

# The Cross and Suffering

*Pillar of Truth Conference*

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**Bible Verse:** John 16:33  
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Well, I am sure that you have met people like I am about to describe. Whenever you talk with them, the conversation tends to go in the same direction again and again. You ask them how they're doing, "I'm great. My spouse is great. My kids are great. My job is great. My health is great. My house is great. My quiet time is great. Everything's great. So enough about me, how are you?" I've never said in those settings what I'd really like to say, "You know, my friend, the continual greatness of your unrelenting greatness in so many great ways annoys me greatly." There are folks like that, they mean well, and I don't mean to say any more than that, and many pulpits tell you that God wants your life to be great and wants your earthly life to go well, but Scripture, I think if you read it cover to cover, paints a much different portrait than that in this expectation of continual greatness. Job 5:7 says, "Man is born for trouble as the sparks fly upward." The Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 3 says, "When we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass and just as you know." Then in second Thessalonians 1, he says, "We ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring." There's a spiritual stability and a spiritual joy but there's an outward affliction that is very real and significant, and I think it's important for us to have a good theology of suffering in the Christian life and to do that, we're going to go to John 16, and I invite you to turn to John 16. I'll read verses 25 to 33, although we're really just going to focus on verse 33 here this afternoon. The cross which brings us salvation also brings us suffering.

In verse 25, Jesus, speaking in the Upper Room on the eve of his crucifixion, says to his disciples,

25 "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. 26 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; 27 for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. 28 I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father." 29 His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly and not using figurative

speech! 30 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." 31 Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? 32 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. 33 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."

Now in those words, Jesus is preparing his disciples for his imminent departure, and in the setting Judas Iscariot has left to initiate the events that will betray Jesus, and Jesus is now alone with the eleven and he is speaking with them in this intimate setting and what he's doing here is he's preparing them for the trials that are just ahead. If you look again at verse 25, he says, "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." Jesus had been saying things that were hard for them to understand and what he says now is that, "The day is coming when things will be clearer to you. In the midst of this affliction, in the midst of the events that are going on right now, I understand that you don't understand everything, but there's a day coming when it will be more obvious to you what is at stake." And probably in this context, he's referring immediately to the fact that the Holy Spirit will soon indwell them after his resurrection and will open their minds and give them power and clarity. You look at verse 26, we read this, that, "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." Christ is leaving But they can be confident, even his physical absence, they can be confident in the love of their heavenly Father. There was no cause for alarm and so he says in verse 28, "I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father." It's a pretty remarkable statement of his eternality, his incarnation, and then the glory of his ascension and his reign on high. He came from the Father. His existence did not begin with his earthly birth. He came from heaven to earth. He's come into the world. He's completed his ministry. He's about to render the atoning sacrifice for our sins and he can say, "Now I am leaving the world, the work is done," taking account of the fact that the cross was still just ahead of him, and he's going to the Father. So he came from the Father, he did his work, the cross will soon be done, he'll be resurrected, and he's going back to the Father.

So there's a lot going on there in the earthly ministry of Christ that he just described and that little summary gives the disciples a flash of understanding and they think that they get it now. They say in verse 29, "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.'" The disciples think that the difficulty has been cleared up for them, but they didn't realize everything that lay just ahead in their future. They were confident of Christ's divine origin, of his divine nature, and they had made progress in that sense. Their confession was fine as far as it went but they weren't as advanced as they thought they were. Verse 31, Jesus

answered them and challenges them. He doesn't really affirm what they said. He challenges them. He says, "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." He's warning them that there is an hour of testing that is about to fall on them and they will scatter away and they will leave him alone. Now in the comparative security and intimacy of that immediate occasion where Jesus is speaking with them, that must have seemed unthinkable to them. Indeed, in other places in Scripture, you read how Peter said, "Lord, even if I have to die with you, I will not abandon you. I will not forsake you." And the other disciples said the same thing. They were on the brink of a great, great testing, thought and felt very confident in it, not realizing that a great crisis and their own spiritual failure was just immediately around the corner. And it's a time of preparation for us even to think in these terms as we gather together in the comparative safety and the quiet and the fellowship of a time like this, and it's sweet as it should be, but you know, it's inevitable that there are trials and afflictions that await us, whether it's soon or a little further along, it's inevitable that trials are just ahead.

