

Study 2 - Week of February 21, 2022

TAKE HEART! CHRIST HAS OVERCOME THE WORLD

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” – John 16:33

Life and ministry can be hard these days. The pandemic (and the politicization of everything that has gone with it), the divisive politics in our nation, the social ills plaguing families, the crime waves in our cities, the blatant immorality evident in the world's dim and corrupted view of God's plan for sex and marriage—any one of these issues would make life and ministry challenging. All of them at the same time? No wonder Christians—and maybe especially called workers—experience stress and anxiety and a feeling that we're engaged in a lost cause with no prospects for anything improving. The devil knows how to use these issues in the world to provoke the sinful nature to discouragement, divisiveness, selfishness, and a general insistence on “my rights” over against love for my neighbor and the good of the ministry. In other words, what we are dealing with in the world around us distracts us from the mission of proclaiming the message of Jesus in and to the world around us.

Of course, we are not the first Christians to live in a world that feels like it is falling apart. The early Christians living in the moral cesspool of the pagan Roman Empire during the first few centuries of Christian history certainly did not have an easy existence. The church in certain areas of the world suffered greatly during various centuries at the hands of Islamic armies and Viking invaders. Personally, I would not have wanted to live during the outbreak of the Black Plague in the middle of the 14th century or try to serve as a Lutheran pastor or teacher in Germany during the Thirty Years' War of the 17th century.

On the night before his death, as he concluded a lengthy conversation with his disciples (John 14-16), Jesus told them the reality of life this side of heaven but also gave them the promise to comfort and uphold them as they lived in this world of trouble. “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NIV). Several decades later, it would appear that the aged apostle John recalled those words of Jesus as he wrote in his first letter, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 5:1-5, NIV).

Yes, there is trouble in this world. But for those of us who are children of God by faith in Jesus, who know his Word and believe in his Word and strive to obey his commands, we have peace. We have victory. We can take heart because Christ has overcome the world for us.

Points to Ponder

How can an occasional review of church history help you as you struggle with life in his world?

Describe the peace we have in Jesus and how that peace gives you comfort and strength to face the struggles of each day.

How can the fact that Jesus has overcome the world help you as you strive to interact with others in your life, your family, and your ministry?

Consider the following sections from Luther's Small Catechism. What prayer thoughts come to mind as you face the stresses and anxieties in your life and ministry.

"God's will is done when he breaks and defeats every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh, which try to prevent us from keeping God's name holy and letting his kingdom come. And God's will is done when he strengthens and keeps us firm in his Word and in the faith as long as we live. This is his good and gracious will."
(Explanation to the Third Petition)

"God surely tempts no one to sin, but we pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us or lead us into false belief, despair, and other great and shameful sins; and though we are tempted by them, we pray that we may overcome and win the victory."
(Explanation to the Sixth Petition)

Prayer

Yea, Lord, 'twas thy rich bounty gave
my body, soul, and all I have
in this poor life of labor.
Lord, grant that I in ev'ry place
may glorify they lavish grace
and serve and help my neighbor.
Let no false doctrine me beguile;
let Satan not my soul defile.
Give strength and patience unto me
to bear my cross and follow thee.
Lord Jesus Christ, my God and Lord, my God and
Lord,
in death thy comfort still afford. Amen.

Christian Worship 817:2

Reflection

Continue to ponder on the thoughts of this study by reading through the following passages at the end of the day or each day throughout the week for encouragement from God's Word.

Psalm 73
Lamentations 3:22-33
Romans 8:28-39