

Take Heart: Jesus Has Overcome

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn in Zion – to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified” (Isaiah 61:1-3).

Shortly before Jesus died on the cross, Jesus made an astounding promise to His disciples and to us. He said, “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” (John 16:33, ESV).

You don’t have to look too far to notice that the world is broken and hurting. Every day people are struggling with depression, hopelessness, confusion, and a deep sense of loneliness. Others battle a tremendous sense of guilt, shame, or even abandonment. It’s likely that in your own life you have ebbed and flowed with feelings of despair and discouragement. Sometimes you can grow disillusioned because you believe that life shouldn’t be as difficult or as confusing as it is. Yet, if you look back at Jesus’s words in John 16:33 you need to remind yourself that He assures you that you would face “tribulation” in this broken world. This helps us make sense of the broken contexts in which we find ourselves.

So, what is our hope with such a grim reality?

Jesus also tells us “to take heart” because “He has overcome the world.” This is an astounding and wonderful promise for us for today and for eternity. He wants us to have peace in a planet permeated with pain.

In Isaiah 61:1-3 we discover how this lasting and living hope was accomplished. Almost 700 years before Christ arrived on earth, the prophet Isaiah announced that One was coming who provide good news to the poor, bind up brokenhearted people, provide liberty to captives, and liberate those who were bound. All of these dire conditions are forms of “tribulation” that Jesus assured us would come our way in John 16:33. Yet, Christ amazingly promises us that part of His mission on earth was to overcome those tribulations and to restore those who were captive or broken by them.

This is still our living hope today. Tribulations like depression, loneliness, shame, guilt, fear, and frustration do not have the final say. Though you may feel captive to those things, remind yourself that part of good news of Jesus Christ is that His grace, power, and mercy are always more powerful than the forces that hold you down. His love will always overcome whatever threatens His followers.

Questions for Further Reflection:

1. You might not be financially poor or battle a specific form of physical oppression, but can you think of some ways that you can be poor or oppressed spiritually?
2. Jesus promised that we'd face tribulations in this life. What are some different challenges that you are facing in your life right now? How can Christ's promise that He has "overcome this world" give you hope in those situations?
3. Are there people in your life who are facing tribulations and trials? What are some ways that you can bring them the hope of Jesus during this Advent season?

Prayer:

Dear Lord – sometimes life is both hard and confusing. At times I feel weighted down by darkness. Thank you for coming to earth to shine a bright light. Thank you for overcoming this world and all of its brokenness by allowing Yourself to be broken on the Cross. Please continue to shine your light in my life and in this world. Give me eyes to see what you're doing and please show me specific ways to shine light and produce hope in the lives of those around me. Amen.