

Cheerful in a Creator's world

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[0 : 00] But be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. We know for certain that these words were spoken by Christ right at the end of his ministry.

So it would be a fitting description of these words to say that they are Christ's last words to his disciples.

Now it is true of course that he did say other things before he died. But not in a formal setting. Here our Lord concludes his formal preaching and teaching to his own disciples in the upper room. And therefore in a very real sense these are his last formal words. To the disciples and to all his people before he went to Gethsemane.

[1 : 17] And then to the cross of Calvary. To bear our sin and to bear it away. And it is so like our Lord that as he is about to leave us here in this world.

His parting advice and counsel is to give us peace and to give us reassurance.

Let not your heart be troubled. I have overcome the world. Be of good cheer.

Now we know these words. I suppose every one of us knows these words and knows them well.

But I would like to suggest my friends that they are worthy of our meditation today.

Because these words surely are extremely relevant to the Lord's people in this generation and at this hour. And in this country.

[2 : 31] And at this time. One famous man regarded these words here in an interesting light.

Let me quote his words. Thus says he. Thus is the good night said. And the hands shaken.

He means these words of Christ. They are his handshake. Well when we say goodbye to one another. We normally give a handshake.

Do we not? Whether they did in biblical times. Doesn't concern us now. But. This writer very cleverly says. Here is Christ. Farewell handshake.

Here is his good night. Before they rise from supper. And go into the darkness. He to Gethsemane.

[3 : 33] Then to the cross. And afterwards the disciples went to the whole world. Peter to the Jews. Paul to the west.

Thomas to the east. Most of them if not all of them. To a martyr's death. So his words are these. In the world.

You shall have tribulation. Alright. Well let's look at them then. Clearly our Lord is not. Clearly our Lord is telling us.

That all Christians must expect. In this life. And in this world. To go through tribulation.

That's his word. To go through tribulation. Now let me say something about. Tribulation. Tribulation. What does this word tribulation mean?

[4 : 36] Well. It's worth my while pausing to tell you. In the languages. Of the day in which Christ was living. And the New Testament written.

Greek and Latin. These words. This word rather. Tribulation. Have the idea of. Squeezing. Or. Pressing. Or. Oppressing.

Or. Oppressing. In other words. It had the idea. Of bringing. Pressure. To bear. Upon. Someone. Or something.

You. Squash. Them. You. Rub. Them. Hard. Indeed. This English word. Tribulation. Comes from the Latin word.

Tribulum. Which means. An instrument. For beating. The grain. Out of. Corn. It's like a child. Sledge. On a heavier.

[5 : 33] A sledge. And underneath this. Sledge. Were sharp metal. Points. Pieces of flint. Anything. Which is. Going to cut.

Into the corn. So you. Scattered the corn. On the floor. And then you drew. This sledge. Probably by the means. Of some animals. Across. And across. And across.

Threshing. Cutting. Sharply. Dividing up. The wheat. From. The stalk. Or the grain. From the stalk. This was the. Tribulum.

Hence. Our English word. Tribulation. Tribulation. A very good word. This. Is the kind of. Treatment. Christ.

Promises. To. His people. Here in this life. He tells the disciples. This is what you must expect. In the world. This is what.

[6 : 28] You will have. In the world. In the world. In the world. In the world. In the world. By the way. Let me not fail. To point out to you. That our tribulation.

Is nothing. Compared with. His. And isn't it. Isn't it a proof. Yet again. In his wonderful love. That he does not. Say anything.

About his own. Tribulation. He doesn't say. Here a word. his own suffering. When we are about to suffer we usually like to share the burden, don't we?

We offload half our problem to our close, loved one. And he might very well have done that. He might have said, do you both realise, sitting here with me in this upper room, do you realise what Gethsemane will mean for me?

The cup of damnation, do you realise what the cross will mean for me? All these wretched soldiers, all this curse of God upon me for your sake to save this world?

[7 : 35] No, not he. We would have said all of that and said it probably a thousand times. Not he. He doesn't say a word about his own tribulation.

Oh, the divinity of Christ. Oh, the love of Christ. His concern was all for them. In the world you will have tribulation.

It is a sign of his being the eternal Son of God. No mere man could be so self-effacing in his sufferings as our blessed Redeemer is here.

Well, now, there's a lesson we must all learn from this, of course. Christ is saying to us that if we are real Christians, not simply painted Christians or nominal Christians, but the real converted, born-again Christians that his word encourages us to be.

