

The Conquest of the World

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[0 : 00] So we're now going to turn to our Bible reading for this evening, and Edward Lobb is preaching! to us once again concluding this little series that he's been doing through what is known as the Farewell or the Upper Room Discourse in John's Gospel. And we're going to be reading again from John chapter 16. So do grab a Bible if you're with us and don't have one. We do have plenty of visitors' Bibles. There are these red books at the front, the sides, the back. Someone on the welcome team would love to bring one to you if you wave your hand. And do open up to page 902, and we're going to be reading from verse 16 through to the end of the chapter. John 16, beginning at verse 16.

Jesus says, a little while and you will see me no longer. And again, a little while and you will see me. So some of his disciples said to one another, what is this that he says to us? A little while and you will not see me. And again, a little while and you will see me. And because I'm going to the Father. So they were saying, what does he mean by a little while? We do not know what he was talking about. Jesus knew what they wanted to ask him. So he said to them, is this what you're asking yourselves? What I meant by saying a little while and you will not see me. And again, a little while and you will see me. Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice.

You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come. But when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also, you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you.

And that day, you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now, you have asked nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive that your joy may be full. 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. His disciples said, ah, now you're speaking plainly and not using figurative speech. Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you. This is why we believe that you came from God. Jesus answered them, do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone.

[3 : 39] 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.

Amen. This is God's word. Good evening, friends. Very good to see you all. Let's turn to our John's Gospel, chapter 16, and our passage is verses 16 to 33. Now my title for this evening is The Conquest of the World.

And you'll see that verse 33, the last verse of the chapter, is the source of that title. Let me read to you verse 33. I've 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. In other words, I am the conqueror of the world. Let me take a moment first to set this passage in its context, particularly for those who may not have been with us in recent weeks. These three chapters of John's Gospel, chapters 14, 15, and 16, are sometimes referred to as the upper room discourse. And Jesus is speaking throughout these chapters, apart from one or two very brief interruptions. He's speaking to his 11 apostles, Judas Iscariot has left during their meal, and Jesus and the apostles are sitting together in

a borrowed first floor room, and they've just shared the annual Passover meal together. But this has been the last supper, because Jesus knew that he was to be crucified on the following day. The apostles did not know this. Their grasp on the situation was almost non-existent. They were going to learn an awful lot in the next two or three days. But on this Thursday evening, they were like men stumbling around in the dark. They do ask Jesus a number of questions during the discourse, like the one in this passage at verses 17 and 18. But you'll see at the end of verse 18, they freely confess, we do not know what he's talking about. We are clueless participants in the discussion. We are ignorami. Now, Jesus, of course, knew this. And he says in verse 12, that they simply can't take in most of what he is saying. But he gives them this teaching nevertheless, because he knows that in due course, when the Holy Spirit comes, the Spirit will remind the apostles of all his teaching and will enable them to understand it. So there is a sense of incomprehension and foreboding at the meal table. Jesus finishes his long piece of instruction at the end of chapter 16.

[6 : 50] Then in the next chapter 17, he prays to God the Father. And you'll see his prayer is recorded there in chapter 17. And as soon as he finishes praying at chapter 18, verse one, he goes with the apostles down the short slope into the Kidron Valley. He crosses the Kidron Brook, goes into the Garden of Gethsemane, where he is subsequently arrested. So the three chapters of instruction are given to the apostles in a very dramatic and traumatic context. This is not like a teaching session given by an elderly professor of history in a library on a quiet afternoon at St. Andrew's University, where the old professor gently runs over his material on the Jacobite rebellions for the 100th time, looking intellectually alert, but secretly looking forward to his buttered tea cake. No, this upper room discourse is fraught with danger, danger to the 11 apostles and supreme danger to their teacher.

Now look again at this final verse of chapter 16, because in a way it sums up the whole thrust of the discourse. 1633, I've said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart, I've overcome the world. We'll start with that final verse, and then we'll work back to the beginning of our passage. In this verse 33, Jesus is reminding his friends that their life is to be lived in two places simultaneously, in me and in the world.

