

**The Rock: 09-11-2022****Reflection and remembrance**

**Title**: Take heart, I have overcome

**Scripture**: John 16:25-33

(Black bible Pg. 849 ESV)

**Theme**:

Where is God when it hurts? Where is He when things go horribly wrong, and it seems as though He is not there?

**Introduction**:

This morning it is good to remember:

Jesus said - "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world."

Also, that the worst day this world has ever seen, was also the greatest day in history -victory came to all humanity in death -and resurrection..

It was shortly before midnight, September 11, 2001, when the 43<sup>rd</sup> President penned in his journal:

"The Pearl Harbor of the 21<sup>st</sup> century took place today. We think it was Osama Bin Laden."

Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941 -a distant memory for the majority of us here. Even September 11, twenty-one years ago this morning -where were you, when the world stopped turning, that September day?

What were you doing as those events unfolded on that Tuesday morning?

Events such as these impact us, affect us because they are ours. They happened to us - and in the midst of working out the "why God let these things happen?". We must remember.

To forget the past, to not reflect on history, our history and the events which unfolded as if they are somehow taboo and unhelpful, is in fact, unhelpful itself.

I've wrestled with what the Lord would have me to say this morning, what He would have for me today as a pastor, whose job it is to try and make sense of such things.

I've thought about where to go in the Scriptures to help us understand, at least a little bit, of our world and ourselves and roles within it.

We are here, and that is by God's design. We are not accidents of time + matter + chance as though we are a bunch of turbo-charged monkeys.

Rather, Scripture declares that we are made for a time such as this. Much Like Esther though, it is not the easiest, nor is it the friendliest of times.

Esther, the queen who hid her ethnicity, is now being challenged to go and speak with the King to prevent a national tragedy -the wholesale genocide of the Jewish people in Persia.

Understand that if she were to go to the King without being summoned, he could order her or anyone's execution on the spot. This becomes her excuse as her cousin Mordechai pleads with her to help her people.

**-Esther 4:12-17 (ESV)**

"And they told Mordecai what Esther had said. Then Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young

women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish." Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him."

Verses 15-17 are particularly striking and frightening. She will do it, but I need you to be fasting. Included in that would be prayer. She needed and would have spiritual covering.

You see, to remember these things is to look and to see God at work in this world, even if it is sometimes behind the scenes.

Esther here is being challenged from a place of comfort, while the disciples in our opening reading, were being encouraged from a place of fear.

The similarities however, are few, with this one exception -God did not take any of them out of the trials which lay ahead. Instead, He strengthened and led them thorough.

Again, to remember, is to see God's hand working even in the worst of times. I think on this day every year, and often through tears, but also with increasing concern.

As we have not learned, nor do we often recall the unity which prevailed during

that time of national tragedy. Remembering that we are more than just the sum total of "ourselves", but rather, we were a people, a nation unified in the midst of grief, loss and pain.

We looked beyond ourselves, beyond the petty differences, and yes, we looked to God -for many reasons and many things - but mostly for comfort and for answers to that aching question of, "Why?"

Every pastor, five days later, took the pulpit that Sunday to bring comfort to their congregations -to try and bring answers and make sense of it all in the midst of heartbreak and fear.

### **The Story:**

John 14-17, is to me, the place to be in order to learn, to understand. It has been just over three years since Jesus of Nazareth declared His ministry and purpose in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Here He is now, if you will, sitting with His congregation. He knows what is coming, and even though He is doing something for the world, some things need to happen to Him that will throw this small group of men and women into a tail spin for the weekend and then for the next 50 days.

His would be a national tragedy, which would bring world-wide victory.

To forget that the plan of God from the very beginning was to fix our breaking of His covenant, and that He would do so Himself, is to forget our history.

**-Genesis 3:15 (ESV)**

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

**-John 3:16-17 (ESV)**

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

Everything Jesus has done in His ministry up to this point, all the things we have been learning this year, have led to this moment.

Yet, it certainly does not seem like a moment of victory, or of "national unity".

And why should it? The world does not want it, His own people have been trying

to kill Him in an attempt to get rid of Him because of His teaching and conviction and condemnation of their behavior.

Question: Where is God when it hurts? Where is He when things go horribly wrong, and it seems He has left the building?

Answer: To know our Bibles is to know that He is right in the middle of it all.

To understand that because God is sovereign over every molecule in the universe means this: That NOTHING happens outside of God's will. YET, not EVERYTHING that does happen IS His will.

This is complicated, but you are sensible people and intelligent people, work it out, please.

We have to understand this if this evil which continues in this world, is ever going to be confronted and seen for what it is.

Otherwise, we just go through life, often mad at God or rejecting Him and His existence because evil things continue to happen.

Not everything that happens IS His will. You see, even His closest friends struggled with this. "We want you to

restore the Kingdom." -He was, just not in the way they thought or wanted -rather in the way they needed.

He was repairing the rift created by Adam and Eve between heaven and Earth. Jesus was uniting them once again in and through His death and resurrection.