We must expect, my friends, that there is no easy ride to heaven. He never told us there's going to be a royal road, shroom with rose petals between here and glory.

[8 : 56] Quite the reverse. He and his apostles tell us it will be a difficult life. The apostle Paul, when he went to one of the churches of Turkey, he himself was nearly stoned to death.

He picked himself up off the street and he walked back and he said to these Christians, no doubt the blood was still oozing from parts of his body. He said, we must, my brethren, we must, my brothers and sisters, we must enter the kingdom of God through much tribulation.

The same word. Through much tribulation. And much later, writing to Timothy, you'll remember, he said, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution, which is virtually the same thing. Tribulation, affliction, persecution, they're all bundled together in the same experiences of the Christians. We are squeezed. We are pressed.

We are pressurized. And don't we have the same phrase today? We say the pressure is on. And it is on. It's not in the same form as it was on for the Covenanters of the 17th century.

[10 : 18] Christians today don't have that open persecution of men with guns and spears or whatever coming to them. Not yet. Not yet.

Not in Britain. Not yet. But we do have pressures of many kinds. I want to look at some. In order to help you, my beloved friends, to see the help and comfort that our Lord gives you here in his word. What sort of pressures, what sort of squeezing, what kind of scratching do the Lord's people suffer today? With the tribulum being drawn over them, like the sledge with the sharp points drawn over our bodies and minds and souls.

Well, first of all, I think if I am not mistaken, that all throughout country today, from Lamb's End to John O'Groft, I think I see amongst the Lord's people tribulation because there is so little blessing with the Gospel.

And that is a tribulation to our minds, is it not? Now you and I read the Bible and we know from the Bible that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

[11 : 40] We believe it to be the Gospel of God, the Gospel of Christ, the very truth of Heaven. We don't believe the lies of the ecumenical movement that adds tradition to the Gospel, or that adds

priestly power to the Gospel, or that adds the mass to the Gospel, or purgatory to the Gospel.

We don't believe that. We believe Christ and Christ alone saves sinners by His blood, through His Spirit, by the preaching of the truth of the Word of God.

We believe that. And yet, where is the evidence of the power of God? In our time. And that, I say, is a source of tribulation to all serious Christians.

And I'm addressing many of them here in this very room. It's a trial to our spirit. Well, says Jesus to you, in the world you will have this kind of experience.

If you say to me, why is there so little blessing? I answer to you, I don't know. And nobody that I've ever met does know. And I have been honoured and privileged to meet many wise people in my time.

[13:04] Ministers and others. And they don't know the answer. And we pray, and we pray with sometimes of fasting, and long prayers in secret, and in the secret place we cry out to God, Why, Lord, so long?

How long, O Lord, till our visitors with revival, and power, and grace? I was just in Belfast, just on Friday night, preaching the word of God. And I was there reminded of something that I'd read about. And I saw it indeed on a Saturday morning. A church in Belfast in the 1920s, where the gospel was being preached so powerfully, with W.P. Nicholson in the pulpit, that the crowd were crushing in to get through the gateposts.

And one of these gateposts built in heavy stone, pushed out of the vertical, through the pressure of human bodies to get in, to get to speak, to hear the gospel.

The 1920s. But now, we don't get many gateposts knocked off the vertical today, with people rushing in.

[14:11] Rushing out, maybe, but not rushing in. But that's what happened under the power of God, the glory of God. Well, I say, we don't know why that should be the case today.

But we do know sufficient to live by. We know that we are to live by the Book. That's what we know. We don't know why God is silent.

We never will know in this life, perhaps. But we do know enough to live by, which is, we know that the Bible is our rule of life. And that brings me to a second of these tribulations that the Lord's people are suffering bitterly today.

Is it not this, my friends, that as Christians we see standards going down and down, slowly and steadily.

It's like watching the sea going out. When high tide has been, and then the sea begins to receive. High tide is finished, and so the water goes out and out and out and out and out.

[15:21] But it doesn't seem to be coming back. And the tide of standards and decency and righteousness and public morality, and all of that seems to be ebbing ever, ever more, farther and farther out to sea.

The private lives of eminent leaders in our country. Sometimes when we hear of it we are shocked to the very core.

We wonder and think to ourselves, are these eminent people with high qualifications and brilliant degrees, are these the people leading our society?

