

Conquering the World

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Preacher: Phil Meulman

- [0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 16th of April 2000. The preacher is Phil Muehlman.
- His sermon is entitled Conquering the World and is from John chapter 16 verses 16 to 33.
- Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that it teaches and instructs us. Help us to believe it, to understand it and to live it out in our lives.
- And we ask this for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, you may like to open your Bibles to page 879 as we look at John chapter 16 verses 16 to the end of the chapter.
- Well, if you knew your death was imminent, what fears would you wish to allay your family and friends of beforehand?
- [1 : 04] Would you be able to confidently tell them that your last will and testament, for example, is up to date? Would you be able to confidently tell them all your business affairs are up to date?
- I wouldn't. Would you be able to allay them of any financial fears they may have about the future? And would you be able to assure them that the funeral details are all in hand?
- Or would you be able to assure them of your love for them? In Jesus' farewell passage from John's Gospel, he is here allaying the fears of his disciples.
- They know that Jesus is about to depart and that he has been talking about his betrayal and death as well as returning to the Father. Because Jesus has been using this time here with his disciples to instruct them on the long-term implications of his imminent departure.
- And he wants to assure them that every contingency has been recognised and plans for their wellbeing have been established.
- [2 : 12] And the promise of the coming one, the advocate, the Holy Spirit, is one of those contingencies that Jesus has in mind. We saw Jesus assuring the disciples of the coming of the Holy Spirit, the promise of the advocate last week in the verses preceding these verses today.
- It is true that the Holy Spirit will be sent to Jesus' disciples. There's no doubt about that. But for this to happen, for the Holy Spirit to come, Jesus must first go the way of the cross.
- It is true that the disciples will learn to serve as witnesses in a world that is hostile to the followers of Jesus. Jesus talks about this with the disciples on numerous occasions throughout the Gospels.
- It's true that they will be able to witness and testify to Jesus. But for this to happen, Jesus must first go the way of the cross.
- And it is true from verse 16 where Jesus says, A little while you will no longer see me, referring to Jesus' departure and death on the cross.
- [3 : 31] And again he goes on and says, Again, a little while and you will see me, referring to his resurrection three days later. It's true that that will happen.
- But for the resurrection to happen, for him to reappear to his disciples, Jesus must first go the way of the cross.

Now like most of the things that Jesus has been saying, there is again much confusion from the disciples about what he means by these words, these three simple little words, a little while, which he has said a couple of times.

And at the end of verse 18, we see these disciples talking among themselves saying, We don't know what he's talking about. Sure, Jesus is going away.

But Jesus hasn't yet left them, has he? And while on this side of the cross, back then, before he has gone to the cross, before death, BC, before the cross, they are unable to understand him, understand his words.

[4 : 40] And so they are confused. So confused that they're not prepared to ask him what he means, probably because their previous questions to him have revealed enough ignorance on their behalf for one night.

Now in one sense, their fear of asking this question and all those sorts of things is comforting for us. As we grow in Christian faith and obedience, we sometimes, sometimes, come across difficult truths and painful experiences, which for days, weeks, months and years, we cannot understand.

Even the person with the best theological mind and the most mature Christians sometimes find themselves in water over their heads with things they cannot understand.

God has not finished with us. Even after we have been Christians six days or 60 years, he hasn't finished with us.

There is still much for each one of us as his people to learn and to understand. Now we may not face the confusion of Jesus' physical departure as his disciples did here in this passage, but I'm sure that we can all think of experiences in our own Christian lives and in our own lives where we have felt abandoned, where we have felt confused, and we end up saying to ourselves, I don't understand.

[6 : 20] These disciples don't understand what Jesus is talking about. They too are confused, like we might get confused. But their confusion is over what he's talking about because his words at this point are really just words.

They are veiled words in a sense. And the reason is because Jesus has not gone the way of the cross. Now Jesus, knowing that they didn't understand what he was saying and the disciples wanted to ask him what he meant by these words in a little while, now enters into their conversation seeking to answer and clarify their confusion, if you like.

And he clarifies it in two ways, in verses 23 to 24. Firstly, he replies to their immediate need. Secondly, he says that their pain will turn into joy.

And from this joy, two blessings will extend out of it. And I want to deal with each of these issues in turn. The first one is that Jesus replies to their need.

