

LIFE IN HIS NAME OVERCOMING THE WORLD

John 16:25-33

“I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father. In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.”

His disciples said, “Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative speech! Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you; this is why we believe that you came from God.” Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

We are going to talk this morning about the relationship between those who follow Christ and the world. As we make our way into that subject, I want to give a brief explanation of the conversation that we just read between Jesus and his disciples. We are in a section, chapters 14 through 17, where Jesus is about to be crucified, and he is having final conversations with his closest followers. In this conversation, he begins to explain to them that a time is coming very quickly when he will no longer use figures of speech. He is just going to tell them the way it is, very plain. He is going to explain to them all about who he is and about the Father. He is trying to help them understand that something is about to happen that is going to change everything. In fact, it is going to bring a more direct relationship between them, and not just with Jesus, but also with the heavenly Father.

Some people get confused about this. They have this idea that God the Father is mean and angry, and Jesus is loving, and that Jesus keeps the Father from wiping us all out. This passage, and really this entire section in John, helps us understand, as does the whole gospel of John really, that Jesus is just doing the will of the Father. The Father sent him, and everything he does, everything he says, is coming directly from God, the Father. He explains that something is about to happen, and it's

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going to change their relationship with Jesus and with the Father. He is no longer going to use figures of speech. What happens next is very telling.

Have you ever been in a situation where people are talking and you have no idea what they are talking about? It's just over your head? I remember being in the classroom at times and feeling that. You get tired of it, and then they are assuming you understand. Finally, you just start agreeing, like you understand, even though you have no idea what's being said. It's a bad thing to do, because eventually you are found out. That's what happens with the disciples here.

Jesus says, "A time is coming where I will no longer use figures of speech." They are like, "Oh! Now he is speaking plainly. We get it!" Then they just go crazy, like, "Oh, this is why no one has to question you. This is why we believe you are the Son of God." And Jesus' response is: "No, not now. The time is coming! I haven't even started yet." This happens after the cross, after the resurrection. He then tells them, "You know, you are saying you believe, but the truth is that your faith is so fragile that the moment is coming when I am going to be struck down and you are going to leave me. You are going to leave me completely alone." He brings it like, "Oh, so now you believe."

He is exposing to them how vulnerable they really are. In fact, he is making a reference here to an old prophecy, a phrase from Zechariah 13:7: "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered..." Jesus is explaining: "The moment when I am struck down, everyone will be scattered. You will abandon me." Then he explains: "But I won't be alone. I won't really be alone." He returns to his big theme -- his relationship with the Father. He says, "The Father will be with me. I won't be alone."

Now, as we explain this conversation, there is something here that's really helpful and relevant to all of us. The bible is not written to portray the followers of Jesus as these heroes, these great men of courage and faith and understanding. In fact, they are writing about themselves, and they are writing about Jesus, and they very transparently tell us: "We are a mess. This is who we were and this is what we looked like before Jesus went to the cross to pay the penalty of our sin and to set us free from our sin. This prophecy, which is going to be vividly pictured for us in the cross, this prophecy is the message of the bible - that without Jesus we are scattered, but because he was struck down, we are gathered to him and we are made whole. There is a promise of life and wholeness in Jesus Christ that is not found apart from him."

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Jesus ends the conversation, and this is where we will spend our time for the rest of this morning's teaching. He anticipates what we would have to say is an obvious question. He is saying that if the Jewish leaders, if Israel wants him to be crucified, and they instigate his persecution and suffering, and if Rome cooperates and actually puts him to death, there is going to be this moment where you are going to look up and say, "Wow! The whole world is against Jesus." And you'd be right.

So, what do you do with that? Jesus, now, is saying that in one sense what's about to happen is completely unique. It's a one-time event. "I'm going to be struck down. You'll be scattered. But when it's over, I'll bring you all back together. But in another sense, it's going to capture something about your relationship as my follower with the world. And that is that you'll have tribulation in this world, but you'll also have peace in me because I have overcome the world."