In me, he says, you will have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. Now that is the Christian life in a nutshell, a strange mixture of peace and trouble to be experienced simultaneously. In me, through belonging to me and abiding in me, you will know peace.

And as we'll see in just a moment, joy as well. But in the world you will have tribulation, because as he has said back in chapter 15 verse 18, the world is going to hate you as it has hated me.

Now if you're a new Christian, and that may be true of some here, you might not yet have grasped the fact that peace in Jesus and tribulation in the world are experienced at the same time, simultaneously. But it is what happens, and it's good for us to know about it. Because when the tribulations come, we will learn not to take offense at God. We will learn not to say to him, this should not be happening to me. Actually, the whole Bible is full of examples of believing men and women who have learned that peace and tribulation are often inseparable. Just think of the Apostle Paul at the end of Romans chapter 8. He says, who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

[9 : 57] Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. More than conquerors, victory to the power of 10 through Jesus who loved us. Now those words give us a completely new take on tribulation and distress. The distress, says Paul, cannot and will not have the upper hand in the end. It will be very distressing. Distress, by definition, is horrible, but it won't win. The author of Psalm 119 writes in just the same vein. For example, he says to the Lord, look on my affliction and deliver me. Many are my persecutors and my adversaries. Princes persecute me without cause. But a few verses later, he says, great peace have those who love your law. Nothing can make them stumble. So he experiences peace and steadiness in the midst of persecution.

Persecutions and adversaries are going to come hard against him, but he's not going to be defeated by them. So the words of Jesus here in John 16, 33 are expressing a theme that runs right the way through the Bible. But Jesus's words are, if anything, even more wonderful because they draw the eyes of our faith to Jesus himself. In me, he says, you will have peace. It's all part of the abide in me teaching of chapter 15. At the heart of the Christian faith, there is a small, rather nervous soul.

That's you or me. And this little soul rests the weight of its weary head on Jesus himself. In me, you will have peace. To live in the world is to live in the sphere of tribulation.

Even at those periods in our lives when tribulation is at its lowest level, perhaps seasons when you're in good health, your relationships with other people are happy, your bank balance is sufficient to meet your needs, you're perhaps about to go on holiday.

Even in relaxed periods of your life like that, you're well aware that tribulation is everywhere. You read the news. It's full of pain and conflict. Your heart goes out to refugees, to the victims of war and violence, especially to Christians who are being persecuted for their faith.

[12 : 38] And at times you shake your head and you say to yourself, this world is such a cruel and unhappy place. And so often it hates Jesus and his people.

But Jesus says at the end of verse 33, take heart, I've overcome the world. And he can say this because he has overcome the prince of this world, the devil himself.

The decisive battle against the devil has been won at the cross and assured by the resurrection of Jesus. The power of death has been broken by Jesus.

And although Satan continues his wretched and miserable campaigns against Jesus and the church, victory over the world and its prince has been won by Jesus.

And everybody who belongs to Jesus shares in that victory. So even if you or I were to be put to death because we're Christians, we would die knowing that eternal life and eternal victory are ours.

[13 : 40] No amount of tribulation can separate us from the love of Christ, as Paul puts it in Romans. Friends, let me encourage you to learn this verse 33 by heart.

It will stand you in good stead, especially when you're suffering. It certainly helped me at a number of sticky points in my own life. Look at 33. I've said these things to you, meaning the whole of the upper room discourse, so that in me you may have peace.

In the world you will have tribulation. You can't avoid it. It will come your way. But take heart. I have overcome the world. Now let's turn back to verse 16 so that we can follow the line of Jesus's thinking, which ends up in that triumphant final verse.

Here's verse 16. A little while and you will see me no longer. And again, a little while and you will see me. Now that's an odd verse, isn't it?

And the editors of the ESV, our version, have put it in inverted commas to suggest that it's a kind of catchphrase, almost a riddle.

[14 : 54] It certainly mystifies the apostles. Now remember, Jesus and the apostles are sitting together, probably still at the table. And Jesus is doing almost all the talking.

But at this stage, a little buzz of conversation breaks out at one end of the table. This can happen at some of our dinner parties, can't it? There you are sitting at table with six or eight friends.

