

Peace - No Matter What

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[0 : 00] Let's turn for a little to the chapter we read in John's Gospel, John chapter 16. And the last verse, 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 as we know the Christian life is full of many, many blessings and one of the great blessings is joy, Christian joy. And that is one of the themes of this particular chapter from verse 16, the great focus on Christian joy. And as Jesus was speaking to the disciples, we see that there were times that they weren't grasping everything that he was saying.

For instance, in verse 18 it says, So they were saying, what does he mean by a little while? We do not know what he is talking about. And that's very comforting for us.

That these men who were followers of Jesus, who lived with Jesus, who every day interacted with Jesus, who were being taught in a very special way by Jesus, were sometimes saying, We don't know what he's talking about. We don't understand.

[1 : 19] And that is also true in our own experience as well, because there are many things with regard to his providence, and even with regard to his teachings, that we do not fully understand.

There is nobody that can understand everything that even the Bible says. Although the great minds will be able to answer many, many of the questions.

I remember when I was in the college in systematics, and there used to be a question time with Professor MacLeod, who then became Principal MacLeod, and it was always one of the great times when we had this question time of questions.

And I remember him saying on one occasion, it was a really difficult question. And he said, I'm going to quote from Professor Murray, who used to say when he would meet a question that really required a lot of thought, and he would say, I haven't pondered too closely on this as yet.

And that shows that even the great minds, there are times where they have to stop, and they really have to think and delve into what is actually being said. So we find that the disciples are saying, you know, we haven't, we haven't, we don't understand what he's talking about.

[2 : 47] And as I say, that's a great comfort to the Christian, because we all develop at different paces. And some Christians are blessed with great minds, and they understand so much.

But there are others who, and they're much slower to grasp what is being said. But the main fact is that we have faith, and that we see sufficient of Christ to know.

And last Sunday, we're looking at Thomas. And the church in Thomas was one of those who was slow to learn. And in John 14, he was saying, we do not know where you're going.

How can we know the way? There were so many things that were baffling Thomas. But anyway, Jesus tells him that he's going away. He's going away from them. And there are two totally different reactions Jesus tells us to his going away.

For the disciples, the news that he's going away leaves them with great sorrow. They cannot imagine the world without Jesus. They cannot imagine their life without Jesus.

[3 : 52] So it causes them great sorrow. But for the world, Jesus says, it's going to bring rejoicing. That's what he tells us. In verse 20, Truly I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.

Isn't that incredible? And we say yes and we say no. Because that is exactly the spirit that is alive today as well. If Jesus lived just now, supposing it was in the 21st century that Jesus had come into this world, the reaction would be exactly the same as if Jesus was in an upper room just now stating this, and that his crucifixion was just ahead of him.

And if he was stating, I am going to go away from you, we, his people, would be lamenting, we would be weeping, but the world would be rejoicing, because the world hates Jesus.

And it's still the same today. That is the whole reason why there is so much energy, so much economic energy, so much financial energy, so much intellectual energy being spent by so many people in places of authority today is to try and squeeze out the Christian faith.

Let's try and obliterate the name of Christ. Let us make no bones about it. There are many people, and that's their agenda today, is to remove every trace of Christianity out of society, because they hate Jesus Christ.

[5 : 32] And that's what Jesus, we shouldn't be satisfied, we are, so often we say, can people not see the truth? Can people not see the light? But Jesus says, that's how it's going to be.

It was going to be like that in his day, and it's like that in our day. The world will rejoice when Jesus is gone from them. However, Jesus tells them that their sorrow will be short-lived.

Because I will see you again, and your hearts shall rejoice. And that is how it is, because when Jesus returned, we know that he met with his disciples, but Jesus said, it's necessary for him to go away, because when I go away, the Holy Spirit will be sent.

Now the Holy Spirit was always here ministering in the world, but the Holy Spirit was going to come in a new way, a new power. And the Holy Spirit was going to, part of his great work was to reveal to us the things of Christ.

And that is why the disciples who couldn't understand before were enabled to understand things that they couldn't before, because the Holy Spirit had come in power and opened their minds and opened their understanding to see and to hear and to grasp and to recall things.

