

## *In Me You Have Peace*

*John 16: 25-33*

**First Presbyterian Church  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**October 23, AD 2016  
Gerrit Scott Dawson**

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During my first year of college, a group of us would gather on Sunday nights for prayer and worship. A couple of guys in their twenties would come over from a local church in Nashville and lead us. One of them was a guy named Brown Bannister. He'd bring his guitar and both sing to us and lead us in song. He was an appealing, handsome dude. As a squirrely freshman, I envied him. Because while I was still trying to figure out how just to connect with the girls in our group, they all positively swooned over Brown. Turns out Brown was a pretty special guy. He would go on to write and produce dozens of great Christian songs, with artists such as Amy Grant, Vince Gill, Sarah Groves and Mercy Me. So far he has 25 Dove Awards for Christian music and 14 Grammy awards. Clearly, I never stood a chance!

But Brown Bannister did leave me with a great gift. He taught us a song based on today's passage that I've never forgotten. The tune has stayed with me so that I can call up this verse whenever it's needed. The words are simply those of John 16: 33: *These things, I have spoken unto you, that in me, you might have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer, be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.*

Jesus has spoken to his disciples of what will soon befall him. He must depart from them, for he will be betrayed, arrested, tried and crucified. They will sorrow to see him go, and it will seem like the world has ended. But then they will see him again, for he will rise from the dead. And they will rejoice with a joy that cannot be taken away. For in Jesus, even death would be overcome.

The disciples will come to know that Jesus' earthly life with them is bracketed by his eternal life as the Son of God. He did not come into being at conception the way we do. He has ever been alive with the Father. In the fullness of time, he came forth from his Father into the world. On earth with us he conducted his healing, redeeming, saving work. When this first stage of his great mission to remake the world was complete, Jesus would return to his Father. He would continue on in his everlasting life of love and joy, having for these thirty-three years touched down in our world. Of course, in those brief days among us, Jesus changed everything for us. That is why he could locate our peace, our very

sense of well-being in himself. *These things, I have spoken unto you, that in me, you might have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.*

Now, as we consider his words more deeply, once again we have to note the beauty of Christian realism. The beauty of the gospel is that it accounts for our suffering and sorrow. Not only does it recognize the grit of death and life in the world, the gospel alone offers an adequate answer to all this sadness. A real answer that delivers true peace.

Jesus reminds his disciples that in the world they will have tribulation. He knew what he was talking about. For in that moment, Jesus himself was entering the tribulation of his impending death. He said, “Behold the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and leave me alone.” I don’t think the translation “each to his own home” actually gets the full sense of what Jesus originally said. After all, the disciples were in Jerusalem with Jesus and their homes were far north in Galilee. They didn’t go right home. They just ran away from trouble. The original words simply say, “you will be scattered, *each into his own.*” You will leave me and run back to life in yourself. Each of you into his saving his own skin. Each of you into his private fears. Each of you looking after himself but not succeeding.

I know I have told you the story of being eleven years old and coming home from vacation with fireworks that were illegal in Miami. I had some pretty cool stuff. For a moment I was the big man in the neighborhood. All the kids gathered around as I prepared to dazzle them by lighting a firework called a *twister*. It would fly in a shower of sparks up into the sky. I was surging with pride as I bent to light the fuse. It took a couple of seconds to catch, but when it did I looked up and saw a police car coming through the intersection right in front of me. I watched helplessly as the fuse could not be stopped. My cool *twister* flew up smack in front of his squad car. I turned around to get support from my friends. Gone. All of them gone. Each one into his own. I was no longer the big man. My so called friends fled the scene and I had to face the consequences alone.

Jesus knew that moment magnified a thousand times. “You will be scattered, each one into his own, and I will be left alone.” When we hit trouble, we may well pull back from relationships. We pull our heads, and hearts, into a shell like turtles. While I have strength and power and confidence, I can be your friend. I can care for you. But when things go south, I’ve got to pull back. I’m going into my own, and leaving you on your own. Leaving you alone to face what you have to

face. It's an awful, sinking feeling to be left alone. We feel helpless. Powerless. Free falling into chaos. Everyone we counted on seems scattered into their own selves and their own pursuits.

In the world you will have tribulation. Jesus did not say "Well, you might hit some rough spots." He didn't say, "It's possible that a tad bit of adversity may come your way." He guaranteed it. In this world, in this life, you absolutely will have tribulation.

It was very interesting to read that the New Testament uses two different words to describe tribulations. One refers to external difficulties. The things that happen to you. Difficulties. Accidents. Persecutions. Abuse. Confrontations. Things on the outside that block your path. People that thwart your best interest. That's one kind of tribulation. That's not the word Jesus uses here.

There's another word that speaks of something much harder than outer difficulties. It's the inner pressure that comes from external tribulations. It's being squeezed on the inside because of things happening on the outside. This is the place of anxiety. What is happening makes us fear what more could happen. This is the place of worry. If it's like this now, how much worse could it be tomorrow? This is the sinking feeling inside that maybe I deserve this. Maybe I've been found out at last. Now everything is going to fall apart. They will know that I am a fraud. That I am a faker. I will be paraded through the streets as a sinner, a coward and a loser who deserves whatever I get.

