



John 16:16-33
So That You May Believe: John
“Overcome”

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As many of you are aware, our family just recently sent our oldest daughter off to college, half way around the world for one semester, and then to Manhattan after that for what should be the remainder of her college career. And hopefully not a second longer. ☺ And we were telling this to someone this past week who we hadn't seen in quite a while, and the person made the statement that Gwen and I must miss her a whole bunch. And our response was, “No, not really.” Hailey, if you're watching this online or listening on the podcast, please keep on listening to hear how this finishes up. ☺ I mean, of course, saying goodbye at the airport was really hard. Watching her walk through that TSA checkpoint and turn around one last time to wave goodbye over the throngs of people – well, because people in our family are a little vertically challenged, it was *through* the throngs of people – yeah...that was hard. But since then: no, we really haven't missed her...at least, not nearly as much as we thought we would.

There are two primary reasons why. First, because for the last 6 months prior to her leaving, she had a job where she worked 40 hours a week, frequently from the mid-afternoon until 10:00 pm or so, and so she often wasn't there when we were all at home...she missed dinners, and so forth. Plus, she was teaching piano lessons, was a volunteer gymnastics coach with the LWHS gymnastics team, visited with friends who were on winter break still...I mean, she was busy. It was like she was already gone at least 5 days a week, anyway, before she ever left. And then the second reason is because of this (hold up phone). Text messaging, FaceTime, Video chat messaging with an app called “Marco Polo”. We're pretty darn connected and see her or hear from her/see her basically every day.

So, we've been able to “take heart” and find hope in the midst of her being gone. His has all helped us to overcome our grief, and the sense of loss. Wouldn't it be nice to have that kind of hope and ability to overcome grief and difficulties in life? Not to ignore them or pretend they don't exist, but to process them and persevere through them with hope, courage, and expectancy? This morning we get the culmination of Jesus' teaching we've

been in the last few weeks. And I invite you to turn to John 16:16 as we pick up where we left off last week, and see if Jesus doesn't have something to say about this and offer something that can give us hope. We'll take it in several sections this morning, starting with **John 16:16-24**.

So, the disciples express their confusion and lack of understanding about what Jesus is saying. And let's not criticize them for that. **All their bubbles of what they expected the Messiah to do and be are being burst here as it slowly dawns on them that Jesus is leaving them.** So, they aren't probably tracking quite as well as they might otherwise. And they've got this question amongst themselves: What does Jesus mean by "a little while"? He's leaving them in a little while, but then they will see him in "a little while." What is he talking about?

Well, Jesus explains that they will weep and mourn while the world rejoices – and the world rejoices because the world hates Jesus as he had said earlier. But their grief will turn to joy. Jesus is speaking of his death and his resurrection; they didn't know that at that moment, so there's still probably some lack of understanding; but later they would realize what he was talking about. As a metaphor to help them understand he speaks about the pain and anguish of childbirth and the joy that then comes with the baby being fully born, so that the pain and anguish is quickly forgotten. Of course, if Jesus continued the metaphor further he would have gotten to the pain of raising teenagers... ☺...but you know, that's beside the point, that their grief will turn to joy.

Jesus then gives one of the most misunderstood statements in the Bible, "My Father will give you whatever you ask for in my name." It's interesting because later Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians something similar when he says, **"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13)**. With this verse, we know there are lots of things we can't actually do, even as followers of Jesus: we can't jump off a bridge and expect to fly by flapping our arms like a bird; we can't lay out in the heat of the sun on a hot summer day and not get sunburned, and so forth. "All things" refers to the stuff Paul wrote just before, in the previous couple of verses. In fact, some translations now more properly read, "I can do all these

things” or “I can do all this” through Christ who strengthens me. He writes that he has “learned to be content whatever the circumstances...in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.” *That’s* what Paul says he can do through Christ who gives him the strength to do it.

Similarly, God doesn’t literally grant us whatever we ask, because some things we ask for aren’t in his will for us. They aren’t good for us. They aren’t right for us. Even things that we think are good or right often are not: they’re selfish, or they’re not centered on Jesus. As the reformed Baptist preacher of the mid 1800’s to early 1900’s, Alexander MacLaren puts it, **“Is a prayer, which from the beginning to the end is reeking with self-will, hallowed [is it holy] because we say, as a kind of charm at the end of it, ‘For Christ’s sake. Amen’?”** (Rev. Alexander MacLaren). If it were, the Mariners would have won a world series by now. To truly pray in Jesus’ name means to pray for and ask for the things that are central to who God is, that are in line with his desires for us and his will for us.

MacLaren goes on to say more about this teaching on prayer: “If I say that I am doing something in your name, that means on your behalf, as your representative, as your organ, and to express your mind and will. And if we pray in Christ’s name, that implies, not only our dependence upon His merit and work, but also the harmony of our wills with His will, and that our requests are not merely the hot products of our own selfishness, but are the calm issues of communion with Him. Thus, to pray requires the suppression of self. Heathen prayer, if there be such a thing, is the violent effort to make God will what I wish. **“Christian prayer is the submissive effort to make my wish what God wills, and that is to pray in Christ’s name”** (Rev. Alexander MacLaren).

