



June 23, 2013
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Cram Session: Jesus' Parting Words – Relax!

John 16:16-22; 33

This morning we come to the end of this sermon series we have called "Cram Session." Jesus is in a room in Jerusalem with his disciples. Within a few hours He will be arrested in a garden called Gethsemane and hauled away in chains. Within 24 hours, he will be dead; crucified like a rebel on a hill outside Jerusalem. Jesus knows what is coming; his disciples don't... although they certainly have a sense that something is "up." So, this meal is the last chance He has to repeat the themes that matter most; to remind them of what it means to be servants; to teach them about the Holy Spirit; to command them to love each other; to inspire them to bear fruit by staying attached to him.

This is also His last opportunity to warn them that the world that hates and abuses him... will do the same to his disciples. Not exactly a feel-good message, is it? If the world hates me, it will hate you. It's the worst sales pitch ever. If you wanted to sell someone on the virtues of being a Christian, telling them they will be kicked out of their synagogues, persecuted, arrested and murdered for their efforts...is not exactly a compelling elevator speech. If Jesus stopped where we stopped last week, the best we can say is, "Okay, we know the cost. If we follow Jesus, it means that the world will hate and hurt us. At least we have fair warning."

So...that's it? That's the best that Jesus has to offer? "If you follow me, the world will hate and hurt you. Sorry 'bout that. Just thought you should know!" Well...actually, there's more to His speech.

The opening few verses of this text are among the goofiest you will find in scripture. Jesus says, "In a little while you will not see me... then a little while, and you will see me." The disciples say to each other, "What does he mean, "In a little while you will not see me, then

in a little while, you will see me?" And Jesus says, "So, are you guys wondering what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will not see me, then in a little while, you will see me?'" It sounds like a comedy act.

So what does Jesus mean by "...in a little while you will see me no more?" Well, literally, in a little while, they are going to walk east from Jerusalem, down through the Kidron Valley, and up the other side to a grove of olive trees called Gethsemane. There Judas is going to lead a band of soldiers to arrest and carry Jesus away—out of their sight, to the bottle dungeon in Caiphas' House; to the court of the Sanhedrin, to the judgment seat of Pilate; to the cross on Calvary, and into the darkness of a borrowed tomb. Literally, "in a little while," they will see Jesus no longer because his body and his life will be hidden from them.

And what does he mean when he says, "...after a little while you will see me."? He means that Sunday morning, three days later, he will walk forth from that tomb, alive, and they will see him again. For a little while, he will be hidden; in another little while he will be seen.

Of course, they don't get it. The next few hours will be horrible for them. He warns them that they will suffer. In verse 20 he says: "... You will grieve..." The literal Greek word for grief is "depression." "You will be depressed," Jesus says. But only for a little while. Like a woman suffering birth pangs. Her pain turns to incredible joy. So will theirs. Verse 22: "So with you: Now is your time of grief (depression), but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy."

Then comes the triumphal summary to everything Jesus has been teaching. These are His last words before He prays; his last teaching until his resurrection. This is what Jesus wants them to cling to: Verse 33 "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."

The last word of Jesus in this cram session is not about the hatred or the persecution of the world against us. The last word is not about the

hiddenness of Jesus when his disciples look frantically for him and cannot find him. No, the last word of Jesus is this: "Peace! Relax! It's going to be okay. In this world you will have trouble; that is very true. But take heart! I have overcome the world!"

That is a promise to cling to! Problem is...most of us live in verse 16. "In a little while you will see me no more." We watch what is happening in our society and among business leaders and among crazy politicians around the world and we say, "How long, O Lord, will you put up with this?" When a Christian dares to stand...to speak out against injustice or immorality, he is mocked and muted as a religious kook. The world is broken and there are times when Jesus seems very hidden to us.