And most of the time, there's just one conversation involving everybody. But occasionally, two or three of the diners have a separate conversation in one corner for a few minutes.

Now this seems to have been happening at the Last Supper. Jesus says provocatively, his rather cryptic saying here in verse 16, and a small group of maybe three or four apostles break into a detached, separate moment of conversation.

And they say to each other quietly, but not so quietly that Jesus can't overhear them. They say, what on earth does he mean? A little while and you won't see me.

[15 : 56] And again, a little while and you will see me. And that other incomprehensible item, because I'm going to the Father. And John, the author of the gospel, makes much of this moment of confused talk, because he more or less repeats verse 17 in verse 18.

And he ends verse 18 by recording the confession of total bemusement of the apostles. We don't know what he's talking about. Anyway, at verse 19, Jesus is absolutely alive to the situation.

He knows what they're saying to each other. So he says to them, is this what you're talking about? What I meant by saying a little while and you will not see me. And again, a little while and you will see me.

And I guess at that point, they nod their heads a bit sheepishly. Now, it is a peculiar little passage, isn't it? The teasing, provocative saying, a little while this and a little while that.

It's written down three times here. Initially at verse 16, then again at verse 17, and then a third time in verse 19. Three times. John wants to make sure that his readers get hold of this and remember it.

[17 : 07] It sounds almost like a riddle. So why does Jesus speak like this in a way that stimulates the apostles' curiosity without illuminating their minds?

Verse 25 helps us to see what's going on. Look onto 25. 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 of speech, but will tell you plainly about the Father.

Now, in verse 25, Jesus, you'll see his contrasting, plain, unambiguous speech, which he's going to use in the near future, with figures of speech, which he's using at the present.

The authorized version translates figures of speech as proverbs. It's almost the same idea as riddles. So why should Jesus use this slightly obscure way of speaking?

Was he deliberately trying to hide things from the apostles? The answer must be no. After all, we find him in so much of the four gospels laboring patiently to help them to understand.

[18:16] But they were slow to grasp things, which is hardly surprising when you remember that the coming of the Son of God into the world was without precedent. The world had never seen such a phenomenon.

It was too big an idea for the apostles to absorb. So Jesus quite often used proverbial pithy sayings because he knew that proverbial sayings are such a good way of teaching.

Initially, the proverb is rather like a riddle. You can't grasp it. But when you do grasp it, it sticks in your memory and it conveys a truth to your understanding, which nothing is going to dislodge.

Just think of one or two of the proverbs which have lodged in your minds for a long time. Too many cooks spoil the broth. It's the last straw that breaks the hippopotamus' back.

Oh, what? Did I get the animal wrong? How did you know it was a camel? You knew because the proverb has lodged itself in your mind and nothing is going to shift it.

[19:23] It will always be a camel. The proverb sticks their word perfect. And John himself remembered this little proverb of Jesus when he was writing this gospel some 50 years later in his old age.

A little while and you will not see me. And again a little while and you will see me. What's it all about? It sounds facile. Almost like something that young children sing to each other in the school playground.

But it's designed to drill into the apostles' minds the central truths of the gospel. It's about the crucifixion and the resurrection. A little while and you will not see me because I'll be dead and buried.

And again a little while and you will see me because I will have been raised from the dead. Now John is including this teaching in his gospel not to remind the apostles of what Jesus had said. Because the other apostles almost certainly were all dead by the time John wrote these things down. He wrote all this down for the sake of his worldwide non-Christian readership.

[20:29] The whole of John's gospel is an evangelistic tract. John wants his readers who are not yet Christians to realize that the death and resurrection of Jesus are the central facts of the good news.

And what John is getting his readers to see in this passage is that a new order of existence, a new age, is being opened up by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

His death deals with the past and brings forgiveness of sins. And his resurrection is the dramatic first demonstration of the life of a new order, a new world characterized by new birth.

John's gospel is the gospel of the new creation. Now coming back to the instruction of Jesus to the apostles, Jesus is about to teach them from verse 20 onwards that after his death and resurrection, they will be able to experience two new things, two great benefits of the new age.

