

PEACE AND COURAGE IN A TROUBLED WORLD
JOHN 16:32-33

This is an odd morning. I have preached to this church body almost 1400 times, by my count. I have never preached with music recorded by our musicians ahead of time, and I have never preached to an empty auditorium. There have been Sundays where attendance was low; there has never been a Sunday when the sanctuary was completely empty (except for the sound engineer and the live stream operator).

We often acknowledge that there is trouble in this world. Life is hard. There are tough times. There are burdens. Most of us have seen other events classified as pandemics. None of us has lived through a time when churches voluntarily closed their doors for worship in an attempt to stop a pandemic. Every single person (and that's not an overstatement) has been impacted in some way by this event. We are *all* feeling the weight of the trouble of these days.

Perhaps these days are leading you to ask questions like the one an 11-year-old boy gave John Piper one Sunday morning: "If God promises to meet all our needs, why are we hungry?" In other words, *is God still good and what is God doing in our circumstance and will He provide for us?*

There are enough stories of suffering in this world (even apart from Coronavirus) that it might be tempting for us to say, "Life is not as good as what we thought Christ promised us. Life is not just hard — life is unreasonably hard." I suspect that there are many Americans and many believers who feel that way this morning, even if they won't say it that way.

Where will we turn in our trouble and trial? What will we do in this circumstance? Beginning this morning — and for the next eight weeks or more (as long as the Coronavirus persists) — I want to take some time to think with you about a number of truths to help us endure in these days. We want to keep things looking as normal as possible and worship like we usually do, but it's obvious that things aren't normal, and frankly, to continue in Romans as if everything is normal is to ignore the elephant in the room. So today I begin this series with the words of our Savior from John 16 and the truth and provision for our suffering. What should we think about suffering? Listen to what Jesus says in John 16:32-33 —

WE LIVE IN A TROUBLE-FILLED WORLD.

BUT CHRIST HAS GIVEN US EVERYTHING WE NEED TO BE AT PEACE AND HAVE COURAGE IN THIS TROUBLE-FILLED WORLD.

1. The **REALITY** of the Believer's Trouble (v. 32)
2. The **PROVISION** of the Believer's Peace (v. 33a)
3. The **COMMAND** for the Believer's Courage (v. 33b)

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BUT CHRIST HAS GIVEN US EVERYTHING WE NEED TO BE AT PEACE AND HAVE COURAGE IN THIS TROUBLE-FILLED WORLD.

As we come to this passage, notice **three aspects** of our suffering and troubles, and God's provision for us —

1. The REALITY of the Believer's Trouble (v. 32)

- You may remember the context for Jesus' words in John 16. He is about to go to the cross and He has gathered His disciples to the Upper Room for the Passover meal; He would also institute the Lord's Supper in that room, and give them final instruction before going to the cross.
- These verses are the last instruction He gives them before He prays for them (John 17) and before He is betrayed by Judas (John 18:1-2). These are essential words to prepare the disciples for the cross and all the events that would follow His death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus was particularly instructing them about the troubles that they would have following His death.
- Jesus' blunt speech about the troubles of life was essential for the disciples and it is essential for us as well. Some of our troubles might be different than what the disciples experienced, but Christ's provision for us and them is the same. His provision was adequate for them and will be adequate for us.
- Having heard of Jesus' explanation of His incarnation and ascension, the disciples claim that they now understand and believe Christ — that His **plain speech** (v. 29) has made it clear to them.
 - ✓ Some have suggested that the disciples are speaking impulsively and arrogantly — that they really don't understand yet — and wouldn't until after the Spirit was given to them. And given Jesus' gentle correction of them in v. 31, it does seem that they have spoken somewhat rashly.
 - ✓ But it is also true that this is the strongest and clearest statement by the entire group of who Christ is and their faith in Him. **Verse 30** is an affirmation of His omniscience (**know all things**), His authority (**no need for anyone to question You**), and role as sovereign Savior (**believe You**).
- In the verses immediately before ours, Jesus says that He will no longer speak figuratively (v. 25) — perhaps the disciples had quizzical looks on their faces. And after responding in vv. 29-30 that they now understand and believe, Jesus responds with a test and warning for them:
 - ✓ **Do you believe?** (v. 31) He is not asking if they believe that He is the Savior. That Q has been tested already and their lives have evidenced faith. But the question is testing whether their faith is hearty and adequate. This is like a one question final exam before He is crucified and ascends: will they stand in difficulty and trouble? So He gives a warning of the days to come.
 - ✓ **An hour is coming...for you to be scattered...**
 - That scattering was just hours away. When Christ went to the cross, everyone scattered. Only Peter and John were at the trial, and Peter denied Him. And hours after that, all the disciples were hiding in a locked room, wondering what would happen to them.

