

“Take Heart I Have Overcome The World”

John 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."

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

John, the disciple who Jesus loved, records our Lord saying, "***In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.***" The irony in this statement is that Judas Iscariot had already betrayed Jesus to the Sanhedrin for 30 pieces of silver. And soon Judas would lead a group of soldiers from the temple guard to a nearby olive grove where they will arrest our Lord.

So how can Jesus make such a bold statement when it seems that the world was about to overcome Him!?

My friends, I'm sure all of you can relate to our Lord's words – well at least the first phrase. Now, in spite of being faithful, God-fearing folk it's a given we won't dodge trouble, distress, or pain this side of eternity. You see, even though Satan was defeated when Jesus was raised from the dead, Peter reminds us that 'Your enemy prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.' (1 Ptr. 5:8) Yes, the devil is a master tempter, so when we fall we need not only to know, but to believe that Jesus has definitely overcome the world.

Now, it's important to keep in mind that Jesus spoke these words before His arrest and passion. Though Jesus had done many wonderful things – like healing the sick, restoring sight and hearing, exorcising demons, and forgiving sins – He still faced the last and greatest enemy: the grave.

Yet Jesus speaks as if He has already completed His earthly mission of salvation.

However, Jesus can speak confidently of future things because He is absolutely certain of their fulfilment. For He will die on the cross, and He will rise from the tomb - doing everything necessary for your salvation. But His disciples had yet to experience the emerging truth of the words, 'I have overcome the world'. On the first day of the week - our Easter Day - they discovered the truth: that death and the grave cannot win because Jesus has actually overcome the world!

And that's something we need to learn too. No doubt, our faith in Jesus' victory over death has been sorely tested at one time or another. But when rogue clergy and theologians cast doubt on God's Church and the reliability of His Word; or when clear Biblical teaching is exchanged for public opinion then Jesus' words, 'I have overcome the world', seems more like wishful thinking for some, rather than the gospel truth.

Yet, Christ's victory over sin, death, and the grave is just as real and true for us today as it was for the men and women standing at the empty tomb on that first Easter. You see, we learn from Revelation 21: 10-11 that the Church (the Bride of Christ) has never been overcome; ... that she is still beautiful and radiant like a precious jewel awaiting her bridegroom. And when the Father calls 'time' on this world, Christ Jesus will return on the clouds to take the faithful saints to His Father's mansion with many rooms (see Jn. 14:2).

Now, after Jesus' ascension those words rang loud and clear in the apostles' ears for they were persecuted, beaten and martyred, but they were not defeated. Why? Because they were eyewitnesses of Jesus' victory – that He had overcome the world. Yes, they suffered, but they rejoiced in the face of suffering. They were hated, but they loved their enemies. They were killed, yet they lived in, and for Christ.

My friends, the apostles couldn't have endured all this hardship unless they truly believed that Jesus' victory was their victory too! Indeed, nothing could persuade them otherwise for Jesus defeated the world - at the cross and at the tomb. Not just the world, Satan too - in spite of indications to the contrary.

And the apostles also believed Jesus' promise: 'I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.'(Jn. 16:23b) Now, this doesn't mean they prayed for great wealth, or for personal bodyguards, or to escape persecution and suffering. No, they prayed: "**Your will be done, on earth as in heaven**" – for it is God's will that all people be saved.

Now, a good example of God's answer to prayer is the story of Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. A God-fearing woman, Lydia had been praying for someone to proclaim the gospel of salvation to her.

Then one Sabbath she was again praying by the river and God answered her by sending Paul. We are told: 'The Lord opened her heart to respond to his message' – Lydia believed. So 'Lydia and the members of her household were baptised' (Acts 16: 15). So, for Lydia, having the joy and peace that comes with being forgiven in Jesus' name and reconciled to God, prompted her to host Paul and his missionary companions for several days.

As you are God's child by holy baptism, Jesus wants you to receive the same peace and joy that Lydia did. It's the peace and joy of forgiveness, and the hope of eternal life. Real faith – believing that 'Jesus has overcome the world'. Having said that, however, we must be careful of Satan – the father of lies – for he wants to replace God's good gifts with sorrow and despair; with unbelief and distress that comes with it.

But, my friends, God has provided for all your needs. That's why Jesus invites you to bring your struggles, your weariness, your failures, and lay them at His altar To unburden your heart so Jesus can fill it with His love. At the altar you will hear the same comforting greeting which Jesus spoke to His disciples on that first Easter: **Shalom**. 'Peace be to you.'

As a baptised child of God, the new life you seek is in the bread and wine – Jesus' faith-producing body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. So 'take and eat; take and drink' with confidence that Jesus is working in your heart.

And now you too can pray confidently that 'God's will be done' – here among this body of believers, in this city and nation, and throughout the world. Just as Lydia prayed without ceasing, believing that God will provide for her spiritual needs, you too can 'Ask, and you will receive'. **Amen**.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all human understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Sermon by Pastor Ernie Kiss, 22 May 2022