These disciples do not understand what Jesus had said with the phrase, in a little while. But Jesus sees that their deepest need is understanding what it is his departure would mean.

[7 : 45] And that's what they are upset and confused about. They're not ready for it. They're not ready for the grief and sorrow that will come as a result of Jesus' departure.

So Jesus helps them to face this impending grief and sorrow. Not by skirting the issues, but saying in verse 20, Notice the contrast here.

Notice the contrast here between the disciples and the world.

The world will rejoice as the disciples weep and mourn at the loss and departure of Jesus, at his death on the cross.

The world will rejoice, but the disciples will mourn. But the disciples, as we know, will see Jesus again three days later at the resurrection.

[8 : 50] And what will they do at that time? They will rejoice. It's true that the world's values are often opposite to God's values.

And this can cause many of us as Christians to feel like misfits. But even if life is difficult for us now, one day we too, as his people, as his children, will rejoice.

We need to, as Christians, keep our eyes on the future and on the promises that God has made to us in his word. Just as Jesus promised his disciples that he would see them again in a little while, he has promised all his people that he will return for good.

It's one of the promises he makes in scripture. And this is a promise that we need to lay hold of today as we seek to make sense of the pain, of the suffering and the hardship that we see day to day on the TV screens and in our own work environments, wherever we may be in our own situation.

So just as Jesus met the disciples' needs, he too meets our needs today through scripture and by the promise of the Holy Spirit for all who believe.

[10 : 14] So the first thing there is that Jesus replies to the disciples' need. The second thing to observe in these verses is that the disciples' pain is not replaced by joy, but the pain that they are going through will turn into joy.

In verse 20 Jesus says, You will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy. Did you have pain before you come here? And it turned into joy, didn't it?

There you go. I don't know what to say next. Jesus makes the point here by illustrating this point, not by talking about Paul's example, but he illustrates that of a woman giving birth to a child.

For those of you who've had a child, do I need to go on? No. I have never met a lady or a woman who has ever looked forward to actually giving birth to a child.

I've met plenty who look forward to getting the baby out, but not actually wanting to go through the ordeal and grief of labour.

[11 : 31] The pain, so I'm told, is unbearable. And it's not pleasant having to watch someone go through the unbearable pain and the pains of labour.

And friends, if you are any out there that are impending fathers, it's wise to stay out of the way of labouring mothers for fear of fists in the head.

But as soon as the baby is born, they've gone through this tremendous pain, but as soon as the baby is born, the first thing the mother says is, What is it?

Can I see my baby? And there are tears of joy and happiness, assuming all has gone well, aren't there? The very thing that generates grief and sorrow for the mother, childbearing, also generates her joy.

The same goes here for the disciples. The thing that generates their grief, namely Jesus' departure and the cross, will ultimately prompt their joy.

[12 : 44] And for this, the disciples' joy cannot be taken away when they realise that Jesus is risen from the dead. Now from this joy, there are two important blessings that are bound up with it.

The first one is a fullness of understanding that will negate the need for the disciples to ask the sort of questions that they've been asking Jesus. Questions like, What does he mean by in a little while and going to the Father and all those sorts of things?

Or questions back in chapter 14 where Jesus is saying, I'm going to my Father's house and there are many rooms and so on and so forth. And Thomas says to Jesus, Lord, we don't know where you are going.

How can we know the way? Those sorts of questions that they've been asking in ignorance. They won't have to ask those questions anymore. In verse 23, the first part of 23, Jesus says, On that day, you will ask nothing of me.

That is, once Jesus has risen from the dead and the Holy Spirit has been poured out on the disciples, they will no longer need to bombard Jesus with questions that highlight their confusion.

[13 : 51] Because on that day, on the day, on that day, they will enjoy a fullness of understanding that will overcome their present confusion with joyful understanding.

The things that Jesus has said before the cross will make sense for the disciples after he has gone the way of the cross. So the first blessing is a fullness of understanding.

The second blessing that we see here will be access to the Father, God the Father, by prayer. And that it will be done in Jesus' name.

Until this point, the disciples have brought their requests directly to Jesus because Jesus has been there in body, hasn't he? But now in verses 23 and 24, he says, Very truly, listen up to what I'm saying, Very truly I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.