- Even after Jesus appeared to them, seven of the 11 (including Peter and John) went to Galilee to contemplate a return to their fishing careers (Jn. 21:1ff). They all left.
 - This scattering was not because they were being directly persecuted. They scattered because they anticipated hard times and persecution and they seemed to quit and give up. Their circumstances were hard and they couldn't see a way out. So they left the Savior and they left each other. And Jesus' prediction came true. They did all go to their **own homes**, they did **leave Him alone**. This is the kind of trouble that comes from the sins of others against us, and then our own sin of not being faithful and our sin of not trusting in persecution.
 - The disciples would be scattered. They would run in fear. They had trouble. From Friday, just before dusk, through Sunday morning they contemplated life without Christ — *if He was put to death, what would become of them?*
 - This scattering is not really what we are experiencing today. The Coronavirus is not afflicting Christians only or particularly. This is one of those hard realities that is true for all people everywhere — there is suffering in this world. And Jesus refers to that kind of trouble in v. 33.
- In **v. 33** Jesus *promised* the Twelve a different trouble (and notice that it is a statement of reality and promise) — **in the world you have tribulation**. That is, there are many kinds of problems in life, including living in a fallen world (cancer, colds, Coronavirus, and car accidents). There are trials in this world. Those trials wouldn't be avoided by the disciples and they won't be avoided by us.
 - ✓ The word **tribulation** refers to pressures, hardships, and sufferings. They are distresses that come from outside of us (they aren't caused by our sin). Sometimes this word refers to the unique distresses that believers experience because they are followers of Christ. But it can also be broader than that. It can refer to our own personal physical weaknesses, the illnesses that are common to man, and the storms experienced in nature (tornadoes, thunderstorms, flooding, etc.).
 - ✓ Pastor Tim Keller talks about the reality of this suffering:

“No matter what precautions we take, no matter how well we have put together a good life, no matter how hard we have worked to be healthy, wealthy, comfortable with friends and family, and successful with our career — something will inevitably destroy it.” [*Kiss the Wave*, 19.]

- ✓ And Scripture affirms the reality of this kind of common suffering:
 - Suffering and difficulty is common to all people (**Mt. 5:45**; 2 Cor. 4:16; **Js. 1:2**; 1 Cor. 10:13).
 - God has sovereignly ordained suffering (**Is. 45:17**; 1 Thess. 3:3; Job)
 - God provides comfort and encouragement in our troubles (1 Thess. 3:7)
 - All creation suffers, but no suffering can compare to the Glory to come (**Rom. 8:20ff**; 2 Cor. 4:17).

- ✓ Our problem is that we have cultivated a scenario where we believe we are entitled to a life without persecution, suffering, and difficulty. We want (dare I say, “we worship”?) a trouble-free life and when we don’t get a trouble-free life we become disappointed, despairing, and/or angry.
- ✓ The particular situation with Coronavirus is unusual in the sense that pandemics really are once-in-a-century events. But the *general* circumstance of Coronavirus is not unusual in that people get sick and die every day, and people lose jobs and income, and the stock market rises and falls, and we are inconvenienced by not getting what we want at the grocery store or restaurant. This isn’t unusual in that sense. *We should expect it.* We should anticipate trials. That *is* the way of life in a fallen world. That was the reality in which the disciples lived and we should expect nothing different.
- ✓ Peter (1 Pt. 4:12 — **not strange**) tells us persecution is expected for believers; here Jesus also reminds us that difficulties in life are also typical and expected for *all* people.
- ✓ Jonathan Edwards captured this truth when he wrote this in a letter to his daughter while she recovered from an illness (3/28/1753) —

I would not have you think any strange thing has happened to you in this affliction: 'Tis according to the course of things in this world, that after the world's smiles, some great affliction soon comes. God has now given you early and seasonable warning not to depend on worldly prosperity. Therefore I would advise...if it pleases God to restore you, to [count] upon no happiness here. Labour while you live, to serve God and do what you can, and endeavour to improve every dispensation to God's glory and your own spiritual good, and be content to do and bear all that God calls you to do in this wilderness. , and never to expect to find this world anything better than a wilderness.

