

Living as an Overcomer  
John 16:33

This morning we'll finish our study of John 16, finishing our series on living between the already and the not yet. Jesus was preparing His followers to live in this new day - the age between the first and second comings of Jesus.

We've made a list of 8 characteristics of our day:

1. A day when we can have a clear understanding of the Father (16:23a, 25).
2. A day of direct relationship with the Father Who loves us (16:26-27).
3. A day of joyful answered prayers in Jesus' name (16:23b-24)
4. Another step in the fulfillment of the Father's purposes (16:28)
5. A day for faith and humility (16:29-32)

Then the final three all come from verse 33:

6. A day of tribulation (16:33)
7. A day of peace (16:33)
8. A day of encouragement (16:33)

READ John 16:33.

Jesus is not only promising peace and encouragement - He is also promising us victory. Though He doesn't directly say it here, the rest of the New Testament makes it very clear that we share in Christ's victory, with phrases like II Cor. 2:14 *Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ.*

Maybe you have repented of your sin and come to follow Jesus as your Savior, but you are not experiencing peace or encouragement. Maybe you've come this morning and you don't at all feel like an overcomer or a victorious Christian. You might even feel more like a loser. This message is for you - for us.

The first truth we need to recognize is that

**The world is a serious threat.**

If you're struggling, and discouraged, and weighed down by the world, that doesn't make you a loser Christian. In John 16:33 Jesus recognizes that in this age His followers will face a lot of things that will try to steal their peace and discourage them. Genuine followers of Jesus struggle with worry and fear and doubt and frustration as they live in this world.



As you look at verse 33, note the phrases *in Me* and *in the world*. In this age we have two identities: we are residents of this world, and we are children of God in union with Christ. Our union with Christ gives us peace and encouragement forever; but our residence in the world gives us tribulation temporarily.

In Jesus' final prayer in John 17, we'll see that He refers to the world nearly 20 times. Believers in Tanzania and Lithuania and Argentina and Temecula all face the same problem: the world. It is a serious threat for followers of Jesus everywhere. And it's a threat at all times: the book of Acts is a great reminder that the world has always been a rough place for followers of Jesus. Don't buy into this idea it has gotten much harder for Christians in the world today. That's not true. It was as hard to follow Jesus in AD 113 as it is in AD 2013.

The world's threat is a characteristic of this age, just as Jesus said: *in the world you have tribulation*. If we don't stay close to Jesus, the world can at least temporarily overcome us.

I John 4 explains that the spirit of antichrist is already in the world - there is in the world both a spiritual power and an attitude that push you away from Jesus.

TURN TO, READ II Peter 2:18-21

The world entices, it enslaves, it makes empty promises, it defiles, it entangles, it overcomes.

As I mentioned last Sunday, in Revelation 2-3 Jesus promises great blessings to the overcomers. But in those same messages to the churches, we also find a very honest portrait of what it's like for the church in the world:

- We experience tiring toil, there are evil men, there are false apostles, and it is hard to not grow weary.
- We may live in poverty, face blasphemy, experience prison, or even death.
- We may have to deal with immorality in the church.
- We can forget what we have received and heard.
- We can be pressured to deny Jesus' name.
- We might be materially wealthy but spiritually impoverished, and not even know it.
- We can become lukewarm, and become spiritually drowsy and weak.
- We can become soiled by the world.
- We can lose our first love.

Is it possible that sometimes we are getting beaten down by the world, because we have ignored the Bible's warnings? Because we have lived naively, as if this world was going to help us follow Jesus? Jesus calls us to view the world as a serious threat.



Now,

**What is the key to overcoming the world?**

TURN TO, READ I John 5:4

The answer is: faith. But first, note the promise: *whatever is born of God overcomes the world!* Those who are truly born again cannot ultimately be overcome by the world. You will sin. You will temporarily cave in to the pressures and struggle with doubt or discouragement. But every true child of God will ultimately share in Christ's triumph as an overcomer.

The author of Hebrews expresses this confidence in Hebrews 10:39 *But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.*

The key to overcoming the world is our faith.

If faith is the key to overcoming the world, then we can guess that the world's goal is to overthrow your faith:

**1. Tribulations pressure our faith.**

When the pressures of the world are upon us - when life seems to be crushing - we can respond

- with discouragement or with faith.
- with doubt or with faith.
- with fear or with faith.
- with despair or with faith.

When you follow Jesus at times you will feel like giving up. You'll begin to think:

- It's not worth it.
- I'll never win.
- This will never work.
- I'm just a failure.
- It doesn't make any sense.
- Things will never get better.
- Following Jesus just isn't working out for me.
- Maybe sin isn't so bad after all.
- God just doesn't answer my prayers.
- I can't handle any more of this.



All of those things are really about our faith. This brings us to a very important and very encouraging principle: it is a victory to simply keep believing. In your notes this is #2

## 2. Faith is the victory.

No matter how weak or waffling your faith may be, it is a victory to simply keep believing. Our culture loves accomplishment: What's on your resume? How much money have you made? How many times have you been PTA president? How many trophies have your kids won?

