

Sermon Easter 6 2021

May 9, 2021

John 16:23-33

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson, previously read.

In the world you will have tribulation. The word for “have” there is a present indicative verb. That means it’s happening. Literally “In the world you have tribulation.” It’s translated “will have” because that communicates that it’s ongoing. It’s happening now. It’s inevitable. You can’t get rid of it. You’re not going to get rid of it in this life. It’s going to be there.

As I was reading about it, one of the authors I read connected it to Revelation—which I thought was fitting because we recently started talking about Revelation in the Wednesday morning Bible Class and we’ll be planning to pick it up on Sunday mornings too in the fall. What you see when you look at Revelation, besides the fact that it’s a revelation of the Lord Jesus, as the name describes, is that you have in that book these two contrasting portraits. The one portrait is that of the heavenly glory of our Lord Jesus. As He is ascended you see Him in Revelation receiving the exultation and praise He deserves, around Him are the heavenly host, the Sabaoth as we say in the hymn of praise. They are gathered in His presence, basking in His goodness, and lauding His worthiness in view of His work of salvation.

The other portrait is starkly different. The other portrait is the harsh reality of this world. Now, in our day, the widespread assumption here in American Christianity is that this portrait is only what will happen in the last seven years before Christ returns. But that is based on a very literal reading of things that pretty clearly aren’t to be taken so literally. Rather, they should be taken in view of the symbolism with which they were given and which we see elsewhere in the Bible. And so in that view, what we understand is that this picture of the harsh reality of this world is the picture that we have extending from the time of Christ’s ascension, which we’ll be observing next Sunday, until His return at the end of time. And that picture shows chaos. It shows death. It shows destruction and suffering.

Now, does that mean that there is only that in this life? No. By God’s grace it isn’t only that, there is a lot of relief from what we deserve and there is a grace shown us in the comforts and blessings that we have. However, as our Lord says, **“In the world you will have tribulations.”** That’s why you see them and know them.

But our joy is that Christ brings us peace in that. As He says, **“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace.”** And what does that mean? He brings us an absence, an opposite of tribulation. He brings us peace. And how? Because He brings us His victory: **“take heart; I have overcome the world.”**

I know I say this regularly, but as we understand the state of this world, as we look at the chaos around us, at the sorrows and suffering, we see that it is broken. Jesus makes it clear in the Gospel of John that this is because the world can't accept Him, it can't receive Him, it doesn't know Him. And so, think about that. A couple of weeks ago, we heard Jesus speak about the ruler of this world being judged. And what He's talking about is how the fall into sin gave the devil authority over this world. And of course, speaking of the devil is seen as superstitious and unenlightened in our day, but what better explanation is there? You see goodness in creation. But you see a whole lot of bad too. And you see death, and you know your own guilt. Where did that come from? It came from this fall, this rebellion against God, where we took this blessing of this world that God gave us, and we handed it over into corruption and death. And of course, it wasn't like it was your sin or my sin that actually did that. No, but our sin puts our stamp of approval on it. We like to pretend we don't approve, but when we sin, what we're saying is that we're just fine with it, that we choose this suffering and this hardship, this tribulation.

In fact, we see how much we're like the Israelites in the Old Testament Lesson. You know, I love the imagery of that lesson. I love how much we can relate to that lesson. Here the Israelites are, and they've been in this wilderness for how long. If you watch my devotions, you know I pointed this out there. This occurrence is after the death of Aaron—Aaron, Moses' brother, the first high priest over the temple, which was the tabernacle at that time. So, this is a ways into the forty years in the wilderness. And from a human perspective we can understand their grumbling. They've been wandering around, they've been getting only Manna to eat day by day, and so they grumble. Now from a divine perspective, how could they? They've been rescued from slavery. They've heard the voice of God giving them the Ten Commandments. They've seen this Manna appear like dew on the grass. How many of you have seen that? How many of you would like to just have your daily provision appear on the grass in your backyard? And yet they grumbled. But lest we get self-righteous, we've seen the resurrected Jesus, we've seen how the story comes together. And yet we grumble. And so, there's this infestation of snakes the Lord brings against them in judgment. It's deserved. And there's the venom

that enters their bloodstream as the snakes bite them, and they start dying. But then they look at the bronze serpent that Moses lifts up and they are healed.