Who can't even lead their own lives in a way of decency and righteousness? Are these the ones who show the young generation the way? Now I'm not being censorious or unkind or judgemental when I say the next point, but when I was on the train coming back from Treswick Airport to Inverness, and in the Glasgow area, I couldn't help feeling very sorry.

There were older men in their fifties getting on the train, and I thought to myself, well, well, change days. You know, if you go back to the 1930s and 40s, on a Saturday, many, many people of that age in their fifties, in their fifties, on a Saturday, they'd be preparing for the Sabbath day, preparing for the Lord's day.

[16:54] They'd be brushing their shoes, getting the potatoes peeled, so they wouldn't have to do anything like that on the Lord's day. And they're getting their clothes ready, ironing their shirts, preparing for the house of God next day.

But my dear friends, it was a sad sight to see men in their fifties, dressed like teenagers, with funny writing all over them, and with their lemonade bottles, as though they were still children, talking about some little game or other they were going to watch.

All very well for children. All very well for young people, but men who should be the leaders of their society, heads of their families.

They're families. I say, the standards, where are they? And you know that I'm not being unjust when I say that sometimes we feel, even amongst professing Christians, the edge of godliness is sometimes lost today.

Oh, thank God we have here in this place, and in other places, eminent exceptions. And Christians who would stand with any Christians you would meet in any age, in any place.

[18 : 06] Thank God for this. But I am not being liable, as I might as say, that we are often suffering tribulation as Christians today, because we see the edge, this going off spirituality.

Disappointing, upsetting, it makes the Lord's people sad. Well now all of this, and all these kinds of things, are referred to here by Christ, where He says to us, In the world, you will have tribulation. You know, if you're a Christian today, who takes the Bible seriously, you're in danger of being a marked man, or a marked woman.

If you live in a family which is biblically controlled, the husband and the wife, and the children, and if there is order in the family, and if there is discipline in the family, and if there's family worship, and if there's a keeping of the Lord's day, and a going to the house of God, and a training of the children in righteousness and obedience, and obedience, you know very well, you are an exception to the rule.

And you are almost marginalized, and made to feel that you are extraordinarily different from everybody else. You see, what's happened is this, that we have lived to see truth and righteousness standing on their heads.

[19 : 43] It's exactly today what we saw in Isaiah's day. Is it chapter 3 or chapter 5, one of those early chapters, Isaiah says this, commenting on what had happened in his day, and what is happening in our day.

Men put darkness for light, and light for darkness. They put truth for error, and error for truth. They put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.

Everything is turned on its head. The things that ought to be criticized are praised. The things that ought to be praised are not off the pedestal, not alone rubbish.

The Bible today is rubbish. Worship is rubbish. God is rubbish. It's the devil who's the best man in town today. And all praise to the devil is what people are really saying.

Down with God, and down with Christ. Down with Christ. That's what they're saying. And no wonder my beloved brothers and sisters, no wonder you and I feel tribulation.

[20 : 50] We are squeezed by the spirit of the age. We are pressurized by the spirit of the age. Now, I must go on from there to say to you, there are two dangers when this pressure comes on the Lord's people.

Two distinct dangers. One of them is we may give in, and the other we may give up. Let me amplify those two statements very briefly.

The first danger is that we may give in. You see, the pressure becomes greater and greater and greater and greater. The danger is that the Lord's people are going to say, I can't take any more pressure.

You know the saying that's been going round for quite a while. If you can't beat them, join them. If it's too difficult for you to keep saying that light is light and dark is dark and sweet is sweet and bitter is bitter and all the rest of it.

Then some people are saying, alright, I cave in. Alright, I give in. Light is darkness and darkness is light and bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter and so on.

[22 : 08] Let's go along with the crowd. Here's a text for you. That somebody gave me very recently. Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.

Now that's the word of God. And it's what we need. It's the corrective we need today, surely. Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.

You see, when evil is pursued by the majority, then the minority is apt to give in. Alright, they say. Alright, I give in.

I give in. And they join the common cry. And they shout with the crowd. Too difficult to stand up against evil anymore.

And the other danger I refer to is that we not only give in, we give up. That is to say, we allow the pressures of life, as it were, to force us to retire from the fight.

[23 : 15] And we become depressed by it all. And we stand in a corner, wringing our hands in despair. And saying, the whole world is rotten.

Cursed will be the day I was born. The times are out of joint. Oh, cursed spikes that I was ever born to put them right.