[6 : 49] the light was beginning to penetrate. And one of the things the Holy Spirit produces within our heart, within our life, is joy.

Not something we can work up ourselves, but there is an inner joy within the Christian life. There is a joy, the joy, it's termed joy in the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit produces joy within the heart of the Christian. And this joy cannot be taken away.

This joy runs right through the Christian life.

But then Jesus comes back after speaking about this and he talks about what it's going to be like for the Christian in this world. And he sums it all up by saying, in this world you shall have tribulation, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

So the question we have to ask is, where will the Christian have tribulation? And the answer to that is in this world. Only in this world. The moment we close our eyes in death, tribulation ceases.

[8 : 02] Sin will be no more found within us or in the environment in which we are transported to. Satan will no longer be able to hound us or any illness or any enemy will come anywhere near us.

So tribulation belongs to this world and this world alone. Remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Rich man who prospered in this life.

Lazarus had an awful life. He was laid at the gate of the rich man full of sores. Remember how the dogs came and licked these sores. But then it all changed.

It all changed in the afterlife. Now Lazarus was comforted and the rich man was tormented. And that is how it is because glory is a place of comfort.

It is a place of joy. At your right hand there are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16 tells us. And part of the awfulness of hell from what we are led to see in that episode that Jesus tells the rich man and Lazarus is the view that those in hell have of heaven.

[9 : 14] Where they are seeing the joy and the comfort of God's people. And that adds to the awfulness of where hell is. So Jesus tells that there will be tribulation.

Now sometimes in this world God's people are swamped as it were by the enemy. Like Israel was in Egypt.

Like Israel was in Babylon. There are other times when the Christian faith is accepted and tolerated. Not so long ago if we were to reverse the clock in our own country and put it back to like a hundred years or eighty years ago.

it was a different society. It was a different world where the Christian faith was accepted whether people were actually Christians or not.

There was an acceptance of the Christian faith. There was an acceptance of Christian principles and Christian values. Fast forward to the day that we're living in and no longer is that the case.

[10 : 25] We are living at a time where there is a definite squeeze against the Christian faith. We're being squeezed. There is an attempt to marginalize all the time.

And it's particularly against it's amazing in this day where we talk of equality and rights and all the rest that the one group of people that seem to really struggle everybody else seems to have the rights by the Christian.

The Christian they're working at trying to marginalize and squeeze the Christian out. So we're living in a day like that. So there is tribulation. There is persecution for the Christian.

And tribulation comes in many ways. It can come in slander and misrepresentations where lies circulate about a person where wrong information goes around about a person.

These things are very difficult to take personally. and there is tribulation of course from the world constantly because the world not only does the world come at us by way of direct opposition but the world is often very enticing and alluring and drawing and pulling us aside and taking us away from Christ.

[11 : 44] It's a very powerful powerful force. And then there's tribulation by way of illnesses in our bodies in our minds there are all kinds of things that come in of the sicknesses and struggles and old age and self.

Then there are so many individual battles that we are facing all the time. You and I are facing personal battles all the time with regard to our Christian faith.

It's warfare and it's hard going because you can have a great time and everything is going well and you feel at one with the Lord and you say well Lord I'm in a good place just now.

The next day you can come crashing down. It can come all crumbling as it were under your feet because we live in enemy territory. Not only is this world enemy territory our own hearts are enemy territory.

yes we fight against the evil one and he goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. But you know sometimes we often blame the devil when it's just ourselves.

[12 : 57] We say to ours the devil who got me. Sometimes it's just our own heart. Our own heart is so corrupt it is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. That's an amazing statement.

That the most deceitful thing in the whole world is our own heart. And that enemy resides within us. And so sometimes I have to say to myself the worst devil that I face is my own heart.

It is that which causes so much trouble, so much distress, so much torment within our own lives.

And so this is part and partial of life.

And the Bible tells us that it is through much tribulation that we must enter the kingdom of heaven. All who will live godly in this life shall suffer persecution.

