection with Jesus.

When they're in trouble, when they have questions, when they're seeking, they can pray in Jesus's name and the Father will answer them.

Specifically, Jesus says “Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.”

PM said last week, pay special attention when Jesus says “Very truly I tell you.” He is about to say a promise. This is a guarantee. My Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

Now this is a big deal.

And let's be honest with the text. Why is it that you don't always get what you pray for?

This is the important distinction. To pray in the name of Jesus is to pray in line with his authority, his character, and his will.

We see this in the lines of the Lord's Prayer “Your kingdom come; your will be done here on earth as it is in heaven.”

So our prayer should align God's will here on earth.

God is not a genie granting every wish simply because we said in the name of Jesus.

James 4:3 (NIV)

“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

Why waste our time praying for meaningless things that only serve our self-interest?

I'm not talking about your daily bread, or day-to-day sustenance. That's in the Lord's Prayer – pray for that.

But comb through the Scriptures and see the prayers that have been answered because people are aligned with God's will.

James says if you're lacking in wisdom, pray for wisdom, and know that God will answer that. It's aligned with His Word.

His Word commissions us to go and make disciples of every nation, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Lord, show me who I should disciple? Who can I talk to today?

Some of us are hearing this and we don't like these prayers. Because they aren't about our own comfort and our own satisfaction or our own standing in the world. We want God to do what we want.

But the Bible teaches us to pray in Jesus's name, aligned with his character, his authority, and his will.

And sometimes we pray for things that are good, and it's not just for our own self-interest, but God in his perfect will, has greater plans that we may not understand on this side of eternity.

Praying in this way can be uncomfortable, and it will require us to trust that God's plans and interests for us are even better than our own plans.

Lord, if this be your will, let it be done.

But he says your joy will be complete. Joy is an internal hope and peace and rest despite external circumstances.

Our own self-interest will only take us so far. Many of us have experienced where that leads us. You could be top of the world one day, rock bottom the next. There is no guarantee.

But this scripture has a guarantee. There is one who is greater than us, infinitely wiser and kinder. Pray to the Father in the name of Jesus, aligned with Jesus. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

Prayer is part of our preparation for the world. Not for my will to be done, but for His.

This is the guarantee that Jesus gave his disciples. Even though he will leave, he equipped them for the world ahead by showing them they could pray, and the Father would answer.

And this is the Father's heart toward us:

26 I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. **27** No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.”

God so loved the whole world that He gave his son, but for those who follow Jesus, there is more favor for you. You have been adopted as a child of God.

And God so loves you. The Father’s face is already turned toward you.

None of us have to persuade God to hear us. To see us. To know us. He is so deeply aware of you, and what you’re going through, and what you’re thinking about, and the things you like, and the things you talk about.

Jesus shows us that the Father is our Father, too, who already loves us. You can pray to Him and trust that He wants to hear you and speak with you.

29 Then Jesus’ disciples said, “Now you are speaking clearly and without figures of speech.

Because Jesus was always talking to them in parables. He gave them a metaphor earlier in the text that was read last week.

30 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.”

They’re so amazed here because you can read verse 18 and 19, but they were asking questions amongst themselves that they didn’t ask Jesus directly. But everything he is telling them now is in response to those questions they had.

Time and time again, Scripture shows that Jesus knows what’s in the hearts of humans. So he can answer questions that they haven’t asked him out loud.

One point we can also take from this is that if Jesus even answers questions that haven’t been asked yet, how much more will he want to speak with those who do ask him questions?

31 “Do you now believe?” Jesus replied. **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.”

What does he mean by scattered?

The disciples seemed really confident. They said, “We believe you come from God.” They are expressing faith in him, but very soon, that faith will be tested.

When the soldiers come, the disciples, terrified, will run away. Even though they believed, they would be overwhelmed.

Have you ever dealt with something so overbearing, you just want to escape? You want to run away?

And Jesus is talking to the guys who were the closest to him on earth. His closest friends, his disciples. And even they, he knew, would abandon him.

2. Jesus is faithful even when we falter.

Knowing the disciples would fail did not cause Jesus to turn away from his mission, that is the cross. He didn't withdraw his love for them.

His eyes were set on the road ahead. The disciples were for that moment going to fail. Peter would later publicly deny knowing Jesus three times, before coming back to Him.

But this is important. Even when people are not faithful, even when the disciples abandoned Jesus, that did not stop him from dying on the cross for the forgiveness of sins.

God made a way for all to be saved.

He never fails. That is the distinction between us and Jesus, and why we need him.

Because sometimes we mess up, we slip up, we give our word and we can't live it out, we get overwhelmed.

Left to our own, we will falter, but Jesus is true to the end. God is faithful to the end.

Faith that is not grounded in something constant will never secure you. It will never hold you up.

If I face the world and put my faith in my accomplishments or failures, I'm always going to be swinging from one end to the other all the days of my life.

But to trust in one who is faithful to the end, in spite of my weakness and failings, is to always have hope.

My hope is secure because it's not in me, it's in him.

And his faithfulness didn't end at the cross. He promised that after his departure, we would not be left alone.

Just like the Father never left Jesus, the Son, Jesus also promised us a constant companion in John 14.