And we just stand there in a corner of the room. And we just tear our hair out in despair. Now that's to give up. We are not called on to give in. We are not called on to give up.

What are we called on to do? Well, our holy, glorious Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, tells us in my text, In the world ye shall have tribulation.

But, be of good care. Be of good care. And then it gives us a reason. I have overcome the world. Let's look at those two things.

[24 : 20] I have time for them both. First of all, what he says by way of counsel and advice.

Secondly, the reason behind this counsel and advice. And the counsel and advice is this. We are to be of good care.

And the reason, because I have overcome the world. I, your Lord and Master, have overcome the world.

Therefore, you who are my disciples in the world, you may be of good care whilst you are in the world. You are not to give up.

You are not to give in. You are not to concede as the fight. You are not to despair. You are not to wring your hands in helplessness and hopelessness. You are to be of good cheer.

Now what does that mean, that expression? To be of good cheer. It is a Greek word meaning to be confident. To be confident.

[25 : 25] That's why I read to you from Hebrews chapter 11 at the end. You see, there's a false way of doing this.

And there is a true way. Let me just take a moment only to refer to the false way of doing this. The false way is what we sometimes call Dutch courage.

Dutch courage. Dutch courage. That when you are afraid, you take a heavy dose of drink, or a strong dose of drink, or something to fortify your courage. Dutch courage.

It's artistic. We sometimes call this expression by the phrase, auto-suggestion. Auto-suggestion. You keep on repeating some little phrase to yourself like this.

Every day and in every way I'm feeling better and better. And you're trying to persuade yourself.

Now that's the false way of doing it. That's not the true way. That's not the biblical way.

[26 : 29] Because, I'll tell you why it's wrong, it's because it is purely natural. No, the help we need is supernatural. Be of good cheer means, make sure that your faith is kept burning bright.

And that's not natural, but supernatural. It's not that we screw our courage up to the sticking point, and do our best to pack up our troubles in the kid's bag, and smile.

Stop humanism. No, this is hope in God. Hope in the Word of God. Be of good cheer because there are biblical reasons why we must be of good cheer.

Let me give you some of these. To brighten your faith, my dearest, precious Christian person, whose soul Christ has died for there on Calvary. Let me remind you of the solid grounds of your courage and reasons for confidence today.

First, we know enough about God to know that this declension to which we are going will not last forever. The declension in Scotland and in Britain has lasted, let us say, a hundred years since those wicked ministers and wicked professors a hundred years ago denied the Word of God with their higher critical theories.

[27 : 59] They did it in England and in Scotland and in Wales and elsewhere and in America. They denied the Word of God. And they entered the churches eventually. Because of course the people had enough logic and sense to know if the Bible isn't true, why should I spend an hour or two on a Sabbath day listening to this poor preacher shouting about something to do with the Bible?

If it isn't true anyway, why waste my time on his breath? And so they voted with their feet and away they went and emptied the churches. That's what happened in the country. But I say, God will never leave his cause forever.

The day will come when God will visit Britain again. We must believe that with all our heart. We must work for it. Pray for it.

Live for it. It's coming. The cloud the size of a man's hand will appear on the horizon of Britain one day. The rains will descend again.

The Spirit of God will breathe upon the nation again one day. English and Scottish and Welsh and Irish people will come to life. And they will come out of their houses like worms coming out of the earth.

[29 : 17] And they will come to the house of God. As they have many a time done. In the 1920s to which I referred in Belfast. They had to put chalk marks on the pavement with arrows.

To direct the crowd so they would know where to go. These people had never been to church no doubt. Many of them they were ignorant of everything. And now the Spirit of God had come down and they were being guided with the arrows of chalk on the road.

There's the church and on they went to hear this preacher who had this unction from God. We must believe it. Because Christ has overcome the world. There he is today. Picture him enthroned in infinite majesty.

All the crowns of empire upon his hands. King of kings, Lord of lords. There he is. With the fullness of the Godhead bodily dwelling in him. With the fullness of the Spirit. Able at any moment to pour the Spirit upon the church. To cast out the powers of darkness and to bring his kingdom in.

We are to believe it. And to be of good cheer. We can't explain why God is so slow as it will. And yet we know he is working these things wisely.

[30 : 33] And skilfully. Treasuring up his bright designs. Though it is behind a frowning face. And then we have promises from God.

To nourish our faith. Promises. Jesus tells us we may come to him. For grace to help. In time of need. At a personal level.