And so Jesus, in effect, is saying, "Do you think you've arrived?" Their faith was about to be tested. The Romans would soon arrest him. They would all run and leave him alone and make the point that overconfident disciples are not prepared for difficult trials, and that's kind of the, you know, I alluded to those people that on social media or, you know, in personal conversations, "Everything's great, everything's great," there's a pastoral sense in which I worry about people like that, because even if things are great and they are telling me the truth, it's not always going to be like that and that easy confidence is not the mark of a well-equipped disciple. And so Jesus here is trying to equip the disciples and prepare them for the immediate time when they will fail him and they will fail and they will be crushed by the defeat, and he was preparing them by mapping out for them the road for suffering.

And, you know, to just kind of pause there before we get into the exposition of verse 33, maybe for some of you, this is a helpful thing to hear. You thought that you were strong, you thought that you were a giant for Christ, and yet unexpected affliction has hit you and now adversity shakes you and you're shaken to the core from the position that you thought you had. If you read the book that they are giving to everyone that attends here, you'll see that I know what that's like and I know what that kind of overconfidence and that kind of subsequent failure and surprise is like. I know that by personal experience and so I'm here on your side to help you as we consider the cross and suffering and the theology of the cross. You look at verse 32, Jesus hints at their coming defection when he says, "the hour is coming, you will be scattered, each to his own home, you will leave me alone." And Jesus is giving them this warning and I would think that the nature of the providence of things is that you are here today not to be rebuked for overconfidence, but Jesus gives this warning to encourage us and to help us and to provide for our hearts in those inevitable times that are to come. Look at what he says in verse 33. He says, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace." He says, "I'm saying these things to you to equip you, to give you comfort, to give you strength." He's not rebuking the disciples in that sense in a corrective way, but rather helping them to see that they're

not everybody that they think they are. They haven't arrived like they think they are, and subsequent events are going to show that to them very clearly, and this idea of peace that Jesus uses, the word can be understood in this way: it's a state of being that lacks nothing and has no fear of being troubled in its tranquility. Jesus says, "I'm telling you these things so that you can be in a state of tranquility despite what's about to take place, and what he does in verse 33 that follows, he gives them three keys to finding peace and keeping peace in the midst of this hostile world in which we live.

Now I just keep going back to the illustration that I gave at the start. I appreciate people with a positive attitude and an optimistic sense and they want to project joy in their lives. I appreciate people like that to some extent. I know that I could certainly stand to be more like that rather than the pessimistic self that I tend to be. But I like to deal with reality. I like to be prepared for reality and this verse helps prepare us for the reality of being a Christian in a hostile world and being prepared for trials and adversity that comes to us from unexpected directions. So often, you don't see it coming. So often you don't see the great semi-trailer truck of adversity that is about to strike you and knock you across the street and these words from Jesus in verse 33 can prepare us and help us for those times, and so let's look at them and consider them briefly here this afternoon.

The first principle that I would say that Jesus is teaching us here is he teaches us to recognize the obstacles. To recognize the obstacles. There will be perfect greatness for us, there will be perfect serenity, but that awaits us in heaven, and the absence of trouble is not for this life. On earth, greatness and everything always going well, especially for a Christian, not so much. Look at what Jesus says in verse 33. after saying, "in me you may have peace," he says, "In the world you will have tribulation." You will have tribulation. It's a statement of fact and so he's telling them upfront to expect the reality of difficulty, and the reality of difficulty, not such that we can just kind of hover above it and look down and be somewhat disconnected from it, but a real difficulty that really squeezes us and really afflicts us and really brings pressure upon us; whether it's through outward circumstances or the afflictions of our heart, this is to be expected. In the world, you will have tribulation.