Until now, you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive so that your joy may be complete. Now Jesus' departure, his going away, means that the entire basis of the relationship with God the Father will be changed.

[15 : 15] And it will be changed, not for the worse, it looks like it's tragedy at first, but it will be changed for the better. We will now have, well they will now have access to him.

And you see Jesus' death, his death on the cross and rising to life will remove the barrier of sin and establish a new relationship in which they will be able to address the Father directly through Jesus and in his name.

And it is on the basis of Jesus' name, which means trusting in his death on the cross to cover up their sin and unworthiness and a sincere commitment to following Jesus by bringing honour to his name and so on, that they can be assured, that these disciples can be assured, that if they ask anything of the Father in Jesus' name, in my name, he will give it to them.

Here is all that the disciples, or ourselves for that matter, can ever long for. So to pray to God the Father means that we should pray in the strong name of Jesus Christ.

And when our prayers offered to the Father in Jesus' name are answered, it is a source of supreme joy because it assures us and it reminds us of the Father's love for us, just as verse 27 talks about.

[16 : 48] Let me try to, let me give you two recent examples. Over the past few weeks in particular, I've been praying for rain in Victoria.

I just felt burdened to pray for that. Now God, I think, in a sense, has heard my prayers and the prayers, no doubt, of many people in sending some rain over the last few days.

And as I think back on that and look back on that, it's been a source of joy and thanksgiving for me as I have seen him answer that prayer over the last week.

It's been a reminder to me of God's sovereignty, that he is the creator of this world and that he is the saviour. And it is also a reminder here of his love for us.

Now similarly, we have been praying for some time in the church for the young adults, that there would be an increase in numbers and commitment from young adults.

[17 : 55] And all these prayers, all this of course has been prayed for in Jesus' name. We have access to the Father in Jesus' name. And it's been a great source of joy, it's been fantastic really, to see God answer those prayers with an increase in numbers of young adults to this church in recent months.

Let me read to you what one person has written about prayer. Too often, Christians can find prayer either to such vague generalities that it would be difficult to identify any specific answer on the Father's part, or to specific requests which are so self-centred that to tag Jesus' name onto them shows a failure to understand what the sacred phrase referring to in Jesus' name implies.

For our encouragement, we note that this great promise was first made to a group of very ordinary and fallible disciples who were soon to desert their master.

Like them, we may take this promise to ourselves, pray specifically to the Father in Jesus' name, and discover the joy that he has promised.

Notice that the model of prayer which Jesus commends here is prayer to the Father through the Son. All Christian prayer should be offered through Jesus Christ.

[19 : 26] The addition of in Jesus' name is not some pedantic formality. It witnesses to the only basis of all intercession, namely the earthly sacrifice and heavenly intercession of Jesus, by which alone to all eternity we may draw near to the throne of the heavenly grace.

We now have access to the Father because of the cross, and we come to the Father in prayer and pray confidently in Jesus' name.

Sometimes, people say things to us in a cryptic way, and we don't understand what they are on about until what they have said actually happens. For example, it's like trying to explain to a child what it's like to be in love with somebody.

You can explain it in vague terms, like trying to explain what it's like to be in love. It's like saying, you're floating on a cloud, your heart beats wildly, your eyes are glazed over, and you can't think of anything, you're so distracted.

You can try and explain it all you like to your child, but it will always be a mystery to them until they experience it for themselves.

[20 : 53] Then, when they have experienced it, you'll be able to speak the same language and understand what each of you is talking about, and hopefully, as a parent, offer some wise instruction and godly advice.

In verses 25 to 33, Jesus' disciples, Jesus' discourse to the disciples is coming to a close. And he says to his disciples, I have said these things to you in figures of speech, in figures, but will tell you plainly, sorry, let me try again.

He says to the disciples, I've said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures, but will tell you plainly of the Father. Jesus acknowledges here that he has been speaking in a veiled way and in a way which brings confusion to the disciples.

He admits that. But there is a time coming when he will no longer speak in this way. A time will come when he will speak plainly of the Father.

But for that time to come, he must first go the way of the cross. Throughout the Gospels, there is this figurative speech which confuses the disciples and no doubt confuses us sometimes as we go to Bible study.