Let me see if I can unpack that a little bit. Sometimes Christians and the Church have not always properly understood this message and held it in balance and applied it correctly. Sometimes we get mixed up because there is a tension. On the one hand, we are told in probably the best known verse in the bible, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." God loves the world. In fact, he sent Jesus, his Son, because he loves the world. Jesus came and gave his life and died to save us, out of God's love for the world.

But then we are also told in scripture: "Love not the world or the things of the world," and we think, "Hmmm. Okay, God loves the world, but we are told not to love the world." The tension there has to do with the fact that when we read about the world in that latter sense - the world system, the world's way of doing things, the world's values are opposed to God. God loves the world, but we are warned against worldliness because there is a world system that opposes God.

So we live with this tension. We love people. God loves people. We love the world. But at the same time, we recognize that there is a world system that opposes God. That tension is seen in another scriptural truth where we are told that we are in the world as followers of Jesus, but we are not to be of the world. We are not to remove ourselves. We are to live here. We are to be active. We are to be engaged. We are to seek the blessing of South Florida, of our employer, of our neighbors, of our friends. We want to be agents of God's blessing and good, displaying his love, but at the same time, as we live in the world, we don't want that worldliness to be in us.

How do we process this? Here's what I want to give us. I want to give us two dangers. I think this is maybe the best way to get a handle on this - two dangers that are warned against in this category in scripture. The first one is the danger of excessive care.

I. The Danger of Excessive Care.

To talk about that, I want to look at something that is found in Matthew Chapter 13. Jesus would frequently tell stories. He would tell parables, and his parables always were very vivid moments of teaching. The Parable of the Sower, which is found in Matthew Chapter 13 and in other places of scripture, is one of the best parables that Jesus told. It's a classic. In fact, Jesus said, "If you want to understand all my parables, you have to understand this one." This contains a central teaching. Whenever Jesus told a story, there would always be something in the story that didn't make sense, that didn't fit, like: "That doesn't seem right." It would kind of draw you in, then Jesus would resolve the conflict he created in the way that he tells the story.

In this case, he tells about a farmer, a farmer who plants seed. But this farmer just throws his seed everywhere, and the seed falls in four different places. What doesn't make sense is that when you hear this story you think, "Wow, this is not a very smart farmer." Right? Because he is very indifferent with his seed. He is careless.

So you are leaning in to find out why, then Jesus tells us that the seed is the message about him. The seed is the truth of Jesus - that Jesus is the Son of God, that he offers you the gift of eternal life, that he offers you the forgiveness of sin, cleansing from sin. Yeah, that's what scripture teaches. There's a problem in our relationship with God, but God loves us so much that he wants to pay the penalty of it himself so that you can be restored into relationship with him. That message comes out like a seed and it falls on four different places, four different kinds of soil or ground that represent four different responses to Jesus, four different heart conditions.

1. The first one is the path.

Some of the seed falls on the path, and this is what Jesus said about that. He says: "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart." That is what was sown among the path. As that message goes forth, some don't understand it, like a bird that comes and picks it right off the hard path and goes and eats it. It never really enters into the heart.

2. The second condition or place is rocky ground.

I'm quoting right from Matthew 13: "...this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away." I can stand here and say to you this morning, "Listen, God wants you to go to heaven. God wants you to live forever. Everything bad you've ever done can be canceled out, forgiven, paid for in full. God offers you in his Son the free gift of eternal life." That's a great message. You hear it. You comprehend it. You say, "Yeah, I'll take that. I'll receive that." And there are those who immediately respond with joy! "This is great! This is what I've been looking for!" But the moment their conviction, their belief gets tested, they fall away. They fall away because there is no root. It hasn't penetrated the belief system of the heart and the mind and they fall away because of tribulation or persecution.

3. There is a third group and this group really captures something for our subject today: Those that fall among the thorns.

This is the person who hears the word, but...listen very carefully, look at this: "...but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." You see, there is just a lot in life that we are concerned about. We are all trying to make it through, to provide, to get ahead, to do a little bit better, and there is a way that the concerns of this life choke spiritual life. They smother that which has to do with eternity. And if we are not aware of this spiritual danger - excessive care, the cares of this world - then we will perish. We will shrivel up in terms of spiritual vitality. This is a very subtle thing, because we are in the world. We are all involved in this pursuit of caring and providing, but it can become excessive.