I daresay, in these last few weeks, he has felt particularly hidden right here at Chapel Hill. When this broken world steals a young father who is killed on his bicycle, we cry out, "I can't see you, Jesus. Where are you?" When this broken world steals an 11-day old baby from his parents' arms despite our prayers, we cry out, "I can't see you, Jesus. Where are you?" When the world steals the hope of a man who takes his own life, his parents cry out, "I can't see you, Jesus. Where are you?" When we, the praying church, on our knees, pleading with God for healing, experience instead, sickness and death...we find ourselves crying out to Jesus, "We can't see you! Where are you in this injustice and brokenness and sickness and death?"

That has been my prayer. My cry to God. The world has been hard on our people these last weeks. The world has been harsh to my flock. What do we do when we can't see Jesus? When the world treats us like he warned us it would? What do we do? We turn to the end of the lesson. "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world!" We wait through the darkness...we walk through the pain...we endure the seeming silence of God because we believe...in another little while...we will see him again. We will see him victorious. We have hope and take heart because we believe will see him, ultimately, as the overcoming, victorious Christ before whom the whole rebellious world bows!

Jesse Hayes is a member of our congregation. He has a rare, progressive neurological disease that will take his life in the next year or two. A while back, Jesse was part of our Sound & Sand Experience, a gathering of Palestinian, Israeli and American Christian students for the purpose of breaking down barriers and proclaiming the unity we share as followers of Christ. For two weeks they gathered here in Washington; for another two weeks they met in the Jordanian desert.

Part of their Washington experience was a hike up Mt. Rainier. Jesse was in his wheelchair and couldn't climb, obviously. We pushed him as far as the paved path, but I assumed that would be the end of the trail for him. Imagine my surprise, then, when I looked down and saw this. This is a painting of a photograph that was taken of that sight: one of the Israeli students carrying Jesse on his shoulder up the mountain to the place where the rest were gathered, so that he would not miss out. Lance Brown and I were together and we will never forget that sight. We listened for two hours as they gathered around Jesse and prayed for his healing. It was powerful. And it didn't happen.

Jesse was not healed. In fact he has gotten worse. We who prayed for this miracle were disappointed with God's answer. Jesus has seemed hidden to us in this way.

But a few weeks ago, Jesse told us he wanted to renew his baptismal vows—in front of his church—because he wanted to give testimony to the goodness of God in his life. He wanted to declare to his church family—and to his Sound & Sand friends who are watching this service around the world—that he trusts God; that he has found God to be faithful. That he has taken heart because he believes that Jesus has overcome the world... including the brokenness of the world that has spilled over into his life.

So this morning, we are going to take heart together. In this season when the world seems to be winning...when the enemy has killed and stolen and destroyed more than usual...in this "little while" when we find it harder to see Jesus...we turn to the end of His sermon. We take heart. And we believe Jesus when he says he has overcome this world. Jesse's vows are a chance for all of us to declare, "God is faithful, Christ is victorious, and in Him, we will overcome the world."

So now, I want to ask Jesse's Sound & Sand friends to bring him forward so that he can give testimony to his faith in Jesus. [Baptism]

I want to take us back to what Jesus said about how we, who do not really belong in this world that can despise and mistreat us, still find our way to joy and peace. We assume, I think, that we endure the pain in hope that it will be replaced by joy. But that's not what Jesus taught. It is like childbirth. The joy does not replace the pain...the joy comes through the pain. If there are no birth pangs, there is no birth.

That may seem hard to swallow when you are the one who is going through a time of death or sickness or failure or loss or persecution. If you are enduring a season where Jesus seems very hidden to you. But it seems that what he is saying is, "Precisely in and through these moments of pain...when I seem so hidden...will I reveal myself to you. I know this world can be brutal. But hold on; take heart; be at peace! Because I have overcome the world!

Benediction:

This world is not my home.
I will not be surprised when it hurts me.
I lay myself in the arms of Jesus
The one who has overcome the world
I trust that He will turn my pain into joy
I will be at peace.

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. The word "relax" never appears in this passage yet Pastor Mark used that for the title of his sermon. Why?
 2. As you read the passage, what reasons do you find for anxiety? And what solutions does Jesus provide for that anxiety? Take a close look at verse 33.
 3. What in your life do you find grievous or disturbing right now? How is this passage encouraging to you in this time?