So having said all that we need to ask why is it if the Lord is sovereign, if the Lord is ruler over all, why does he allow so much tribulation in this world and particularly for his people?

[14 : 05] Well the first thing we would have to say is that it's for his own glory. glory. Now that might be hard for us to understand, but everything in this world is ultimately to the glory of God.

And that is impossible for you and me to understand. When we look around at so much of what is terrible happening in this world, in a mysterious way, God will still take glory to his name out of it. and he will do that in your life individually, even in the hard things, in the sicknesses, in the illnesses, in the bereavements, in the losses, in all these things, God is going to take glory to his great name.

And that's, you know, there's only faith that can lay hold of that. It's only faith that can give an amen to that. Human reason can't, human logic, our own best understanding, and we're saying, Lord, that doesn't equal up.

But we've got to remember, the Lord says, my ways are not your ways. Remember, he says, just as the heaven is so much higher than the earth, so are my ways to your ways, and my thoughts to your thoughts.

[15 : 18] You and I cannot enter into the thoughts of God today. It's beyond us. It is so deep. His thoughts are beyond our understanding. But God allows tribulation into the lives of his people for their own good.

because it is by tribulation that God is at work through us. Just in the same way, it's like the furnace. Just as the furnace is refining the gold, so the tribulation in the lives of God's people are refining them.

Because the Lord, through it, is breaking our love of this world. Because our love of this world is far deeper than ever we realize. you know, there are times we say, I'm fed up of this world.

You know, I'm ready to go. I've had enough of this world. Well, you know, it can change very quickly. We love our life and we love this world far, far more than we realize. And that is why the Lord allows tribulation into our lives to break, to break, to loosen the tent. It's like loosening the tent pegs and the rope that comes down from the tent into the pegs.

[16:33] If you went round and loosened, went round the tent and loosened it all, it would begin to shake and it wouldn't be doing its job properly. Well, that's exactly what the Lord is doing through this tribulation.

God's word tells us what is wrong. But our own natural heart has such a love for sin, for what is wrong, that we're prone to side with it. We side with it.

We love sin. It's natural for us because we have sinful hearts and we side with it. And so the Lord, by tribulation, brings us to see more and more of the ugliness of sin, the heinousness of sin, the offensiveness of sin.

Because you see, we can say to ourselves, I know I sin. But when the Lord really begins to deal with us and shows us a glimpse of himself, it is only then as we see himself that we're brought to see just how offensive an ugly sin is.

You know, David went for quite a period of time in a backslidden condition. And what he had done with Bathsheba and what he had done to Uriah, his faithful servant, didn't really trouble him too much.

[17:57] He lived with it. He knew he had done wrong. But he copped with it. He lived with it. Until that arrow of conviction came into his heart.

And wow, it all changed. All of a sudden, he saw what he had done as offensive before God. There was like a burning arrow of fire had gone right into his heart. And what he had been able to live with and to tolerate with and to live out every day and just to be his usual self, he crumbled. That's why he cried and he said, against you, you only have I sinned. Against thee, thee only have I sinned. And done this evil in your sight. All of a sudden, there's a new awareness, a new sighting of sin, of its ugliness, of its offensiveness, of its heinousness before God.

Because you see, we can tolerate sin, we can live with sin, we're happy with sin, until bang, God shows us his holiness. And God shows us his righteous indignation against sin, and we crumble.

[19:05] And that's part of what tribulation does. Because tribulation in God's hand can bring repentance. Tribulation in and of itself doesn't bring repentance.

Tribulation can in and of itself bring bitterness and anger and resentment in people's lives. sin. But in the hand of God, tribulation breaks us.

And like David, we go down, we fall before the Lord. And we say, do thou with hyssop sprinkle me? Lord, forgive me, forgive me my sin.

And as we said, David saw, see David knew that he had sinned against Bathsheba and sinned terribly against Uriah because he had killed him. But a sense of what he had done before God became so great that he's only seeing his offense against God.

And you know, that's how it will be for us in the judgment. That's what judgment will be like. Where we will be brought face to face with our sin against a holy God.