Now in context, Jesus is referring to how the disciples will soon scatter away from him, but it includes all of the troubles that come in a fallen world. Trouble will be part of the fabric of your life in this world, and there's enough gray hair in the room like mine that I don't need to tell you that. You know it by experience. Acts 14:22 says, "Through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God." And how does that help you have peace? There is a sense in which it could almost make you gun shy. It could make you always wonder what's just around the corner and you could live in fear of the adversity that you don't know is coming, but it's not meant to give us that sense. It's meant to give us a sense of peace and a sense of confidence, and so how does this help you have peace? Well, beloved, if you know in advance that troubles will come, if you know in advance that adversity is to be expected, then you won't be so perplexed when it does come. Of course you have trials today, my friend. Of course things are difficult. Of course you are experiencing sorrow. Of course you find things that are sad and problems that have no obvious solution. And of course you have people close to you that have let you down,

that you've been disappointed in, that you're concerned about, that you pray about and things only seem to get more difficult. Beloved, this is to be expected and the purveyors of the health and wealth gospel, those who say you can name what you want and then claim it, and if you just have enough faith, things will go the way that you want to, those that promise that God is there to always help you and fix all of your problems on your timetable in the way that you want, beloved, that's all a bag of baloney. It's all untrue to what Scripture says and what Jesus teaches and it is a pernicious kind of teaching. It is very damaging and destructive to set those expectations in the minds of unsuspecting people because the trouble is inevitable. And what I most detest, and I detest a lot of things about those kinds of teachers, what I most detest is when their teaching inevitably proves to be false in real life, the way that they protect themselves and vindicate themselves is to look at the suffering person and say, "You just don't have enough faith. If you had enough faith, you wouldn't be suffering like this." And so on top of the physical and spiritual affliction that they are already experiencing in order to protect their kingdom, they lay the blame on the person for a lack of faith, which I think is reprehensible and I would not want to be standing in their shoes on the day of judgment, having inflicted so much physical and, well, spiritual pain on the people of God. It's not true. We're going to suffer. It's going to be difficult. Not in the same degree for everybody and not everybody will go through periods of darkness like some of us have. But difficulty is to be expected. We live in a fallen world and we are fallen creatures and sad, difficult, fallen things happen to fallen creatures in a fallen world, and so, if you came to Christ just looking for an escape from all earthly trouble, welcome to reality, welcome to a truer presentation of the gospel of Christ than what was given to you at first. And think about it, beloved. Jesus, Travis quoted it earlier in his message earlier today from John 15, Jesus said, "If the world hates you, they'll hate me," you know, and in like manner, if we follow a Savior who suffered on earth, then is it really too much to expect that we won't suffer also? Isn't it to be expected that if we are to become like our Master who was perfected, so to speak, Scripture says, by his sufferings, it rounded out his human experience to go through suffering, then obviously, if we are following in his footsteps, God will use suffering to sanctify us as well. It's a question of when it will happen, not if it will happen.

Now, commercial airplanes have instruments that orient the pilot when he can't see where he's going, flying through weather or whatever the case may be. What we're talking about right now, my friends, is one of your most important spiritual instruments that you can have as you go through life here on this fallen earth. One of your spiritual instruments that guide you in the darkness is to recognize that obstacles are to be expected in the Christian life. This is to be expected and so you can take heart, my suffering friend, Jesus told you in advance. Your plane isn't off course, you're just having adversity, which is to be expected, and to know that is to solve half of the battle. I mention it in the book that they've given to you, you know, one of the things that will hinder you as you go through trials is a wrong set of expectations. If you think that Christians are not supposed to suffer, that's going to really hinder things and make it difficult for you when you go through suffering because you end up, I'm speaking to true Christians in what I'm about to say, because you end up asking questions like, "Am I really saved? If I were really saved, I wouldn't be suffering like this." That's not the way to think. That's based on the

wrong set of expectations. And so Jesus tells us to recognize that there will be obstacles, you will have tribulation, and that's a great starting point to have in place so that when the doctor brings bad news, when the stock market collapses, when whatever other wind of adversity blows into your life, you can step back with a measure of detachment and say, "Wait, let me get oriented here. Let me look at the instrument panel. Okay, the plane is still on course. This is to be expected."

Now, that's not enough to go through the trial successfully, it's not enough to recognize the obstacles, you need to go further. You need to go further and point number two, you need to rise to the occasion. You need to rise to the occasion. Now, in exact opposite to the person who says that everything's always great, on the other extreme of things is that you and I should not be people who are always complaining about what we're going through and soliciting sympathy and, "I'm the victim here," and, "Woe is me," and just talking about how dark and difficult things are and everything's a crisis. That's not the way that we're meant to live either. Not in a false sense of optimism, a false portrayal that everything is always okay and great with me, but neither should we just be always walking around like the guy in the Peanuts cartoon who always had the cloud over his head. What was his name? Pigpen, thank you.