- ✓ This is Edwards’ wise care of his daughter to remind here that in this world there is tribulation and that we should not have expect anything less.
- But that does not mean that they — or we — should be hopeless. And here we come to the culmination of this passage —

2. The **PROVISION** of the Believer’s Peace (v. 33a)

- Frequently Jesus said things that just didn’t seem to fit the context. Things like **Your sins are forgiven** when a crippled man just wanted to be healed (Mk. 2:5) and **I and the Father are One** (Jn. 10:30) and (to Peter, one of His most intimate disciples) **Get behind Me, Satan** (Mt. 16:23).
- And this verse contains another of those shocking statements: **These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace.** “Really?” the disciples had to be thinking — “You said *that* (“tribulation”) so that we would have peace?”
- But notice that this is not the only thing that Jesus said in the Upper Room. In fact, He said **these things I have spoken** eight times (14:25; 15:11, 17; 16:1, 4, 6, 25, 33).

- Jesus seems to be alluding to *all* the other things He has spoken on that evening as well. So what else did Jesus say?
 - ✓ Christ will not leave them as orphans; He will come again (14:3, 18)
 - ✓ Christ will answer all prayers asked in accord with His name (14:13-14)
 - ✓ Even though He will go, He will send the Spirit to them (14:16, 26; 16:7)
 - ✓ By living in and with Christ, He will give everything one needs (15:7)
 - ✓ There is joy in keeping the commandments of Christ — *full* joy (15:10-11)
 - ✓ The persecution they suffer is not unusual; it is because they are following Christ (15:18ff) and He has spoken about it to give them courage (16:1, 4).
 - ✓ Even though Jesus will leave temporarily, He will return to them and they will have joy (16:16, 20)
 - ✓ The Father loves them and will care for them as the Father (16:23, 26-27)
 - ✓ He tells them (and us) *these things* so that they might have *peace*. We don't need to have trouble-free lives to have peace. We need *these things* to have peace. He gives us Himself for that purpose.
- Let's also think about what Jesus means with the word *peace*. He uses that word to refer to an absence of strife and a sense of contentment and rest in the midst of suffering.
 - ✓ *Peace* was a particular theme on that night (Jn. 14:27) and after the resurrection (20:19, 21, 26).
 - ✓ And remember that Jesus' advent began with a declaration of His coming peace (Lk. 2:14) — a peace that came from reconciliation with God; now His ministry culminates with a declaration of a life of peace in the midst of turmoil. "Whatever the trouble, peace prevails." [Carson]
 - ✓ So what was this peace that Christ offered?
 - It is a peace that is available only *in Me*. That phrase is contrasting two possible places to find peace — "in Christ" or "in the world." The first is eternal; the second is temporal. Only when we are connected to Christ through faith will there be peace.
 - The peace that Jesus is talking about is the subjective experience of peace that is based on the objective reality of peace. We "feel" at peace (content, satisfied, non-anxious) because we have genuine peace with God through salvation (Rom. 5:1). The peace that we have that God is no longer against us (Rom. 5:1) keeps us from despairing when we are in trials (Rom. 5:2ff).
 - Friend, if you are not experiencing peace in the middle of Coronavirus, is it because you don't have *real* peace with God? Is He still your enemy because of your sin? Are you a follower of Jesus Christ? Do you live dependent on Him (what Jesus calls "abiding" in Jn. 15:4ff)? If not, I urge and compel you to trust in Jesus Christ today. You and I do not need freedom from health scares or full grocery store shelves or disinfectant wipes or a stable stock market. We need forgiveness from Christ for our sin. The problem all of us have is that we are sinners, unprepared to meet the Lord of Heaven. But if we trust that Christ's death on the cross was adequate to remove the penalty of our sin and the power of sin over us, then we can have peace with God. And when we have that great peace, then all the smaller disturbances of life will not shake us so readily.

- ✓ Do you remember what Jesus said in **Luke 12:4-5** — which I read last week? Substitute Coronavirus in that verse for **those...** Coronavirus cannot take away anything of value from those of us who are in Christ Jesus. If we have been saved by Christ, we are secure and we have *nothing* to fear.
 - When we are fearful of falling stock markets, illness, broken relationships, and death, it is because we have never learned to fear God.
 - We fear the smaller things in life because we have never learned to fear the greatest thing in life, so we think the smaller things are the biggest thing. People fear the loss of food and finances and toilet paper (and death) because they have not learned to truly fear God.
 - We are not at peace because in our heart of hearts we think the smaller things in life (like full grocery store shelves, and health, and a bulging retirement plan) are the great source of peace. So when we lost them we think we've lost the greatest thing; we have forgotten the peace that Christ gives.
 - Christ has not promised to keep us from problems; but He has promised to keep us (**17:15**).