First of all, a new joy, verse 22, a joy that no one can take from them. And second, a new access to God the Father, verse 23, an access as they learn to pray in Jesus' name.

[21:47] Well, we'll look at these two things now in turn. First of all, a new joy that no one can take from them. Jesus uses this provocative little riddle in verse 16 to stir the apostles into a bout of thinking.

And he knows that they're not going to understand what he's saying and that they will want to ask him to explain himself and that he will then get the opportunity to teach them something really important about his death and resurrection.

Verse 16 is a ploy to prepare their minds for the teaching of verses 20 to 23. So picking it up here in verse 19, he's saying this.

Friends, you're asking yourselves what on earth I might be on about in saying a little while and you will not see me and again a little while and you will see me. Well, let me tell you the meaning of my

riddle.

Verse 20. Truly, truly, I say to you. Now, whenever Jesus uses that phrase, he means listen very carefully because what I'm about to say is of the utmost importance.

[22 : 55] You will weep and lament tomorrow when you see me hoisted up on a cross. You will be aghast. It will be a day of dreadful sorrow and confusion for you.

You will weep, but the world will rejoice. All the anti-God forces represented by the Jewish authorities and the Roman government, they will be delighted and relieved.

The Jewish leaders especially who regard me as a threat to their whole institution, they will toast each other in champagne tomorrow night because they will have me, their arch enemy, dead and buried.

Yes, my friends, you will be sorrowful tomorrow, but your sorrow will turn into joy when you see me again on Sunday.

And then you will understand what I meant when I said I would be raised up on the third day. And then in verse 21, Jesus uses a wonderful illustration of intense pain followed by great joy.

[23 : 56] Verse 21, when a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come. But when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish for joy that a human being has been born into the world.

Now, if you're a man whose wife is having a baby, you go through a few anxious hours in the maternity ward.

But you do not go through what she goes through. God says to Eve in Genesis chapter three, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing.

In pain, you shall bring forth children. So the pain experienced in childbirth is part of the curse laid upon the human race because of our age old rebellion against God.

But it's all over very suddenly. The baby is delivered. And the mother's face that was contorted with pain is now suddenly smiling with joy.

[24 : 57] The mother picks up the baby and she nurses it. The baby gurgles. The baby burps. You know that all is well. Jesus chooses the best possible illustration of intense pain, quickly followed by great joy.

And as the mother holds her newborn baby, she contemplates with delight a new beginning, a new existence, a new creation. Then Jesus explains the illustration in verse 22.

So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice and no one will take your joy from you.

So great sorrow is followed by great joy. And the point Jesus is making is that his resurrection marks the arrival of a new order. The resurrection of Jesus is the first stage in the dawning of the new creation.

And it's the event that immediately precedes the coming of the Holy Spirit. So Jesus is teaching his apostles and us that his death, his resurrection, his ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

[26 : 07] These events which all took place within six weeks of each other. These are the hinge between the old world, which is subject to decay and ruin and the new order where in the end, death, pain and tears have no place.

That's why the disciples are about to experience a depth of joy that no one will ever be able to take from them. When they met Jesus again on Easter Sunday, Jesus in his new body, his resurrection body, they were not merely being reunited with their dear friend and their teacher.

They were seeing with their own eyes the prince of the new age. They were able to touch him with their hands, share meals with him and talk with him on various occasions.

And later, when the Holy Spirit came to clarify their understanding of Jesus, they knew with unshiftable conviction that they too were members of the new order.

It was the resurrection of Jesus that opened the gateway into the new creation. Peter, the apostle, makes exactly this point at the beginning of his first letter.

[27 : 18] He writes, God has caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

And then he adds a moment later in this, you rejoice. So this is what filled John and Peter and the other apostles with such joy. They came to realize that through the resurrection of Jesus, they had been brought from the unbearable birth pangs of the cross.

To the unbreakable, unshakable, incorruptible joy of membership of the new order. Now they knew, of course, that they would still have to die. They knew that they would be hated for their allegiance to Jesus.

But they knew that they now belonged forever to the one over whom death has no more dominion. And when we become Christians, we become part of that new order, the new creation.