And so we have to rise to the occasion and as we come back to verse 33, I just want to say this, is that if you're in adversity now, what God has set before you, is perhaps different than what the outward trial seems to be. I've got to get through the next doctor appointment. I've got to fix this or whatever. There's something more fundamental going on if you're going to view these things biblically, view them spiritually, and to truly be sanctified by them. God has brought something to you and brings adversity to us in order to mature our faith and to have us grow from one position of glory to another, and so what we do is we step up to the trials instead of shrinking back and falling down in discouragement. We rise to the occasion, point number two.

Look at what Jesus says in verse 33. He says, "In the world you have tribulation." In other words, this is what you cognitively need to know. You need to fix this principle in your mind that there will be tribulation and so when it comes, it doesn't need to surprise you, it doesn't need to create a great sense of doubt in you, wondering – yeah, that's another thing that I forgot to say that I wanted to say. You know, you can have this sense that, "Well, maybe Christians aren't supposed to have any trials, so am I a Christian? I'm having trials." Or you can say, you can have a wrong perspective that says trials are inevitably a reflection of the fact that there is sin in your life. Now, sometimes we have trials that are a direct result of our sin. You know, somebody that has spent 20 years of heavy drinking and they find that they've got the condition known as wet brain and their brain can't recover, they're suffering as a direct result of their sin. A woman who loses her family and marriage because of infidelity, she's suffering as a direct result of her sin. And you can go on with examples like that and sometimes there is a direct connection from sin to the suffering that we're experiencing. But that's not always the case. Sometimes trials come to us without any moral culpability on our part. Think of the patriarch Job, blameless man, terrible things happened to him. Think of the Apostle Paul as Travis outlined in the first session, lots of tribulation, lots of difficulty, not because of his moral

culpability. Think of the Lord Jesus, suffering during his earthly walk, suffering supremely on the cross, not through any sin of his own, not through any judgment of God on him in the sense that he was suffering for something that he himself had done. Think of the man who was born blind in John 9. The disciples looked at him and said, "Jesus, who sinned, this man or his parents?" And Jesus answered, "It wasn't his parents, it wasn't him. He's suffering so that the glory of God can be displayed." And so we have to cleanse our minds of a lot of bad presuppositions, a lot of bad prior teaching, and realize, yes, Christians will suffer, it's not always a direct result of sin, and so then what do we do when it comes? How are we to respond? What Jesus is teaching here in verse 33 is that we step up to the trials with courage rather than shrinking back in fear and falling down in defeat.

Look at verse 33 with me again. He says, "In the world you will have tribulation," statement of fact. Now here comes the command in how you respond to it, "But take heart." But take heart. Take courage. Be strong in the midst of it. And let's get a sense of the meaning of this word from the way it's used in other Scriptures. Go back to Matthew 9. It's used a couple of times in Matthew 9 and I just want to point out the way it's used in these other contexts to give you a sense of what Jesus is saying here in John 16. In Matthew 9:1, reading about Christ, it says, "And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. And behold, some people brought to him a paralytic, lying on a bed. And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.'" This man who had suffered in his condition for so very long, the night had been long and no doubt there were times where he had utterly lost hope. Now he's brought into the presence of Christ and Christ looks on him in compassion, looks on him with sovereign authority and tells him to take heart. "The way it has been in the past is no longer the way it will be going forward. Your sins are forgiven." And so not only later does physical energy surge through his limbs and he gets up and walks, spiritual power surges through with the promise of the forgiveness of sin and the love of Christ given to him in that hour. "Your sins are forgiven. Not only is your body restored, your soul is restored also. Take heart." Well a guy like that, what's he going to do? He's going to leap up with a sense of spiritual power and confidence and joy and new life and off he goes. "Take heart."