And I love that imagery. As John tells us earlier in the gospel: **“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”** That’s the reality, this suffering this, sorrow, this death, this is the venom not from a fiery serpent in the wilderness, but from the serpent who drew us to death in our sin. And now the venom of that sin courses through your veins. That venom is taking its toll on you. Eventually, that venom will play itself out and, in this tribulation, you will experience the loss to that venom. You will lose the battle and die.

But I found this great quote from Luther as I was reading about this this week. Luther wrote this sermon about death and dying, and in it he starts talking about the snakes in the wilderness. And he said: *“we hear that when the children of Israel were bitten by fiery serpents they did not struggle with these serpents, but merely had to raise their eyes to the dead bronze serpent and the living ones dropped from them by themselves and perished. Thus you must concern yourself solely with the death of Christ and then you will find life. But if you look at death in any other way, it will kill you with great anxiety and anguish. This is why Christ says, ‘In the world—that is, in yourselves—you have unrest, but in me you will find peace.’”*

In Christ you will find peace. You will find peace as He has been lifted up on the cross for you to look upon His victory. He has fed you the antivenin in His body and blood so that you would know His life over death and His peace for you. He has washed you in His waters and cleansed you from your sin, raising you in that life which has overcome death. Because He has overcome the world.

And as we look at this week and its lessons, though, we see a connection to this that isn’t just about the comfort we have in Christ’s victory. Certainly, we have to understand that this victory, this overcoming of the world is where we have comfort. It’s where we have peace. In fact, it’s where we have strength and joy and endurance and all the good that we have. But we see something here that we also can draw from. Confidence to pray.

Whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Have you thought about that confidence that we have to pray? You maybe have. You maybe have thought about the assurance we have that because Jesus has died for our sins we can come before our Father in heaven in confidence that we will not be struck down in light of

our sin and unholiness. I mentioned this last year, but that's not a common thought, that we wouldn't be acceptable before God because of our sin, and we wouldn't be acceptable to come before Him in prayer in light of that. We sort of assume that of course God would just hear us.

But even still you see it recognized in some ways. I'm sure you've heard someone say that they're not going to pray about something because it's too insignificant for God. Or they'll say they don't pray because God has more important things to worry about. But hear again at what Jesus says, "**whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.**" Luther takes this and he says that in the command to pray, there is also the promise to hear.

You aren't too insignificant for God to hear. No, even you, the God who created the whole universe tells you that He will hear you. And you have the confidence that this is the case for Jesus' sake, because you ask in His Name. In fact, that's essentially what that phrase relates to. It relates to coming before the Father in light of the work of Jesus for you. It also includes praying according to God's will and Word, but it's about coming before the Father cleansed in the blood of the Son, confident in His victory over the tribulation of this world.

Now, does that mean that you'll just get what you want whenever you want? No. I've heard it said wisely that sometimes God says, "No, because I love you." Sometimes He says, "Not yet, because I love you." And there certainly are also those times where He says, "Yes, because I love you." And I'm sure you parents can relate to that. Sometimes you tell your children yes, but sometimes you tell them no, or not yet. And why? Because of your love for them.

Christians, you have confidence in that love because of Christ. You have confidence in that love and that listening to your prayer because of Jesus. You have the assurance in Him that the world has been overcome and the tribulation of this world will cease. It specifically will cease at the return of our Lord Jesus. But that peace is promised to you now. As Paul says, "**The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**" That peace is yours in prayer and supplication because Christ has overcome the world for you. Amen.