Jesus puts it like this in John chapter 5, verse 24. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.

[28 : 26] He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. So once we become believers, we realize that we have already left the old order where death and the devil are in command and have been transferred by the grace of God into the new world.

We have passed from death to life. If you're not a Christian, you're still in the kingdom of death. But if you've trusted Christ, you belong to the new creation.

Your slavery to death is now a fading memory. You are already enjoying life in the new world. And to come back to our passage here in verse 22, this is why nothing and nobody can rob us of our joy. This is why the apostles after Pentecost were prepared to face martyrdom. They knew that they'd be hated by the enemies of Jesus. They knew that they were likely to be subjected to kangaroo courts and mock trials, just as Jesus had been.

And that they'd be sentenced to death for no other reason than that they were preachers of the gospel. It is the lot of the members of the new order to be hated by the world. Jesus puts it so clearly at chapter 15, verse 18.

[29 : 42] If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. So, friends, let's learn to savor what it means to belong to the new creation.

We still have one foot, of course, in the old world. We have to do all the old order things. We have to earn our livings. We have to pay our bills, pay our taxes, go to funerals, including, finally, our own.

But if we belong to Jesus, death has no more dominion over us as it has no more dominion over him. We have passed from death to life, from the intolerable pain of birth pangs to the joy that no one can take from us.

Well, let's turn now to the second aspect of the new age that Jesus teaches the apostles. And that is, they now have a new access to God the Father in prayer as they learn to pray to the Father in Jesus' name.

Now, we'll pick up this line of teaching in verse 23. Now, each of those two verses, 23 and 24, begins with a time reference.

[31 : 11] Verse 23, in that day. Verse 24, until now. The phrase, in that day, refers to the era after Jesus has risen and ascended and the Holy Spirit has been sent.

In other words, the new era that is about to begin. The phrase, until now, in verse 24, looks back to the era that is coming to an end. The era when the apostles did not understand the principles of prayer that Jesus is now teaching them.

So he is saying, previously, up to the present moment, verse 24, you have asked the Father for nothing in my name. Because you didn't know that that was the way to pray.

But in the very near future, as the new era dawns, verse 23, you will learn to address your prayers to God the Father in my name.

And whatever you ask in my name, he will give to you. Now, look on to verse 26, because it opens up the territory yet further. Verse 26, in that day, after my ascension, after the coming of the Spirit, you will ask in my name.

[32 : 22] You will be learning this new principle. But asking in my name doesn't mean that I will then take your request to the Father on your behalf.

So I won't be going to the Father and saying to him, Mrs. McKillop from East Kilbride is asking that her knee replacement operation will be a success. Will you grant her request?

No. Mrs. McKillop can ask the Father directly. Why? Because, verse 27, the Father himself loves her. Because she loves me and believes that I came from God.

In other words, because she is a Christian. So Mrs. McKillop and every other believer have direct access to God the Father. Now, this incidentally shows us that the Roman Catholic understanding of prayer, that you pray to the Virgin Mary or to one of the saints, is mistaken.

The Catholic idea is based on a kind of humility. I'm so small and unworthy that I can't expect God to listen to my prayers. But if I ask St. Kevin or St. Mungo or the Virgin Mary to act as a go-between and take my requests to God, he will listen to them because he knows them and he approves of their saintliness.

[33 : 42] He wouldn't listen to me, but he might listen to a holy saint. Now, Jesus' teaching is quite different. He's saying in verse 26, I don't have to ferry your requests to the Father on your behalf because the Father himself loves you.

He notices you, however small you feel yourself to be. Jesus says elsewhere that God the Father knows our needs even before we ask him. He does love us, friends.

He does love us. We need to get that into our hesitant little hearts and heads. And we need to remember who he is. He is the Father. That means that he knows us, loves us, and cares about us. Human fathers are not always caring and kind, and some of them behave very badly, but not our heavenly Father. Look again at verses 27 and 28, because they describe the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

The Christian is the one who loves Jesus and believes that he came from God. In other words, we gladly acknowledge his heavenly origin. And, verse 28, we have grasped the meaning of his coming to the world.