Now in like manner in verse 20 of Matthew 9, Matthew 9:20, and again a longstanding physical condition, with no doubt long-standing discouragement, "behold, a woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, for she said to herself, 'If I only touch his garment, I will be made well.' Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, 'Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.' And instantly the woman was made well." Take heart then means to have confidence, be strong, be courageous, as the Lord said to Joshua in Joshua 1 on the verge of entering into the Promised Land and taking possession of it. Take heart means to have confidence in the face of testing, have confidence in Christ, have confidence in the outcome, have confidence in his sovereign direction, have confidence in the reality that he is causing all things to work together for good, even when it is this painful, even when it is this difficult, even when the answers seem this impossible.

Now, it's easy to illustrate confidence in a way that kind of removes it from reality and daily life for us. You know, we could think of courage and confidence in dramatic encounters as when Martin Luther stood against the Catholic Church and said, "Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me, amen," and things like that, and those dramatic encounters. But beloved, it's far more applicable to daily life than that. In the privacy of your own heart, in the privacy of your own personal life, and in your circle of relationships, you rise to the occasion when you trust God and refuse to fear the future in times of adversity. You rise to the occasion when you find contentment in the times of great need. The spiritual success is not diminished simply because it seems to be mundane. When you are acting on biblical principle and trusting in the words of Christ, you are doing something that God rewards greatly.

So in like manner, turn back to Matthew 5 with me as we see it in a completely different context and I just want you to see the exceeding graciousness of Christ in his promises to reward faith in the midst of adversity, trust and confidence in the midst of affliction. Jesus says in verse 11 of Matthew 5, he says, "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account." Now notice what he's describing here is not someone dying a martyr's death and literally shedding their blood for the sake of faithfulness to Christ. He's talking about those that are simply enduring verbal abuse, misrepresentation; you know, in matters that are compared to the great trials and adversity of men that truly shed their blood for the sake of faithfulness to Christ, to deal with a little verbal abuse, a little bit of verbal misrepresentation seems rather minor by comparison in an outward way, in a theology of glory way. But Jesus looks on those and looks on us and tells us that when you're merely having words thrown against you, what can you do? Verse 12, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." He honors the simplicity of faith regardless of the external circumstances that call it forth.

And so what this means for us is that we have to look beyond the circumstances, look beyond the false expectations of an easy life, and realize that righteousness trusts God. Righteousness trusts God enough to say, "Okay, I understand that affliction will come, I understand that I can trust him, and I don't have to diminish the importance of rising to the occasion in faith because the Lord honors the simplest of faith and obedience." And so we start to develop this spirit in our hearts as we look and we rise to the occasion in response to the words of Christ, "The Father loves me." That's what Jesus said earlier in verse 27, look at it there and in words that apply to each one of us who are truly in Christ. The Father himself loves you, as shown by the fact that you love Christ, and he's drawn you, and so the Father loves you, and you've believed that I've come from God. Take heart in that." The Father loves you, the Father is in control, and you say to yourself, and you preach to yourself, "I will not yield to anxiety or to discouragement in this trial." Yes, you may say that with tears streaming down your face over the heartache that you're going through and that's not inconsistent with a strong faith in Christ. When loved ones die, or standing at the graveside, maybe immediately after, maybe decades after, remembering sweet times that are now gone, perhaps realizing I'm looking at the earthly resting place of someone I will not see in heaven, and you feel the weight of that and yet, alongside that, faith can live, faith can flourish, faith can say, "God, I trust you even for



this. I trust you even for this. I have entrusted my eternal soul to you, O God. The most valuable thing I have, I'm confident, and I have given it to you and what that means," you say to yourself as you're meditating before God, "what that means is, Lord, I can trust you with everything else as well. I can trust you with all of my earthly circumstances, and I do. I can even trust you with the eternal souls of the people that I love that died outside of Christ. I can trust you that much because, God, you are good, you are wise, all of your judgments are always righteous and true, and I trust you completely even though I don't see the outcome. These are matters that are too great for me. These are matters that belong to you. I'm just going to rise to the occasion and trust you no matter what."