He told the disciples that he would send the advocate, the Holy Spirit, who would live inside us and guide us and empower us.

Anyone today who claims Jesus as their Lord and Savior and follows him has the Holy Spirit living inside you. The Holy Spirit will help us when we're weak and we stumble.

His faithfulness prepares us for the world, and even our own weaknesses.

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.”

3. Jesus' victory gives us courage to face the world.

I have been using the word “world”, but what does it mean?

World can mean many things in Scripture. It could refer to the earth and creation itself, it could refer to humanity, but in this case, it represents all that is hostile, indifferent, or rebellious to God.

All these things separated us from God. But now Jesus has bridged the gap, so we could be in right standing with God.

There are three ways how his victory affects us. Let's break down his statement.

Subpoint 1: Be at peace.

First, he says, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.”

What is it that Jesus has told them?

In the course of his three years of ministry with them, he taught them a lot. He said many things to them.

But throughout the entire Upper Room Discourse, Jesus told his disciples several important things: trust in me, follow me, abide in me, pray in my name, expect trouble, and anticipate joy.

And now he tells them why he's said all these things: so that they may have peace.

Notice that he doesn't say they'll have peace because everything around them will be peaceful. He says they'll have peace in him.

Jesus is offering us peace that doesn't rely on circumstances. We don't have to crave what someone else has.

Some of us have deeply anxious thoughts that leave us spiraling. But this is Jesus' invitation to lay your burdens down.

We aren't meant to carry the weight of the world. We cannot do it. But Jesus can.

So what we can do is bring all our worries to the table, take our thoughts captive, and find rest in Him.

He said I am telling you these things so that you would have peace in me. Not in the world.

The next thing Jesus said is this: "In this world you will have trouble."

Trouble is coming. He promises peace, but that does not mean there won't be suffering.

The reality is that we live in a broken world that will one day be restored. But today, while we are here, we endure trials.

But never be mistaken: trials and pain are not a sign that God is absent or that he doesn't care.

If tragedy, betrayal, hurt, loss or death meant that God wasn't with us, that he didn't love us, then we must ask: what was Jesus doing on a cross? He endured physical, mental, and emotional pain.

The reality is that the Lord so intimately cares that he entered into our pain and took it upon himself. In fact, Isaiah 53 prophesies about Jesus. And it says that he was a man of suffering and familiar with pain. He was despised and rejected by mankind. He was oppressed and afflicted.

God is not distant from our pain.

Subpoint 2: Don't lose faith when trouble comes.

We go through many unfair, unjust or cruel things.

But suffering is not the end of the story.

For one day, God will restore all things to goodness and make all things right.

And the invitation for today is to find the hand of God in the midst of our pain.

The one who is not indifferent to human suffering, but entered into it, endured it, and made a way for you and I to become children of God.

Don't lose faith, because one day if we put our whole trust in Jesus, we will be with him in paradise.

One day, you will see the crown of life.

As Jesus says, "take heart."

In other words, have courage. Other translations say be of good cheer.

So how do you live courageously in a world where trouble is guaranteed?

Subpoint 3: live with eternity in mind.

The world we live in is temporary. It's not going to last, and Jesus has already overcome it. So instead of just setting myself up to do well by worldly standards, what if I set myself up for heaven?

Putting first the things of God.

How would your life look different if you had eternity in mind?

Imagine the grace you might show, the radical level of forgiveness, of kindness, of generous giving, of sacrificial love.

It would be a little like bringing heaven here on earth. Your kingdom come, God, your will be done here.

Let hope of eternity drive you to live courageously now.

And now Jesus finishes by saying this: I have overcome the world.

But what does it mean to overcome?

I know what it's like to be overwhelmed. I know what it's like to be overcome.

If I rely on myself, I'll be disappointed by myself.

Jesus knew. The burden of humanity is that we ourselves are easily overwhelmed. Jesus knew his disciples would abandon him. They all scattered. Every person, we fall. Everybody, we fail. We are all overcome.

Except one.

There is one who has never fallen and never failed. There is only one who has not been overwhelmed but has overcome.

He overcame hatred, division, lies, demons and death. He overcame the evil, the corruption, and the rebellion that separated us from God.

It is his victory that gives us the courage to face this life.

Sometimes we face situations that look like a loss. It looks like it's over. There's no recovery from this, there's no way out of this.

But Jesus didn't tell us meaningless words. When he said "I have overcome the world," we would call this in English the present perfect tense.

When you use this tense, "*I have* done this", you are expressing a completed action in the past that has ongoing, permanent results in the present.

Jesus said I have overcome the world before he even went to the cross. Before his resurrection.

This future was so absolutely certain in God's sovereign plan that Jesus could say it as an established fact.

2 Timothy 1:9 says "He has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time,"

Before we even knew we needed a savior, Jesus had already overcome.

We started with engaging the question: how has Jesus prepared us to live in this world?

Through prayer, through faithfulness, and through Jesus' victory. His victory gives me peace, strengthens my faith in trouble, and gives me the courage to live with eternity in mind.

We've laid down the pieces from the text. Now I want to ask a new question, one that Jesus asks himself.

Do you now believe?