[34 : 58] He came from the Father, was sent purposefully by the Father, and came into the world to bring salvation to those who were ruled by the devil. And having achieved salvation by dying and rising, he then left the world to return to his Father.

Verses 27 and 28 say so much in so few words, but they sum up the shape of the gospel and the reason why Jesus came. And when we believe these things about Jesus, verse 27 assures us that the Father loves us and listens to our requests.

So what does it mean to make our requests in Jesus' name? Well, as we draw to a close this evening, I want to spend a little time on this important question of what it means to pray in Jesus' name.

Okay, what does it mean to pray in Jesus' name? I pointed out a couple of weeks ago that the phrase in Jesus' name acts as a kind of limitation on what we might ask God for.

I think I said, for example, we could not ask for a powerful sports car in the name of one who didn't even own a donkey and had to borrow one when he needed it. Or we couldn't ask for a great big sum of money to spend on ourselves in the name of one who didn't even have two silver coins to pay his temple tax.

[36 : 22] But there's more to the phrase in Jesus' name than just that wise limitation. Throughout this upper room discourse, Jesus is teaching us many aspects of discipleship, how to live the Christian life, what it means to live in a way that honors Jesus' name.

And this teaching about discipleship helps us to frame our prayers in a Jesus fashion and to know what to ask God for. Now, I'll just pick out a few examples from the discourse.

Throughout this passage, Jesus is emphasizing the importance of keeping his commandments. If you love me, you will keep my commandments. Chapter 14, verse 15.

Now, we sometimes find it hard to keep his commandments. So it's good for us to pray to the Father that he will give us the self-discipline and the desire to keep Jesus' commandments.

So the one who prays in Jesus' name will pray, Father, help me to love and to keep the commandments of Jesus. Then secondly, in chapter 15, Jesus teaches his people to abide in him as branches abide in the stem of the vine and to submit willingly to the pruning that the Father applies to each branch of the vine to make it more fruitful.

[37 : 46] Now, the pruning can be painful because by it, God is reshaping our lives and our priorities. But if we're praying in Jesus' name and therefore along the line of his will and his teaching, we will ask the Father to prune us and to deepen our longing always to abide in Jesus and never to stray from him.

Third, chapter 15, verse 12. Jesus commands us to love each other as he has loved us, which means right to the point of laying down our lives for each other.

Now, that can be a difficult commandment to obey because our natural tendency is to look after ourselves before we think of looking after our fellow Christians. But if we're learning to have our prayers shaped by the teaching of Jesus, we will often pray for one another and be prepared to make big sacrifices for each other.

Then fourth, we saw last week from chapter 16, verse 8, that when the Spirit came, part of his powerful work was to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. And he would do that through the words of the apostles and later through the words of all believers. So if we are learning to pray in Jesus' name, we'll be asking the Father to employ us in the evangelizing of the world so that through our words, conviction of sin will come to men and women of the world and will bring them to Christ.

[39 : 19] Fifth, in chapter 15, verse 18, Jesus tells the apostles and us that the world will hate us and in verse 20, that the world will persecute us.

There are no ifs and buts about it. Jesus says it will happen. So could we possibly pray to God in Jesus' name that we might be spared the hatred of the world when Jesus makes it clear that if we are his true disciples, we shan't be able to avoid the hatred of the world?

The point I'm trying to make is that the teaching of the Upper Room Discourse so fills our minds with Jesus' view of true discipleship that we couldn't possibly pray to the Father in Jesus' name and then ask to be allowed to avoid the rigors and the demands of the true Christian life.

The whole discourse is a demonstration of Jesus' name, his priorities and his values. It's here in our Bibles not only to teach us true discipleship, but to show us the values that shape a true disciple's prayers.

Now just to step outside the Upper Room Discourse into other parts of the four Gospels for a moment to get a further view of what it might mean to pray in Jesus' name.

[40 : 39] We can't separate his name from his example. His name carries with it the whole shape and tenor of his life. So what do the four Gospels teach us about the depths of his character?

Well, they teach us his love for sinners, his compassion for those whose lives have become bitter and hopeless, his unerring ability to distinguish truth from error, his humility, his antagonism towards hypocrisy and false religion, his courage in the face of hatred, his ability to assess character, his deep desire to obey his Father's will no matter what the cost.