4. Then there is a fourth group, and this is the group, obviously that we want to be in: It's the good soil.

This is the person who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields in one case a hundred fold, in another 60, and in another 30. The word goes in just like the seed that enters the ground and dies, then produces the plant and bears fruit. We want to be of those who go on to bear fruit.

The first danger where we see worldliness as a spiritual danger is captured in this word "care," or the cares of the world. The second is the danger of misplaced desire.

II. The Danger of Misplaced Desire.

1 John 2:15-17. John, writing this letter, is the same author that we are reading in John 16. I have referenced this verse earlier. He says:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world (look at these three categories) – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Here is a description of that world system. It's given to us in three categories. I'm going to summarize them with these three words: Sensuality (for the desires of the flesh), Materialism (for the desires of the eye), and Pride (for the pride of life). Those categories are not original with me. Many people have made the observation, trying to put labels on what we are taught here in 1 John 2:15-17. If we allow ourselves desires in these areas: Sensuality, Materialism, and Pride – they take over our hearts. These things are passing away, and that which is eternal doesn't abide in our hearts, and neither do we abide, according to 1 John 2.

Let's just think about this for a minute. I wanted to see if maybe I could try to illustrate how this works. Let me just take the first one, which is Sensuality, and talk about it for a moment. Because together these three – Sensuality, Materialism, and Pride – they form a tight-knit web, and scripture is telling us there is a danger here.

If we take sensuality for example, it is presented to us as freedom – sexual freedom, freedom in sexual choices. Juxtaposed to that is the idea that if you follow God, you are really going to miss out sexually. You are going to live this really restrictive, unfulfilling life. But actually scripture tells us that sensuality brings death and God's way brings life.

The pornography industry is the latest example of how sensuality is overtaking us as a culture, as a people. Now secular scientists are releasing study after study, arguing and proving that pornography actually changes the shape of a person's brain. As we take in pornography, the area of our brain that helps us experience physical pleasure gets smaller and smaller. You would think it'd be different. You would think that as you feed it, it would get larger and larger. But scientists have now proved that it's the opposite of what you would expect. It gets smaller and smaller. Then it takes a greater and greater amount of stimulus to bring about sexual pleasure. So a person finds

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the behavior completely addictive, and that it takes more. The person goes deeper and deeper, further and further into the activity, trying to have the same level or experience of pleasure.

Secular studies now are saying that it is extremely destructive to the individual and to relationships. According to Fight the New Drug, pornography is memory-based, and the images remain in our minds. They are highly addictive. All of those memories serve as triggers to bring us back into the addictive behavior. The addiction destroys relationships. It begins to replace human touch and interaction. The person begins to look for satisfaction in fantasy and finds himself or herself unable to enjoy true human interaction.

Human interaction stimulates. It actually matters. It's healthy. According, again, to these secular studies, it creates happiness. In many cases, porn is producing depression. And as the addiction increases, human interaction decreases. Experts used to encourage couples to view porn together. Now, even those same secular experts are saying, "Don't do it. It's destructive to relationship." These statistics are actually mind-boggling. I want to illustrate for you the whole idea of how a system in the world takes over, and it's characterized by sensuality.

Listen to this: Porn sites every year receive more traffic than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined together every month. This is staggering. 35% of all internet downloads are porn related. Everything that gets downloaded on the internet -- 35% of it is pornography. Pornography has increased marital infidelity by 300%. 30% of everything transferred on the internet is porn related. The most common female role for women in pornography is women in their 20's presenting themselves in pornography as if they are younger and in their teens.

Child porn is one of the fastest growing industries. To date, 624,000 online child porn traders have been identified -- 624,000 traders who are trafficking in child pornography. Child porn is a \$3 billion industry. Pornography globally is a \$97 billion industry, 12 billion of which exists right here in the U.S. alone. In 2016, on one porn site, 4,599,000,000 hours of porn was downloaded - on one site, over 4.5 billion hours.