[20:10] Where the offensiveness of sin, we won't see any of the trappings of sin. We won't see any of the enticements that went, or any of the temptations are all the things that made it conducive to work.

All we will see is the awfulness of what sin is and what we have done before God. And that is why we need Jesus Christ.

Because only Christ can cancel that out. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse us from all sin. But again, tribulation will separate the Christian from the non-Christian.

Because you see the same tribulation can come upon a Christian and a person who may think they're a Christian. And throughout the history of the church, there have been many people who have started in the Christian faith who have not continued.

And one of the things that often separates, often divides, is tribulation. When hard things come into a person's life, it is an amazing way of showing whether that person is truly a Christian or not.

[21:21] It's like in the Pilgrim's Progress. Remember how Christian and Pliable, they both set out from the city of destruction. And they hadn't gone far when they fell into the slough of despond.

Christian plows his way through, but Pliable goes back. He started out, but as soon as the first problems and difficulties came into his life, he returned back to the city of destruction.

And that is one of the things that you will find. You who have been following the Lord, and maybe you've had many a stroke on your back, and you've had many a trouble along the way, and Satan has whispered in your ears, oh, just go back.

Satan has said, what are you following the Lord for? It was far easier before. Remember those days back when you were younger and you had that freedom and couldn't care less. It was a lot easier then, wasn't it?

And he'll say to you, back you go. But you can't go back, because the Lord is a hold of you, and his love is in your heart, and you keep following him, because you're his.

[22 : 36] This is evidence of it. You had plenty opportunities to go back, but like Peter said, to whom else can we go? Because you have the words of eternal life.

You've been back and you don't want to go back. And so this is the great, as we say, tribulation is one of those things that separates the Christian from the non-Christian. And again, tribulation in the hand of God humbles us, and that's where God wants us to be.

He wants to remove every ounce of pride, and every ounce of self-sufficiency, and every ounce of self-importance and self-glory. And he's in the business of making us nothings, which flies directly against the world's teaching.

The world says you've got to be somebody. The world wants their fame. They want to be famous.

The world says, I want you to be a nobody, because it's in the nobodies that I work.

And what I want you to be is somebody who reveals me, so that people will see something of me in you. And again, that goes against the grain, because we don't want to be humbled.

[23 : 54] We don't want to be broken. But that's what the Lord continues to do to us. And again, in tribulation, discovers a lot of what we really are like, because there's a self-discovery.

Asaph, the psalmist, discovered that as a hint of atheism in himself. We read about that in Psalm 73. Job discovered impatience in himself that he didn't know about.

Elijah, he discovered that he wasn't quite the person he thought he was. before he ran away and hid from Jezebel.

We make a lot of discoveries through the tribulation. And you see, tribulation brings us to call upon the Lord and to rely upon him.

Because, you know, when we have a little burden, if we only have a little burden in life, if we only have little things to bear, do you know what we try and do? We try and bear them on our own. We say to ourselves, I'll cope with this.

[24 : 59] But you know, when big things come into our life, we say, this is beyond me. And we go to the Lord. We should actually go to the Lord with the little things, but we don't.

We so often, well I shouldn't say we don't, often we don't. Often we try and deal with them ourselves. And that's why the Lord, sometimes he puts a little burden in us.

And if we don't respond to that, he'll make it more and more and more until in the end we do go to him. And that's what the Lord wants. The broken spirit is to God a pleasing sacrifice.

We say to the Lord, oh Lord, take away this broken spirit from me. I don't want to be living with a broken spirit. But it's music in the heart of God where he sees his people coming in brokenness before him, crying out to him.

And so we see that all these things are worked for our good. Tribulation prepares us for heaven. As we said, it weans us away from the world and it produces within us a longing for glory.

[26 : 07] You know the Lord's people as you go along and the closer you get, the more you begin to look forward to it. If you're looking forward to a holiday and you're saying, I can't wait, you know there's something of that happening in the life of the Christian as time goes on and as the Lord is breaking us and breaking us and breaking us more and more and we're beginning to see the first flickers of this, you know, I can't wait for glory.