Now one could add many other observations about his character, but if we are going to pray to the Father in Jesus' name, our prayers will be cloaked in the character and concerns of Jesus.

So we shall pray for the lost and for more love for them. We shall pray for humility for ourselves and for each other. We shall pray for courage to stand firm against false religion.

We will pray for the ability to assess the character of other people in a kind and yet shrewd way.

And possibly more important than anything else, we'll pray for the grace to endure whatever kinds of suffering the Lord allows to cross our path.

[42 : 08] I want to read you the first verse of a favorite old hymn of mine which I learned at school. We don't sing it here, but these words have stuck in my mind since the year dot.

Father, hear the prayer we offer, not for ease that prayer will be, but for grace that we may ever live our lives courageously.

That's a very simple request, but a very good one. We pray not for ease, but for grace to live courageously. And the greatest example of enduring courage in the face of very great suffering is given by Jesus himself.

So how did he pray as he faced the most searching test of all? John doesn't record this in his gospel, but Matthew, Mark and Luke all do word for word.

I'm sure you know the scenario. Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane knowing what the following day Good Friday will bring. And here's his prayer. Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.

[43 : 14] Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done. And as soon as he has prayed this prayer, Luke tells us that the father answered him, not by removing the cup of suffering, but by sending an angel from heaven to strengthen him.

To shore up his courage so that he could go through the ordeal of the cross, which he did. He set aside his natural desire to be spared the suffering and he committed himself to fulfilling his father's will, which was to go to the cross and bear the penalty of our sins.

So if we are praying to the father in Jesus name, as those who belong to Jesus and who are being increasingly conformed to his likeness, our praying will reflect something of his Gethsemane prayer.

We will pray, Father, not my will be done, but your will be done, even if it involves pain and difficulty. And just as the father strengthened Jesus and enabled him to go through with what he had to do and not to run away and hide, so the father will strengthen us and reproduce in our characters

something of the character of Jesus.

But there's something very important for us to remember in all this. Just look again at John 16, verse 27. The father himself loves you because you have loved me.

[44 : 45] The one that we approach in prayer is not some distant austere power. He is our father and he loves us. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew chapter 7.

Everyone who, this is about prayer, everyone who asks receives and the one who seeks finds and the one who knocks, to the one who knocks, it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?

Now look back to John 16, 24. Jesus says, ask and you will receive. Now we know from the Matthew passage that I've just read that the father will absolutely not ever give his children things that are bad for us.

The father knows far better than we do what we most need. He will only give us what is best for us. So if I ask for something and I don't receive it, I must conclude that the thing I've asked for is not what I most need.

[46 : 00] Jesus asked his father for the cup of suffering to be removed and the father did not remove it. But he answered Jesus' request in a different way by strengthening him to endure the ordeal that he had to go through.

If we ask for something, we will receive an answer. We may receive the very thing we've asked for. But the father's answer may be, I know better than you do what is best for your situation.

Trust me. Trust me. I will give you what you need. Strength, courage, fortitude. Well, friends, we must finish.

This upper room discourse includes some very plain teaching about the difficulties that Christians face, the hatred of the world, the real possibility of persecution and even martyrdom.

But the encouragements of the discourse greatly outweigh the things that might make us fearful.

The promised Holy Spirit is with us. He is our helper, bringing all the resources of heaven into our individual lives and our church life.

[47 : 12] And Jesus begins and ends the discourse with the most forceful assurances of his favor towards his people. Chapter 14, verse 1.

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. And then chapter 16, verse 33. I've said these things to you that in me you may have peace.

In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart. I've overcome the world. Well, let's bow our heads and we'll pray together.

Our dear Father in heaven, thank you that the words of our Lord Jesus bring such strength and comfort into our lives.

we thank you for his death, his resurrection, his ascension to heaven, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the promise of his glorious return.

[48 : 22] Keep us steady and steadfast, we pray. And give us courage as we open our mouths to broadcast the good news of salvation and the victory of our Lord Jesus over the world.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.