Whatever personal problems we have. We may come to him for grace to help. In time of need. We don't need to give in.

We don't need to. Join the modding crowd. With its tempestuous roar. For foolish worldly entertainment.

We don't need to become like them. We mustn't become like them. And then we must remember. That the pain that we have now.

[31 : 41] Is but for a little time. Very soon. The Lord's people will be beyond the sorrows of this time. So let me come to my. Final point.

Which is the reason Christ gives. Why. We are to be of good cheer. Not indeed. In the way of self persuasion. Which is auto suggestion.

And psychology. And mere humanism. And naturalism. And mere humanism. And naturalism. But because of. Biblical reasons.

We are to be of good cheer. He says. Because I have overcome the world. I'm going to give you three explanations of that statement. And then I shall close.

I have overcome the world. What does our Lord mean? Well I suggest to you first. His meaning is this. I he says.

[32 : 42] Have lived in this world. With all its temptations. And yet I never sinned. Once. I have been under all the pressures.

Of this evil world. Precious to conform. With its standards. But I never allowed this world. To squeeze me into its mold. For one moment.

Our Lord was different from other men. And he was recognized as different from other men. And you and I must be different from other men. And wo betide us as Christians. If we are not different from other men.

We are expected to be different from other men. Because we don't belong to this world. But to that world. We are on the journey to that world. And we are on the journey. And we are on the journey to that world. So Christ has set us an example.

Of how we also are to overcome the world. By his grace and spirit. We are to live above the world.

[33 : 43] world and to see that it is possible through faith in Christ ourselves to live after the pattern of Christ and so also to overcome the world as he did isn't that the way John puts it in his first epistle chapter 5 who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Christ this is the victory we are more than conquerors through him that loved us now the second explanation I have overcome the world I think is this Jesus Christ our Lord is telling us that all the wickedness of this world was not great enough to stop him from finishing his great ministry and his great work now it is interrupting the lives of ministers of many isn't it you hear a politician he's going fine for a time and then along come these paparazzi and others and they make their little pictures

and photographs and then somebody gets the story and it gets in the gutter press have you heard about a certain member of Parliament his private life and down he goes you see he was swamped pressurized by this world there is no reason why

Christians should be swamped or pressurized to sin against God my friends we must finish our work our Lord finished his he went through all the sorrows of this life and the curse of death of the cross he shed his precious blood and redeemed the whole world of believers from the beginning to the end of time every one of those from the father had given him for them he died and for them he bled all their sin he pardoned through his precious blood and he cried on the cross you remember it is finished nothing prevented him finishing his work so must it be with us by his grace and help we must also finish our work we mustn't retire from the fight we mustn't give in or give up all the pressures of this world are not enough to destroy your faith because it is God given you belong to him keep your faith bright that's why it is essential to give time every day to secret prayer you must that's why you mustn't neglect your Bible but read chapter upon chapter upon chapter of the word of God every day that's why you must come to church and prayer meeting that's why you must come to services morning and evening and prayer meeting it's not that these things are an added luxury they are absolutely essential to keep alive faith and hope in the Christian soul we cannot do without preaching and fellowships and Bible studies and all these things that go with them he finished his work and third and lastly he overcame the world he overcame the world of course in this sense that he defeated the powers of death and of hell our Jesus has smashed the power of the devil he has broken his power he has struck him in the head the ancient prophecy of Genesis 3 15 the devil would strike him in the heel the head the devil on the head now if somebody strikes you in the heel that painful but not mortal if somebody strikes you with a blow a blow with a deadly weapon on the head that is a terminal condition my friends the good news from Christ's own lips here is the devil is terminally ill the devil is terminally wounded when you go to the hospital and they look at at what's wrong with you and they look at what's wrong with you and they open you up or something give you a test and they say I'm sorry it's the liver or it's the heart or something you're terminally ill terminally ill it means that you haven't got long maybe a week maybe a month maybe six months but it's terminal it's over with you the next stage is you won't be here at all the devil the devil the devil the devil the devil the devil knows he is terminally ill Christ has standard power he has made a display of him openly on the cross triumphing over him in his death he has smashed him he has cast him out now is the prince of this world judged and cast out and he goes about as a roaring lion but he knows his time is short he growls like a cage lion but the devil knows his time is short and soon it will be up and a lake of fire awaits him but heaven and glory await you who believe you're on the way to paradise and he who rides to be crowned does not much mind does not much mind a rainy day god help us all to lay these words to our heart