So, pray for things, ask for things, that line up with what God desires. Ask for a heart that is in tune with God. Ask for courage to live more generously. Ask for the opportunity to put your spiritual gifts to use for God’s glory. Ask for a deeper conviction of God’s truth and his promises. Ask for forgiveness for your sin. Ask for the ability to forgive others for their sin against you. Ask for a heart of compassion for those on the margins. Ask for the ability to pray

for your enemies. Ask for more of the fruit of the Spirit. Ask God to make you more Christ-like in your head, your heart, and with your hands. As for the ability to love your neighbors as yourself. Ask God to give you opportunities to lead someone in the direction of Jesus, even to that final step of putting their faith in him. Ask for peace, for joy... These are the things that God will grant you, because these are the things that Jesus was about. So, these are the things his representatives, who are in full communion with him, pray for. Let's continue the passage (**John 16:25-30**). (**Followed by Sermon Graphic**)

Do you remember in the movie, "The Karate Kid" how Daniel Laruso wanted to learn to defend himself, and Mr. Miyagi said he'd help him out? Daniel is excited to learn karate so he won't be bullied. So, Mr. Miyagi puts Daniel to work waxing his car, cleaning his windows... I don't even remember all the tasks, but he wanted Daniel to do each thing with very specific motions and actions. ("Wax on, Wax off.") And after a while Daniel is like, "Hey when are you going to teach me to do this karate stuff so I can keep from getting beaten up?" And at that moment Mr. Miyagi started doing a bunch of karate on him, attacking him, and Daniel instinctively does exactly what he needs to do to defend himself, because of all the work he'd done waxing the car, washing the windows, and so forth. Mr. Miyagi taught him using metaphors (physical ones), and the lightbulb finally came on for Daniel when he put it to use. Similarly, Jesus uses a lot of metaphors and figures of speech to teach his disciples. And they've learned more than they realize.

So, Jesus acknowledges he's been speaking figuratively, using metaphors and so forth to teach them about God and being a disciple of Jesus' and what the business of the Messiah really is about. But a time will come when he will speak plainly about his Father. He means that he will speak plainly through the Holy Spirit. The disciples have incredible clarity after Jesus' resurrection and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – we see that in Acts, for instance. That being said, he does say something relatively straight-forward even here: **"I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father"** (**John 16:28**). I mean, he may not explicitly say "I'm going to be dying on a cross in the next 36 hours or so"

but it's pretty straightforward in a certain sense because he says he's leaving the world and going back to the Father. He's looking beyond his resurrection now, to his ascension back to his Heavenly Father.

And in this moment, a lightbulb goes on for them. Personally, I find it ironic because for us today I think this stretch of teaching is one of the more misunderstood passages, and yet for the disciples there, they have this "a-ha" moment, and now they believe. Three years of ministry with Jesus, three years of discipleship, and just in the nick of time, apparently, they now believe. This should encourage us: If you've looked into who Jesus is, if you're exploring Jesus and have questions and wonder about his claims and his teaching and his life, death, and resurrection, and if things seem fuzzy or uncertain...or if you've been trying to follow Jesus for a while and you still have questions: take heart, because Jesus' disciples were with him, in his physical presence, for 3 years before they seemed to really "get it." They connect the dots and realized they've learned more than they realized, like Daniel learning karate when he didn't realize it. Sometimes, it just takes time. Let's finish out the passage and see how Jesus wraps this all up. (**John 16:31-33**).

Jesus is pretty straight up with them: You say you believe, but that belief isn't going to be lived out very well, and you all are going to be scattered, you'll abandon me. You'll leave me all alone. So, their faith isn't all that fantastic, really. Humility can be such a tough lesson to learn, right? But, in spite of that, he wants to encourage them, and let them know that all will be ok, that they can have peace, and more. So, then he gets to the final teaching. This is what it's all been building to. The reason prayers are answered, the reason they can have peace, the reason they will have joy after their initial grief at his death is because of his final statement: **They can take heart (have hope and courage) – because the outcome is *not* dependent upon their faithfulness to Jesus. The outcome is dependent on Jesus, and Jesus is going to overcome the world.** This world that hates him, that will soon crucify him...Jesus is going to overcome *that* world.

And when you combine this proclamation with all of his teaching the last few chapters and throughout his ministry...What Jesus is saying is that his

overcoming of the world extends to us as well. Not because our faith is so marvelous, or our allegiance to Jesus is so solid (they're going to abandon him in short order). But rather: because of who Jesus is and what he's done. Because Jesus is the way the truth and the life; because he is the vine that we branches get our nourishment from; because his teaching is what we obey even if imperfectly; because Jesus now calls us his friend; because the Spirit is sent and will speak to us and bring clarity to Jesus' teaching; Because of all this that Jesus does for us (and that's all stuff he teaches about himself in this final discourse, going back into John 14), so too his overcoming of the world extends to his disciples as well.

Now, one could wonder if Jesus is off his rocker. It's some pretty grandiose claims he makes, especially considering that in short order he gets put up on a cross like a common criminal. If you or I were to tell someone, "Take heart, for I have overcome the world" they'd think we were loony. And if that's how the story ended (with his death on the cross), we'd all be doing something else this morning. **But Jesus demonstrates that his overcoming of the world includes overcoming death. His resurrection backs up everything he said.** Now, we'll get to that in a couple months as we continue through John, but we're also 2,000 years on the other side of it. So, we can't just pretend it hasn't happened, because it has. All of Scripture is interpreted through the cross and the empty tomb.

So, I don't know exactly what each of you are going through. But I know in our church and in the world around us there are people who grieve because they have lost jobs, lost loved ones, sent their kids off to college; We struggle with sin from greed to lust to pride and so much more. **But the good news is that Jesus has overcome that stuff.** And his overcoming of it all extends to you in the midst of whatever you're facing. So, take heart. Have hope. Live with courage and peace. Turn to God in prayer and ask for those kinds of things, and he will grant them to you through the Holy Spirit. We can't provide them ourselves. We're not the source. But God the Father who sent the Son, God the Son who overcame the world, and God the Holy Spirit who now rests in Jesus' disciples...God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit graciously provides it all for you, so you can overcome what you're facing today, tomorrow, and eternally. Let's pray...Amen.