Are you challenged by that, are you encouraged by that because there's elements of both in it, and this is the sense in which we rise to the occasion. God tests our faith not because he doesn't know what's there, but to display to us over the course of time what is there, and to have your faith greatly tested and proven to be true after the worst kinds of adversity is a really wonderful gift from the Lord to give to us. And my friends, let me tell you, you want that gift on the other side, even if the price is so painful to pay to go through it on the end. Jesus wouldn't make promises like this if he didn't intend it to be to our blessing and to our encouragement. And so we recognize the obstacles, you will have tribulation. You rise to the occasion by taking heart, by exercising faith, by trusting God, even when you don't understand, let me just say this, even when the circumstances cannot possibly change, and if God has given you a trial in which the circumstances absolutely cannot change, for example, a loved one has died and is gone and they're not coming back and that can't change, it doesn't look like a gift at the time. I understand that completely. Believe me, I do. I understand it doesn't look like a gift at the time. But what God has given you is a circumstance, giving you an occasion in which as you apply your faith to the reality of life, he is displaying to you and giving you an opportunity to see that you will find his complete sufficiency for the joy of your heart, even if earth gives you nothing to prop it up by way of circumstance.

Go back to the Old Testament book of Habakkuk, which is not an easy book to find for some of us, but it's toward the end of the 12 minor prophets, so-called. If you find the book of Zechariah just before the New Testament and then flip back a couple of pages, you'll eventually come to Habakkuk. These verses were so foundational to me many years ago, delivering me from a very dark pit of despair. In Habakkuk 3:17, God has revealed to Habakkuk that his nation is about to be carried off into exile as judgment for their sin and in verse 17, Habakkuk has worked through all of the difficulty of that. He was agitated at the start, but now he's at peace. He understands the plan of God. He trusts the plan of God. He trusts God himself so much so that he could say this as he's on the brink of watching his nation go down the drain. In verse 17, he says, "Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls," everything's gone, it's not going to change, it's the will of God as expressed in the circumstances, and here I am. What does faith look like in times like that? In verse 18, Habakkuk says, "yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation." The fact, God, that you are who you are is enough for my soul to rejoice. I don't need any earthly circumstances to prop up the joy. I can rejoice in you simply

because God is who he is. That is enough to satisfy the believing heart with unquenchable, undefeatable joy. And that's the sense that Jesus is bringing us to here in this when he says, "Take heart."

Now go back to John 16:33. You said you recognize the obstacles, you rise to the occasion, and then thirdly and finally for today, you rest in the overcomer. You rest in the overcomer. The ultimate point of your trials is not to find a solution to them. That's not the first thing, the most important thing. That's not the first goal of God, and it's not the purpose of God, let me put it this way, often it is not the purpose of God to give you quick relief from your difficulties and from your affliction because there is a longer term lesson that he is building into you that Jesus is calling you ultimately to rest your hope in him and in him alone, and until you have grown fatigued with the trials of the world, until you realize that the things of this world are so transient and so passing, and vanity of vanities, all is vanities, until you've come to that point you haven't yet been in a position to fully embrace and know by experience the complete and absolute sufficiency of Christ in your life. And so when the afflictions like that come, Jesus is ultimately calling you to rest your hope in him.

Look at the end of verse 33 where he says this. He says, "But take heart; I have overcome the world." I have overcome the world. Now, remember that we're here toward the conclusion of a conference talking about the distinction, the difference between the theology of glory and a theology of the cross. Theology of glory saying that we recognize the power and the blessing of God by human measurements, and consider the display of God being seen in what humans find valuable in human power, human success, and all of that stuff. And we are grateful for how Travis has so thoroughly refuted that in his teaching over this weekend. At least I am. It's been helpful to me. From a perspective of a theology of glory, look at how ridiculous what Jesus says here in the context how ridiculous it is. Jesus says, "I've overcome the world." Well, how could he say that? From the perspective of a theology of glory, how could he say that? He is on the verge of crucifixion. He's on the verge of utter human defeat. He had no wealth, didn't have a place to lay his head. He had no status. Pharisees, Sadducees, Herod, all these people of power and influence and prominence rejected him, hated him. Even in the immediate context of John 16, one of his 12 closest disciples had just betrayed him to the authorities. And peeking ahead into the future, his closest friends, his most devoted disciples are soon going to abandon him and all run away because they didn't want to be identified with him when it was going to be a threat to their life in that moment. Jesus met no worldly definition of success whatsoever when he said this, and within hours, he would be hanging exposed before the world, nailed to a cross like a common criminal, with the Roman Empire having exercised its authority over this one who claimed to be the Son of God. How is that overcoming the world? And how is that glory? There's no answer to that question, is there? In the whole context of everything that we've heard here, this is not glory. This moment is a rejection of the theology of glory altogether and a rejection of the expectations that that false theology creates in well-intended disciples who simply trust what they're told from a human teacher. No, beloved, Jesus would not meet any worldly definition of success and by those presuppositions, what he is saying is utter madness. "You've overcome the world? Right. Let me laugh you out of the room,"

according to the theology of glory but beloved, this is precisely where the theology of the cross can help us.