[22 : 22] But the time of plain speech, however, begins after Jesus has risen from the dead. One example of that is seen on the road to Emmaus in Luke's Gospel.

In Luke chapter 24, on that road, Jesus is walking along with two other followers of Jesus and he opened the minds of his followers to understand the Scriptures.

Following the resurrection, Jesus is able to explain more clearly the things that he has already spoken about his Father because it makes sense to the disciples.

They are experiencing Jesus in the resurrection life. And with the coming of the Holy Spirit, there is a spiritual awakening and enlightenment for them to understand what he has taught because in the light of the cross, things begin to fall into place.

On the cross, access to the Father is made because on it, Jesus paid the price of sin once and for all.

[23 : 38] He is the perfect Lamb of God sacrificed for us. Now, we are able to approach God because we are on this side of the cross.

We are post-resurrection and we are able to approach God not because of our own merit, not because of the good things that we have done, but because Jesus has made us acceptable to God the Father.

He is the great high priest who has made a way for us to enter into God's heavenly grace. Now, in verse 29, it looks as if the disciples understand what Jesus is on about before the cross though.

They say, yes, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure of speech. Now we know that you know all things and do not need to have anyone question you. By this, we believe that you came from God.

God, well, do the disciples really believe that who this Jesus is and what he is on about? Or are they bluffing and pretending that they know what is going on like we sometimes do in certain situations?

[24 : 58] In an age when knowledge is power, no one wants to admit ignorance, do they? Now in all fairness, I don't think the disciples are out and out liars, but they do claim to know more than they actually know at this point in time.

They claim here to believe and understand Jesus' statements in verses 27 and 28. He says, you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

I came from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I am leaving the world and am going to the Father. they claim to believe and understand this.

But Jesus quickly points out though how little they really do understand. In verse 31 he asks a question, do you now believe?

The hour is coming, indeed, it has come when you will be scattered, each one to his home and you will leave me alone. The disciples believe to a point but they have leapt to the conclusion that they really understand what this Jesus is on about.

[26 : 14] And they have leapt to this conclusion before Jesus has gone to the cross to die for the sins of the whole world. They have leapt to this conclusion before he has risen and ascended to heaven and they have leapt to this conclusion before the Holy Spirit has been poured out.

Well, Jesus, God in the flesh who knows everything answers these disciples by predicting here the scattering of his disciples after he is arrested thus showing how little they really do know about who Jesus is as well as the truth about themselves.

Again, there is a sense of hopelessness isn't there? But all is not glum. All is not glum.

Jesus' final words in verse 33 are exultant. He says, but take courage. I have conquered the world.

I have conquered the world. Why has he conquered the world? The answer is seen in part in verse 32. Because the Father God the Father in heaven is with him.

[27 : 34] Even though his disciples will abandon him and desert him and scatter and so on, and even though there is darkness that lies ahead, Jesus knows that his Father is with him.

And it is for this very reason that Jesus, the light of the world, has come into the world to overcome the darkness. You see the contrast of light and darkness throughout John's Gospel.

And at the cross Jesus will triumph in a glorious way. There the darkness will be overcome. Though Jesus will be obedient unto death, death itself will be defeated and along with it all the rebellious powers of sin and darkness.

Jesus has done everything to prepare his disciples for this very hour and imminent death that he is about to enter into. They don't understand it even though they claim to.

The only way that they will make sense of it is by Jesus going the way of the cross. grace. Then after he has conquered death and conquered the world after he has risen and poured out his Holy Spirit the words that Jesus has said here and elsewhere in the Gospels will begin to make sense to these disciples bringing them peace and courage to face the persecution that the world will bring upon them.

[29 : 18] And it is by grace that we today can make sense of the cross and enter into God's eternal kingdom.

For there at the cross God's love and peace is poured out on his followers giving them courage to face the world's persecution and look forward to the day where every knee will bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

I cannot tell how he could love a child so weak and full of sin. His love must be most wonderful if he could die my love to win.

I sometimes think about the cross and shut my eyes and try to see the cruel nails and crown of thorns and Jesus crucified for me.

But even could I see him die I could but see a little part of that great love which like a fire is always burning in his heart. I want to love you Lord.

[30 : 30] Teach me how to grow in grace that I may love you more and more until I see you face to face. Amen.