Many of you will remember a recurring character who used to appear on Saturday Night Live. His name was Stuart Smalley and he was the host of a fictitious self-help program. Stuart spent most of the show talking himself up. He tried to overcome his fears by with his mantra, "I'm good enough. I'm smart enough. And doggone it, people like me!" Of course in every show, he would make a mistake, blundering his words and sending his confidence into a tail spin. Near tears, he would reveal his deeper fears. Because he was such an idiot, Stuart was convinced he would end up penniless, fat, homeless and lying in the street alone until he died. We laughed at Stuart's extreme fears. But the fact is that's what internal tribulation creates in us. These circumstances outside of me put a pressure on me inside that awakens my anxieties that everything is going to fall apart. Indeed, a rational case can be made that things will indeed get worse, in the world and in our lives. You *will* have tribulation.

So let's see what Jesus did with anxiety, both his own and that of his disciples. Let's see how he found confidence in the midst of a very realistic awareness that the worst was indeed about to happen to him. *You will be scattered, each one to his own, and will leave me alone. Yet, I am not alone, for the Father is with me.* I'm going to face a trial by the people who represent God on earth. I will stand alone and be told that I blaspheme what I love most, my Father in heaven. I will stand alone before the Roman governor and be told that I am not fit for life in the world. The people I came to save will shout for my death. I will cry out from the cross that I have been forsaken, for it will feel to me that my Father has left me too. But I have faith in a deeper reality. I am not alone. For the Father is with me. There is a relationship that cannot be taken away. No human betrayal can steal it. No numbness in faith and feeling can actually erase it. Not even death can take it. The Father is with me. I know this. And I will believe this even when I do not feel it. I will recall what I have known and experienced and trusted. The Father is with me.

*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me, you might have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer, be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.* Jesus' source of peace was his relationship with his Father. It's a relationship he gives to us when we are joined to Jesus by faith. He connects us now and always to his Father. In me you might have peace. Connected to me. Joined to me. Mystically bound to me. Supernaturally married to me. In me, you have peace, the deep sense that all is well. Here we see the amazing faith of Jesus in his Father and in his mission. Because he is confident of victory *before* he has undergone the final battle. I have overcome the world. I am entering this tribulation fully submitted to my Father. The victory is won. All is well because I will pass through death in faith and come out the other side having gained everlasting life, not only for myself but for you. Your peace, is linked to my victory.

And that's where I am so encouraged and convicted by this passage. Jesus is my peace, for Jesus has overcome the world in the faith that his Father is always with him. I know that. But still I get anxious. Still I stress and struggle. Still I have to deal with the internal pressure that comes from external circumstances. I feel the squeeze that the world and my life are not going to be how I want them to be. And I have no peace.

Bishop Albert Ratkin is the pastor of a church in Kaluga, Russia. We've been partners with Albert for many years. Last month, David Koza, his daughter Catherine and Whitney visited Kaluga to celebrate the church's 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The congregation is thriving in spite of being continually under government pressure. They are constantly trying to shut down their Christian school and seize the church property. But a quarter century has passed, and the church and school carry on.

I always love when Bishop Albert visits with us, because his faith is so real and his joy so overflowing and his peace so deep. Several years ago as he spoke to us, Albert said, “Nancy asked me, ‘How are you?’ I thought about that. And I said, ‘How am I? Well, I will tell you this. God is alive. And I am alive.’” Albert paused then. And took a big breath. He said it again, ‘God is alive.’ Then he took another big breath. “And I am alive.” Another breath. “So it is a good day. God is alive and nothing can change that. I am alive, and that could change. If I die, I will be with God, and that is good. If I live, I will live for God. And that also is good. God is alive and I am alive. It is a good day.”

That’s powerful. And peaceful. Albert faces the worst every day. It could all be shut down. He could be imprisoned. He could die. Nothing changes the pressure of that external tribulation. But the inner pressure has been replaced with peace. Christ is alive and nothing can change that. I belong to Christ and nothing can change that. Whether I live or die in this world, God is alive and I am alive, and so it is a good day. Albert is sold out to Jesus. He lives for Jesus. He lives from Jesus. He has already counted all things as loss for the sake of Christ, so whatever he has, whatever he does, he counts that all joy. He holds this world but lightly, and therefore he has peace. Therefore, he can do great things for Christ.

*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me, you might have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world.* The power in that simple song comes from the fact that it is nothing but the words of Jesus. The brilliance in how that simple song inspires me comes from the repetition of one phrase. But be of good cheer. Be of *good cheer*. The encouragement encourages us! The word literally means to be warmed up because of confidence within. It means to radiate warmth because you are lit up with the presence of God inside. It’s the antidote to the internal anxiety and pressure of tribulation. In Christ, there is peace. Because he has overcome the world. He has the victory. In Christ all is well. And all shall be well. And I am in Christ. I am in his victory. Christ is alive and you and I are alive. No matter what, it is a good day. Be of good cheer dear ones. Christ Jesus has overcome the world. In him there is peace.