Look at this and consider what's being said here. Jesus is in perfect control of all of his... he's perfectly serene, he's in perfect confidence, he's in perfect control of his faculties and his emotions in this very moment when the fury of hell is being unleashed against him. From the perspective of what really matters, obedience to God, he hasn't flinched. He went through the temptations of the devil at the beginning of his public ministry, he didn't flinch. He went through the opposition of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, he didn't flinch. He was tested by disease and sin and all kinds of other matters, the powers of nature rolling, heaving seas against him, blindness, deafness, muteness, and he conquered it all. And in the midst of all of the human affliction, human suffering, human sorrow that he went through, he did not flinch from obeying his Father. And going even further, he humbled himself in obedience to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Look at Philippians 2. We should take a quick look at that because it gives us this insight into how Christ overcame the world. Philippians 2. We get some perspective on what it means to rise to the occasion as our Lord did and provides an example for us to follow, how to think, how to act in the midst of affliction. In Philippians 2:5, we read, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." The cross we discussed last night. And in response to that, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." In spite of all of the provocations, in spite of all of the suffering that was just ahead, in spite of the fury of the wrath of God being unleashed against him as he bore the sins of everyone who would ever believe in him, Christ didn't stray from the purpose of God. He never failed once.

Jesus Christ was an impeccable spiritual success, not by the definition of the theology of glory, by the definition of what is true, the theology of the cross. And now, beloved, Jesus speaks to you who are in Christ, and as it were, he says, "You belong to me. You've been united to me. I have loved you." Christ has given himself for you. He has redeemed you from all of your sins. He has pardoned all of your sins, and you are accepted as righteous in the sight of God, as declared in the doctrine of justification. And you are in him, and he will never leave you, nor forsake you, nor abandon you, beloved. And because of your union with Christ, that's what Christ is pointing to here when he says this, he says, "You take heart, you be strong, you be courageous because you are mine, and I have overcome the world," so that the one who saved us through his suffering now keeps us in our suffering. The power of him who is raised from the dead indwells you in the person of the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 1. You will one day share in heavenly glory. You will see Christ as he is face-to-face and you will be made like him. And the message of the gospel, the message of God to his people through his word is look to whom you

belong. Look at what your eternal future is and hang onto that. Not the earthly stuff that comes and goes and is vulnerable to loss at any time. Look to Christ. Look at how he has overcome. Look at how he has conquered sin, death, and hell on your behalf. Remember that you belong to him and he will never let you go. The fact that he has overcome the world and you are in him means that without fail and without exception, you also will overcome the world in the end and therefore, you can rise to the occasion despite the obstacles. We won't take the time to look at it in 2 Corinthians 12:9 and 10, Paul says, "I boast in my weakness so that the power of Christ may dwell in me."

Beloved, I know it's hard. I know what it's like to weep over loved ones, dead and alive. I know what that's like and, man, it's hard. Oh, does it hurt. But beloved, that very suffering is the pathway to greater intimacy with your Lord. Don't reject the suffering that will bring you closer to him. So we do not expect ease in this life. We don't have a false sense of confidence in it. We don't go around complaining about it either. We simply don't run from the adversity. No, not at all. We don't do any of that stuff, none of the fake stuff in either direction. We're simply content to take up our cross and follow Christ.

Let's pray together.

*Father, I would pray for these dear friends. Grant them grace to see the glory of Christ and to embrace the theology of the cross. Grant them grace and faith in their affliction. Grant them comfort in the most bitter of tears. Grant them strength in the times of greatest weakness. Grant them a flaming hope that can never be extinguished because it's grounded in your word, informed by your Holy Spirit, and resting solely and exclusively in the person of the one who overcame the world, even Christ himself. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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