They wanted Him to stay with them, as they were afraid of being alone. Who wouldn't be? Yet, He is explaining to them that He is and will be with them, but He has to go away first:

**-John 16:25-28 (ESV)**

"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. 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. I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father."

None of this made much sense in the moment, it never does. What is God doing here? He is lifting up His Son in order to draw the world back to Himself, to



reconcile a lost and rebellious people back to Him.

Evil exists in this world because we chose to step outside of the boundaries which our Creator has established for us. Boundaries meant to help us, not harm us. Meant to bless us, not inhibit and curse.

They are meant for our best, in order that we may fulfill our calling from eternity:

**-Psalms 139:13-16 (ESV)**

"For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them."

**-Ephesians 2:8-10 (ESV)**

"For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ

Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

You are no accident! You were made for such a time as this, even as we remember and reflect on the worst of humanity in rebellion against God, make no mistake, this is the reason why, we as human beings behave as we do.

Yet, in the midst of that, God continues His reconciling work in this world, through you. Mr. Rodgers, the man so many my age grew up with, said this:

“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”

September 11, 2001:

343 -firefighters -37 Port authority  
police officers -23 NYPD -8 EMT's,  
multiple passengers on flight 93, ... and  
countless others, forever nameless.

Helpers who ran toward and into the  
tragedy. Back to the Bible.

You are not alone -This is such a  
beautiful promise! The Bible, and today  
this very small section in John's telling  
of the Gospel, reminds us of the  
realities we face.

The challenges, the struggles, and the tragic, painful events of life. Jesus never once said, "Follow me and I promise that life will be all unicorns and cupcakes." Mordechai never told Esther she would be protected from punishment if she went to the King.

After all, you are doing "God's will." Rather, the promise of tribulation and of suffering is given. We miss this because we don't like this. Nobody wants to go through tribulation. Nobody wants to suffer. Most especially, all alone!

**-John 16:32-33 (ESV)**

"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. 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."

Jesus gives a powerful reminder that just as I have never been alone, I am promising you that neither will you be left all alone, or left as orphans.

This is the only truth that will sustain the Christian in this world. It is the only thing, the only promise which helps

make sense of these great tragedies in our world.

We can only define what is evil against a canvas of what is good. And good cannot be our views and opinions. Rather good can only be defined against the backdrop, the canvas as it were of God's word -the Bible, and the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

God alone is good. Remember Jesus' response to the rich young ruler? "God alone is good." Again:

**-John 16:33b (ESV)**

"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

Trying to make sense out of man's evil perpetrated against their fellow man, cannot be made sense of outside of the goodness and promises of God, found in Jesus. It is not possible.

Think on this for a moment. If we blame God for all the things wrong in this world, and then celebrate ourselves for all the good: Then God is the problem and we are the cure.

To look at humanity and to think in that way, is to deny the facts as they present themselves. Humanity is broken, that is the one thing everyone agrees on! Yet,

it is only God's story as found in the Bible which makes sense of our situation and proposes a cure.

To look at it another way -Because evil exists and because bad things happen, that must mean that there is no God -we are all just "dancing to our DNA" as the atheist Richard Dawkins proposed in his book, "The God Delusion."

That is even more absurd! For if that were true, we are left all alone in a bleak house of our own making, with no escape. Why?

Well, if you remove God from the picture, IE: He doesn't exist, we are once again left with humanity as the problem and cause of the evil in this world.

But we are now left with no solution to our dilemma. Listen, we know evil exists -we watched it in real time, those of us who were there, 21 years ago, live on our television sets.

Yet, to deny God, is to remove the ability to say that. Because, it is only in Christ and the Bible that we can define good, and thus have the ability to understand evil.

We've been learning all year, that Gods' design, His rescue mission is to save us. But, in studying this, we have to be

prepared to admit, that it is from ourselves that we need rescuing!

G.K. Chesterton, an English author and journalist of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in response to a question posed by the editor of the local newspaper: "What is wrong with this world?", responded this way:

"With regard to your question; 'What is wrong with this world?', I am.'"

-Sincerely yours,

G. K. Chesterton

To recognize this is to realize and accept a couple of things:

1-I am in need of help from the outside. I cannot fix myself.

2-That I and we can take heart. Why? Because not only is help on the way, help has actually already come.

In the midst of a broken and rebellious world where things like Pearl Harbor and 9-11 can and do happen, God has broken in.

The greatest tragedy ever seen in history is also at the same time, the greatest victory ever to be had by us -because of Him.

The hill outside the great city of David, Jerusalem, was where He was hung upon the cross -for the healing of the nations.

Evil, the worst of humanity's action and ability, nailed Him to a tree. He looked down upon them, His enemies, and at the same time the ones He came to save, and said:

**-Luke 23:34a (ESV)**

"And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Where is God when it hurts? Where is He when things go horribly wrong in life?

He is right in the midst of it all with you. This is no quaint saying hanging on the wall of our living rooms.

This is a promise, written on our hearts, in Christ.

I pray we never forget our history, because looking back we are assured of all of God's promises as we go forward looking toward that day when they are all fulfilled with the yes and amen in Our King Jesus.