My point is that scripture says to us that this world system is characterized by sensuality, and that that sensuality doesn't bring life. It doesn't bring fulfillment. It brings death. It's addictive. It's enslaving. Though the person may enter into it feeling like, "Wow, this is freedom, this is liberty. I'm just going to do a little bit of it. I'm just going to experiment," they quickly find themselves moving deeper and darker into this reality and find themselves completely in bondage. The destruction it

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brings is not just spiritual relationally with God, it is relationally with one another. It is physical. It's biological.

Over the years as a pastor, having honest conversations with people, we understand that the struggle for sexual purity is a fight for all of us. Statistics would tell us that as I'm sharing a larger perspective, we know that the fight comes to us individually. I don't want to pretend for a moment that I am immune from temptation in areas of sensuality or sexually, and that neither are you. I don't want to think for a moment that there aren't people here - I know that there are people, many people perhaps, who are hearing this message, who are fighting this battle in one way or another. Here is the message: Jesus Christ has overcome the world. He has. And what you may feel powerless against, Jesus has power over.

There are many practical things that we do in fighting the fight against sensuality, materialism, and pride. But one of the first things we do is settle: "I'm in the world, but not of the world, and this battle is with me for life. This battle is with me until I go to see Jesus." So every day I have to get up and stand for God, for my marriage, for my children, for what's right, and I cannot do it unless I have grace from Jesus Christ.

There are certain things that we can do practically that will help us: accountability, transparency, confessing our sin, getting real, admitting where we're at and where the battle has overtaken us. The church is a place, should be, wants to be, desires to be a place where people can freely, openly own their sin. Obviously, there is an appropriate way to do that and an inappropriate way to do that, but this is a safe place to come and say, "Hey, I need Christ to help me." But I want to say that all of the techniques, all of the practical things which are necessary are not a substitute for true faith in Jesus Christ. And I will say that some of you here - maybe you've been a Christian for many years and all of a sudden you are in a battle. Or maybe it's not all of a sudden. I want to tell you: Faith in Jesus Christ is how we overcome it.

Let's just look at a couple of verses that will help us draw this to a conclusion. We referenced 1 John 5:4-5. John is taking the last part of our text in John 16, where Jesus tells us, "You'll have peace because I have overcome the world," and he is applying that now to us as followers of Jesus. "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith." How do we overcome? We overcome by faith. We overcome by

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trusting in Jesus Christ. “Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

Brother and sister, this is reality. When you sit down and say, “Though I have battled against this for a long time, and though it seems so powerful in my life, I’m asking you, God, to fill my heart with faith that you are greater than this,” that is the turnkey that is the key to victory in your life. It is faith in Jesus Christ. I wish I had time to tell you of individuals and of specific victories that have been won, but I want to say to you that God is greater.

Now let me end with this. Because some of you, if you are thinking this through, are saying, “Okay, Brian, I am with you. There are some spiritual dangers: Excessive Care and Misplaced Desire. Our desire can get the best of us and overtake us and rule us and bring some really unhealthy things. And you are saying to us that Jesus has overcome, that there is a power in God so that we don’t suffer that ill fate.

But what about everyday life? I know I’m supposed to work. I’ve got to provide. I’ve got to provide a place to live and I’m trying to do a little bit better. I’m trying to get a little bit more. How does that work?

Jesus talked to us about that at length in Matthew 6. It’s interesting that we were in Matthew 6 during the worship time. There is a whole section where Jesus talks to us about worry -- how excessive care becomes worry, and it creates spiritual death. He gives a principle there. It’s a very simple principle, and this is where we will end this morning. He tells us, “Listen, God knows what you need, so do this: Seek first God. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and God will take care of everything else. All these other things will be added unto you.”

You have to think it through. He is not saying, “Quit working.” He is definitely not saying that. I can take you to specific texts that will tell you that we keep living. But in our pursuit, my ultimate aim is not bigger, and more, and accumulation, and more and more and more. I seek God’s blessing. I am grateful for it. I want to give thanks to God. But ultimately, what I want is for God to be honored, to be glorified, to reign in all of these areas of my life. And that will only happen as I learn to trust him, realizing that he gave me this caution. He said, “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?” No matter how successful I become in this world, if my soul is lost, I have lost. But God alone can bring fulfillment and eternity to your soul. Would you bow your head?