

James Collins Sermon - Sunday 12 July 2020
Famous Last Words [5] Calm in the Storm (John 16:33)

Well, hello again - wherever and whenever you are reading this, I trust that you are keeping well and that the Lord is keeping you strong in His love. It's great to share God's word with you once again. Today we are looking at the final verse, verse 33 of Chapter 16 of John's gospel. Over the past few weeks we've been looking at Jesus' farewell discourse, the sermon he preached to his disciples on the evening before he was tried and he was crucified. So we've called this series Jesus' 'famous last words'. For the next couple of weeks, we'll be looking at the amazing prayer Jesus goes on to pray for his followers, but for now, let's take a close look at the way Jesus brings this crucial teaching to a close.

These are his last words before he goes into a prayer for his disciples at the end of this amazing sermon, this amazing farewell discourse. Jesus says:

"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." (John 16:33). This is God's holy and powerful word.

So this is the conclusion that Jesus has been leading to. These are simple words, yet they go to the heart of life, the universe and everything. Four deep truths emerge:

"In this world you will have trouble." If Jesus never said anything true (actually everything he said was true) surely no one would contest the truth of this statement. And it carries with it a tremendous amount of baggage. In the immediate context Jesus is speaking of the trouble these early disciples of his would face from those who would not or did not believe in him. They would face hatred and bitter persecution. The Apostle Paul, reflecting on his own experience of 'trouble' as a servant of Jesus says:

"I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" (1 Corinthians 11:23b-29)

Well, perhaps the troubles you have experienced or are experiencing right now are not quite so extreme, but nevertheless we all have our fair share and some have more than their fair share. What troubles do you have to deal with? What events, injustices and griefs have been forced upon you. What internal frailties do you wrestle with?

Millions of people struggle to make sense of the difficulties they have experienced. Some find the pain of life overwhelming, others begin to despair of making sense of life and retreat into various ways of palliating themselves - through shopping, sex, food, entertainment or some other means of distraction from the pain and emptiness.

For Christians there is some encouragement in knowing that Jesus experienced his own share of trouble. Of course as he said these words he knew what was about to take place. In a few short hours he would descend to a very dark place emotionally and then be put through the horrors of a show trial, torture and brutal execution.

Life is pain - there's no two ways about it. You can deny it, fight it, repress it or try to ignore it, but sooner or later you're going to have to acknowledge its presence. And let me tell you a mystery - most truly interesting people have experienced and found a way to overcome trouble and suffering. And the best example is Jesus himself. He not only faced trouble but he emerged victorious. In fact he faced more trouble than anyone who has ever lived and emerged victorious and that makes him very interesting indeed!

The next phrase we're going to look at is, "*I have overcome the world.*" In these words, Jesus lifts the lid on his victory. He has not only triumphed internally, he has not only developed the resilience to face the difficulties of life and stay strong. His victory is not primarily internal at all. Jesus has triumphed over the physical and spiritual structures of this whole world, such that they have been entirely disarmed. He has overcome this world and all the trouble it inflicts upon us.

He has defeated our sin and selfishness. So often we are the architects of our own downfall. Through our radical self-absorption, our unbridled appetites, our vanity and pride, our greed and corruption we shame ourselves in our eyes and in the eyes of others. In our rebellion we anger God and bring grief to ourselves and those around us. Jesus has decisively overcome our sin, overcome our selfishness and our self-absorption in his death for us on the cross.

He has defeated all that is untrue. I don't know about you but I am sick of people playing fast and loose with the truth. It seems that people feel very little concern to make sure what they are saying actually corresponds with reality. But before I become too judgemental, I know my own struggles in this area. Sometimes I am tempted to manipulate the truth to fit my aims and objectives. Perhaps I exaggerate or even fabricate things to attract attention or admiration. Jesus is the truth - he has never told a lie and he never will. His words are golden trustworthy truth. He has decisively overcome a world of spin and sleight of hand.

Thirdly, he has defeated unkindness, cruelty, abuse, hatred and violence. We all experience unkindness and meanness at the hands of others and for sensitive people, that alone can be a very difficult experience. But what of the more destructive forms of un-love; hatred, abuse, cruelty, torture and violence. These things can cause us trauma that we struggle to ever get over, and in extreme cases they can cost us our lives. Jesus plumbed the depths. He triumphed over them all. All the spiritual and political and religious and personal hatred that this world can muster was lavished upon him. And it simply couldn't pollute him. He remained kind, loving, gentle, humble and truthful. He is all grace, all the time, no matter what. His goodness and love stand eternal when all the forces of hatred have long ago fallen to dust.

He has decisively defeated, unkindness, cruelty, abuse, hatred and violence. Lastly, and most significantly, he has defeated sickness and death. On the cross he, the life of the world, tasted death. A cruel, barbaric death designed to utterly expose and humiliate and crush the victim. A death from which there was no coming back. On the cross he bore all our sickness and our physical frailty. Jesus plumbed the depths. There's no illness, no weakness, no physical challenge, no death that Jesus cannot understand or sympathise with. But it's also true that Jesus has decisively defeated sickness, and frailty and death. Jesus died the most awful death, but death could not hold him. He burst out of the grave like a firework. No tomb can contain him. And if you remain in him there's no tomb that can contain you - the sky not the grave is our goal! Jesus has a place in the new creation for you - sickness and death cannot steal it from you. On the contrary - they are the gateway to it. At the moment of your greatest weakness and isolation, at the moment of death, you stand, because of Jesus and his victory, on the threshold of a scintillating and eternal new existence.

And so there is nothing that this world can do to you that Jesus cannot repair and make good. There is nothing that this world can take from you that Jesus cannot restore. There is nothing that this world can deprive you of that Jesus cannot give to you. He has overcome the world.

And in response to his victory over this world, the world in which we have so much trouble and that he had so much trouble, there are a couple of things we must do.

Firstly we must absorb the truth that he has taught us - we must eat Jesus' words; digest them. May they filter into the very deepest recesses of who we are and form our identity. Because when we live and breathe his words and his message and his life, we know stillness and confidence inside. Jesus said, "*I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace.*" In the Bible, the devil is sometimes referred to as 'Beelzebul' which literally means 'Lord of the Flies'. Some think it captures the restlessness and driven-ness of the devil. He is frantic and frightened and furious. He is angry and agitated and anxious. He is all rage and fury. And, living in this world, he can easily lead us down the same path. But Jesus will not tolerate these conditions. He commands peace and stillness. In him we slow down and enjoy the scenery. We are not so easily disturbed. Our fears are soothed and our anger dissolves. He leads us beside still waters. Jesus has overcome the world so don't let it drive you mad. Listen to his voice - eat his words - drink in the peace.

Secondly, we can take heart! We can be encouraged and live courageously. Because we have got nothing to lose. Things can only get better and whatever this world throws at us, in Jesus, our final victory is secure. Of course, while we live in this world we will often have moments, days, weeks, months of anxiety, and stress and strain, but in the midst of these very human and very painful experiences, Jesus looks right at us, with a broad smile and urges us towards courage. Because once Jesus is present and we are in him, there really isn't any reason to be afraid any more.

In the midst of trouble, may the words of Jesus, may the mighty deeds of Jesus, may the atoning death of Jesus and may the glorious resurrection of Jesus, light up your world. May his victory be your victory. May his victory bring peace to your inner world and enable you to live courageously. God bless you. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.