And sometimes we start to think that way about Christianity: How many people have you witnessed to? How many classes have you taught? How many verses have your children memorized?

But from God's perspective, simply continuing to believe is a great and mighty victory over all of Satan's schemes.

You know Satan doesn't care much about killing your body, because that simply graduates you to heaven. But he cares very much about trying to kill your faith. And if you go through the valley of the shadow of death and keep believing, you just won a great victory. If you go through depression and come out the other side still believing in Him, you just won. If you have a very difficult marriage, or a miserable job situation, or a painful illness, or financial disaster, and you keep on trusting in the Lord - no matter how weak that trust may be! - you are winning great victories. Though it does not look like an accomplishment from the world's perspective, from God's perspective it looks very different!

As we read in I Peter 1:(6-9) The various trials that distress you are proving that your faith is genuine, and the result will be praise and honor and glory when Jesus comes again. Note that the test is not whether or not your faith is strong, but whether or not your faith is genuine.

We might think that the only way we can win the victory of faith is if we go through a trial with unwavering faith, never doubting, never struggling, and never discouraged. No, the victory is when you go through the trial and you do keep the faith, despite the doubts and struggles and discouragement. You still believe.

We have recently mentioned Acts 14:22 *Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.* But what comes right before that? *encouraging them to continue in the faith.*

Faith is the victory. Not strong faith, but genuine faith, even though it may often be weak.

This also applies to temptation:



### 3. Resisting temptation is a great victory of faith.

We can feel discouraged when we fight against temptation, like we've just got our finger in the dike and it's going to burst sometime. We can feel like we're just surviving instead of conquering. But resisting temptation is conquering: it is a victory of faith.

Imagine with me a follower of Jesus who is at home all alone facing temptation. It doesn't matter what the temptation is; think of whatever might tempt you when you're home all alone. This believer is struggling to resist that temptation and trust God instead. It's easy for her to feel like there is no use, she might as well give in. "Who is going to know anyways? Why does it matter anyways? It's just me, struggling like always." Suppose that follower of Jesus resists that temptations and chooses to trust God more than her feelings. That doesn't seem like much: she just survived. No one is going to write a glowing biography about what a great Christian hero she was because she survived that temptation.

But suppose we could see that same situation from heaven's perspective. Might it be true that what just happened there was just as great a victory as a preacher delivering a mighty sermon to a huge crowd, or a missionary boldly going where no one has gone before with the gospel? Have we somehow failed to realize that resisting temptation is a great triumph of faith?

Maybe you think of yourself as a bit of a loser of a Christian. Certainly no one is ever going to write a biography about what a great follower of Jesus you were. But wait: do you still believe? Despite the tribulations and temptations and failures and trials in your life, do you still look to God in faith? Do you still trust Him? You are an overcomer! You are a victor! You are born of God, and you are overcoming the world by your faith.

Then, if faith is the key to overcoming the world, realize that

### 4. Faith looks to Jesus as the great Overcomer.

The key is not really us but Him. Faith's strength is not in us, but in Him. Faith looks to Jesus as the great Overcomer, instead of looking to ourselves. You will not overcome the world because you have such strong faith, but because you have faith in such a strong Savior. We're just branches, He's the vine. We are weak, and He is strong. If you have felt weak recently, be encouraged again to know that the key is not for us to be so strong, but for us to have faith in One who is so strong.

So faith is the key to victory over the world.



## What kind of faith?

### 1. Faith that God Himself is enough.

Think again of the text we read last week:

*Zephaniah 3:16-17 Do not be afraid [be encouraged!], O Zion; Do not let your hands fall limp. The LORD your God is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy.*

God is with me. God is a victorious warrior. God loves me. That's all I need, no matter what is going on in my life. Many times over the last few months we have recounted portions of the riches that we have in Christ. In Christ we have endless reasons to not be discouraged. Our riches in Christ are more than enough to keep us encouraged.

Maybe you need to take these verses from Zephaniah and memorize them this week, print them out and tape it on your wall, put them on your dashboard, use them as your wallpaper on your computer. As the world pressures you, say: "I'm OK, because God is with me. God is a victorious warrior. God loves me. That's all I need to know. God Himself is enough for me." Oh, how Satan flees from a heart that is content in God alone!

### 2. Faith that God is lovingly carrying out His purposes for us.

This brings us to the majestic conclusion to Romans 8.

TURN TO, READ Romans 8:28-39

Both Romans 8 and John 16 talk about tribulation and triumph, and Romans 8 specifically calls for faith in tribulation. You see the opening words of verse 28: *and we know*. Those are the words of confident faith.

What are we supposed to believe?

I think we can summarize it with three words or phrases.

- At the end of verse 28, see the words *those who are called according to His purpose*. That is what God has determined to do in your life.
- Then in verse 31, God is *for us*.
- And then in verses 38-39 *Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*.



So this passage calls us to believe that in our tribulations, God is lovingly carrying out His purposes for us.