3. The **COMMAND** for the Believer's Courage (v. 33b)

- And then He adds **take courage**. The word means “be of good cheer, be comforted, be bold...” Most people are generally bold when there is no trouble. But give us some trouble and mix in a little trial and stir it with interpersonal conflict and boldness — and courage flees. Yet Jesus commands the 11 — “in the coming troubles and trials, be bold and strong.”
- How can Jesus *command* this? It seems preposterous. He says it for one reason — and this is the heart of this passage — ***I have overcome the world.***
 - ✓ He does *not* say, “be courageous because *you* have overcome the world.” The personal pronoun is emphatic — ***I***. “I, Jesus.” “I alone.” “Because *I* have overcome the world, you be strong.”
 - ✓ What does He mean by **overcome**? It is the basic word for victory. He means I am the victor.
 - ✓ And this victory is not merely a personal victory of Christ as if He has protected Himself and His life. Rather, He is victor over **the world** for all men and on behalf of all who will believe. It is a corporate victory accomplished *by Him alone* for His body, the church. And He has defeated everything on earth, everywhere on earth, for those who believe in Him. His victory demonstrates His mastery.
 - ✓ And notice that He doesn't say, “I am about to go to the cross and I will die and be resurrected and on Sunday morning I will overcome the world and sin and death.” No, He says, ***I have*** (already!) **overcome**. On Thursday night — before the cross — Jesus was already victorious and already the conquering King. The cross and the resurrection will affirm and reveal it, but He is already the Conqueror. And the force of the verb **overcome** also means that Christ has overcome and His victory extends forward in time — He already is — and always will be — victor.

- ✓ Where did Christ win this battle against the world?
 - over Satan in the wilderness of temptation (Mt. 4:1-11)
 - in binding the power of Satan (Mt. 12:29)
 - in repeatedly casting demons from people (cf. Mk. 1:22ff)
 - in preventing Satan from carrying out his plan until it became God's time (Lk. 22:53)
 - supremely in living a life of righteousness fulfilling every aspect of God's Law (Mt. 5:17-18)
 - Christ is victorious in every part of life; nothing anywhere has defeated Him and nothing has caused Him the slightest harm or problem.
- Before Christ ever went to the cross, He was already victorious. He was a Savior in full control of His destiny in the courtroom and on the cross and in the grave and on resurrection morning. Every action of Christ on those days were the actions of a victor, doing the work to demonstrate His victory.
- And friends, the astounding part of this message is that the victory wasn't for Him. It was for us. He was victor over righteousness and sin and death and Satan so that we could be freed from sin and the wrath of God and the hopelessness of life and so that we could live boldly with and for Him.
 - ✓ Friend, you don't have to sin. Christ is victor.
 - ✓ Friend, death never wins. Christ is victor.
 - ✓ Friend, righteousness is possible. Christ is victor.
 - ✓ Friend, peace and contentment and boldness are not empty commands. Christ is victor.
 - ✓ Friend, take courage. Christ has overcome the world. Sin hasn't defeated Him. Death hasn't defeated Him. And Coronavirus hasn't defeated Him. If you are in Him, you are safe. You are secure. You *may* suffer. No, you *will* suffer. But if you are in Christ, your suffering is not fatal or final. Christ is final. And He is the victor.

CONCLUSION: Hear the words of pastor Joe Thornton:

"It isn't wrong to ask God to relieve you of your pain, but it is more important that in the midst of the pain you rely on the promise of God to work such experiences for his glory and your good — to use these times as a means of perfecting your faith, strengthening your spirit, and transforming your life in such a way that you are becoming more like Jesus.

"I know you want relief, but often relief comes, not in the form of the removal of the affliction, but in the strengthening of your faith. And that is what these trials are designed to do — test, prove, and strengthen your faith." [Joe Thorn, *Note to Self*.]

As you go about your tasks in an unusual way this week remember that your trials and suffering are not unusual. But your way out of the suffering *is* unusual — it is in the person of Jesus Christ alone. Hold on to Him and you will receive peace and courage. Only by holding on to Him will you have the peace and courage you need for these days of trial and testing.

BENEDICTION:

Now go into the world in peace.

Have courage.

Hold onto what is good.

Honor all men.

Strengthen the fainthearted.

Support the weak.

Help the suffering.

Share the gospel.

Love and serve the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.