I'm really looking forward to it. That doesn't mean that we're looking forward to what we may have to go through before we get there. And so there is, but then Jesus says, and just in our words, the time has gone, Jesus said to them, take heart, I have overcome the world.

Isn't that wonderful? Here's Jesus and he says, you know, all these things that I'm saying to you are true, but take heart, because I have overcome the world.

I have won victory. I'm going, he said, I'm going to the cross and I'm going to meet death face on.

The world is going to think it's conquered me, but it's only conquered me for two or three days.

I have to go under it in order to do this for you. And as I go under death, I am going to rise again from it. And I'm going to gain victory over it.

[27 : 39] And I'm going to be put into the grave and the door is going to be closed on that grave. And the world is going to think they've seen the last of me, but I'm going to rise from that grave. And I'm going to rise for you.

And I'm going to conquer through my death sin. And I'm going to conquer the world. And I'm going to conquer Satan. And I'm going to conquer every enemy.

So that although they may torment you and hurt you and bruise you and batter you, they will not ultimately defeat you because I, I'm winning the victory. I am an overcomer.

And God's people will overcome in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. That's our great hope. That's what the great message of the Christian faith is all about.

And so Jesus says, I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace. And that is the fruit of what Jesus does for us.

[28 : 38] He brings his peace into our heart. that peace that's like a river that flows deep down underneath. You know sometimes we can be, it can be bubbling a bit at the top.

And sometimes when there's tribulation and troubles and trials and difficulties, there's this bubbling away and ah it's difficult. But you know you strip it all down. And underneath there is a peace and there's a calm that is only God given.

peace and peace and peace and peace and dwelling within us. And that peace can never ultimately be taken from us. My peace I give you, not as the world gives, give I unto you.

Do you today have this peace? Well you can only have it in Jesus. As we said recently, this peace is not something that Jesus has beside him like in a partial and gives it to us.

peace. This peace isn't something that the Holy Spirit finds in heaven. And the Holy Spirit says, well I'm going to communicate this peace that is in heaven to you.

[29 : 48] No, the Holy Spirit communicates Jesus. It's Jesus himself through the Holy Spirit that comes into our heart and life and grants us this peace.

It's a tender peace we have to guard against. Grieving the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit is the one who communicates. You and I know that it doesn't take much to rob us of a sense of the peace. Even although the peace remains within us, our sense sometimes of it can be broken because of our sin. But we need always to be examining ourselves.

And in light of the communion that is coming up, that is something that we're required to do. let a person examine himself. And so let him eat and so let him drink.

And if you love the Lord Jesus Christ, irrespective of how things may be in your life, but you love him and you say, well Lord, I can follow this.

[30 : 55] I've had all kinds of knocks in my life. I've had these ups and downs. things. But there's one thing I know. I don't really want to be with anybody else but with you.

It's you I want. It's you I love. Well, the table is for you. No matter what else, you might say to yourself, I look around the church and I see these people of great faith.

I'm not like them. I see these people and they seem to live such beautiful lives. I'm not like them.

Well, let me ask you this question. Do you have faith in God?

Do you believe in Jesus? Are you following in your heart Jesus? Is Jesus precious to you? Do you love him?

Well, if you do, then the table is your place. No excuses. No reasons why not. The table is your place.

[31 : 56] Let us pray. Lord, our God, we pray to encourage us in your word. Sometimes your word challenges us. Sometimes it breaks us.

Sometimes it makes us question things. But always, Lord, it is to bring us to a greater knowledge of your truth. And so we pray that you will bless us.

Bless our meeting together and part us with your blessing. We pray to bless the conference that's going on down in Harris this weekend. We pray that it might be a feast for souls and that your people will be encouraged.

We pray then that you will watch over us throughout this week, that you'll grant us health and strength and safety and put a wall of fire around us, we pray, because we know the enemy is going about seeking to disrupt and to mar and to spoil.

Oh, protect us. Keep us, Lord, as a congregation. keep the evil one away from us. Protect us, protect us from ourselves and protect us from every invasion of every enemy that may come in to spoil.

[33 : 03] And we ask, Lord, that you will do us good and take away from us our sin. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.