In verses 29-30 Paul explains God's purpose. God's purpose is to predestine you, call you, justify you, and ultimately glorify you in the image of His son. God's purpose is for you someday to be completely changed into the image of Christ forever. I love how verse 31 comes immediately after that: What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? If God has an unshakeable purpose for me - if God is determined to accomplish this chain of predestining me, calling me, justifying me, and glorifying me - then who can get in God's way? No one can mess with God's plan for me! Certainly the world's tribulations cannot derail God's purpose.

Now someone might say: "Well, if God was really for me, He'd take away all my problems." But that is exactly what God is accomplishing. He is going to take away all of your problems by changing you fully and finally into the image of Christ. All of your problems will be gone the moment you are glorified. So if all my problems are going to go away when I am changed fully into the image of Christ, then the best thing God could possibly do for me today is not to take all of my problems away, but to use all of my problems to change me into the image of Christ.

If you still question whether God is truly for you or not, in verse 32 Paul challenges you to look at the cross. If the Father did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, could God possibly be against you today?

If you want to live as an overcomer, you must believe each day that in your tribulations God is lovingly carrying out His purposes for you. As verse 28 says, God causes all things to work together for good. In all your tribulations, God is lovingly carrying out His purposes for you.

Paul goes on to say that you cannot be overcome by the world's charges or accusations, for God has justified you and Christ intercedes for you. You cannot be separated from the love of Christ by any tribulations. Not even death, or spiritual beings, or the future uncertainties, or any else you can think of can possibly separate you from God's loving purposes that He is carrying out in your life.

Let's look especially at verse 37: *in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.*

In John 16:33 Jesus says "Be encouraged, I have overcome the world." And remember that is *nikaō*, like Nike, to win the victory.



Now here in Romans 8:37 we read in all these things we *hypernikaō*. That is the prefix from which we get words like hyperextension, hypercritical, hyperactive. In all these things, we don't just win, we dominate. We hyper-win.

"So great is the victory that is secured by the loving work of Christ that Paul in Rom. 8:37 finds *nikáō* too weak a term. He thus adopts the rare *hypernikáō*. In every test we win the supreme victory." (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume IV, 945)

We win, and it's not even close! Think of our tribulations like an enemy coming at us, trying to condemn us in our sin, trying to derail God's purposes, trying to sever us from God's love. Not only are those attacks not successful - because those who are born of God do ultimately overcome the world - but those very tribulations are used by God to draw us closer to Christ, to change us into the image of Christ.

Suppose you play chess, and you win. And someone asks you: "Did you win?" And you reply, "Did I win? I didn't just win, I dominated. Every single move he made I turned to my advantage. Every move he made helped me." You've probably played some sort of game like that, where no matter what you did, it was the wrong thing and helped the other person. That is what it is like when our tribulations seek to overthrow God's loving purposes for us. They not only fail, but God takes them and uses them to accomplish His purposes for us. Every single move the enemy makes is turned by God to our advantage, because God is for us. So if you want a dominating victory in your tribulations, keep believing, and let God keep changing you to be more like Christ. That will be a dominating victory.

Then finally, victorious faith believes that God will triumph in the end.

### 3. Faith that God will triumph in the end.

This is true whether we are talking about the end of our lives or the end of this world. Two passages state this very directly: TURN TO, READ I Cor. 15:57 In Christ, death's grip on us is lost. Hebrews 2:15 says that we are no longer enslaved by the fear of death. Death is still an enemy, and we hate it, but we do not fear it.

We don't live under any delusion that we are going to live forever. We don't buy into all the latest health fads that supposedly keep you from every disease, because we know full well that we are dying people. We also know, however, that these bodies are going to be resurrected someday and glorified into bodies that bear the image of Christ. We fight death, but we do not fear it. We hate death, but we are not hunted by it or haunted by it. At the end of our lives, death will not triumph. God will.

And so I Corinthians 15:58 says that gives us the confidence to carry on.





Then TURN TO, READ Revelation 5:1-5 I believe that the scroll or book described here contains the plans for the end of the world; God's plans for His final triumph at the end of the world. But someone has to be qualified to break the seals and open the scroll. Somehow, the final events at the end of the world cannot happen without a qualified person. And when all of the options have been exhausted, and no qualified person has been found, John weeps. The possibility that God's purposes cannot be unfolded breaks his heart. But the elder tells John to "Stop weeping!" Because suddenly here is the Lion - here is King Jesus, and He has overcome so as to open the book.

The work of Jesus in His death and resurrection guarantees that God's plans at the end of this world will happen. Jesus is the triumphant one who is qualified to unroll God's plans for final triumph. Because Jesus has already overcome, God will triumph in the end.

### **Conclusion**

If you came this morning with weak, struggling faith, I pray that you are encouraged. If you have been beaten down by tribulations, I pray that you might see that you are not a spiritual failure. From God's perspective, your small faith is a great victory.

I also want to challenge all of us to press on in the word to know and love God more, that our hearts might be full of faith in Him. Let us not stay in the lowlands of weak faith. He is sufficient to fill our hearts with joyful faith each day. Do not wait for your circumstances to change: fix the eyes of faith upon Him today. He will grant you peace and encouragement, and cause you to overcome with Him.

