

Sermon: The Triumph of Christ's Work for Us

Text: John 16:23-33, with Revelation 21:1-7 and Acts 11:1-18

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The air was thick with ash and grief in the summer of 2024 when wildfires swept through Northern California. Homes reduced to rubble, families displaced, and yet, amid the devastation, a story emerged. A firefighter named Daniel, a father of three, risked his life to save an elderly couple trapped in their burning home. He carried them to safety, his lungs burning, his life on the line. When asked why, he said simply, "It's what I'm called to do."

Today, in John 16:23-33, Jesus speaks to His disciples—and to us—about a far greater work, a work done on our behalf, a work that saves not from temporal flames but from the eternal fire of sin and death. *"In that day,"* Jesus says, *"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"* (John 16:23). These words, spoken on the eve of His crucifixion, are not a blank check for worldly desires but a promise rooted in His finished work. Jesus is preparing His disciples for the day when His cross and resurrection will open direct access to the Father, a day when their prayers will rise through the name of the One who has overcome the world.

To deepen our understanding, let's consider two Greek words in a main verse in the Gospel text, verse 33. *"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."* First, the word for "overcome" here is *nenikēka*. This is a perfect tense verb, meaning a completed action with ongoing results. Jesus isn't merely hoping to triumph; He has already won the victory over sin, death, and the devil, and that victory endures forever. Second, the word for "tribulation," *thlipsis*, carries the sense of intense pressure, like grapes crushed in a winepress. This is the world's reality—crushing, relentless. However, Jesus' overcoming - *nenikēka* assures us that His victory is greater than our trouble- *thlipsis*.

Let's linger in the upper room, where the disciples sit, hearts heavy with the weight of Jesus' impending departure. The world outside is a tinderbox—Roman oppression, religious hypocrisy, their own weak and fragile faith. Jesus knows their fear. He knows the *thlipsis* they will face. Yet, He speaks of joy: "You have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). This is no fleeting happiness but a joy forged in the furnace of His suffering, death, and resurrection, a joy secured by His *nenikēka*.

Consider again Daniel the firefighter. His work was not just a job; it was a calling, a sacrifice for others. So too, Jesus' work on the cross is not merely an event in history but the eternal

act of God's love for you. He carried your sins—every selfish thought, every cutting word, every failure—to Calvary. He bore the wrath of God, the flames of divine justice, so that you might stand before the Father, forgiven, redeemed, alive. That's what the saving work of Jesus does.

But the world, as Jesus warns, is not done with its *thlipsis*. "In the world you will have tribulation," He says (John 16:33). We see this today. In 2025, division rages—political rancor, cultural decay, the pressure to conform to a world that rejects Christ. Last month, a small Lutheran congregation in rural Minnesota faced threats for standing firm on biblical truth about marriage and life. Their pastor, Rev. Michael, received hate mail, yet he preached on, saying, "We trust in Christ, who has overcome." This is the *thlipsis* Jesus promised, but it is not the end of the story.

In today's reading from Revelation 21:1-7, John's vision unveils the fruit of Christ's work. "*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth... And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man'*" (Revelation 21:1, 3). This is the world remade, where "*death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore*" (Revelation 21:4). This is the joy Jesus promised, the joy no one can take away, secured by the One who says, "*It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega*" (Revelation 21:6).

Notice the voice from the throne. It does not say, "Work harder, and you might make it." No, it declares what is already finished in Christ. The wiping away of tears, the defeating of our enemy, and the preparing of a place for you. This is the heart of our faith: salvation is not our doing but His. We confess with the catechism that Jesus "*has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil... with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death.*"

How do we live in this broken world while awaiting the new one? Acts 11:1-18 gives us a glimpse. Peter defends his ministry to the Gentiles against those who said salvation was only for the circumcised. He explained how God poured out His Spirit on those once considered outsiders. "*Who was I that I could stand in God's way?*" Peter asks (Acts 11:17). This reminds us that Christ's *nenikēka* is not just for a select group but for all of us. The Gospel is not a private treasure to hoard but spiritual wealth to be lavishly spent on others.

Sarah was a nurse in a Chicago hospital during the 2023 healthcare worker strikes. Amid chaos, she stayed at her post, caring for patients, praying with them, sharing Christ's hope. One patient, Jamal, was an atheist, broken by addiction. Sarah's kindness led to conversations about Jesus, and by God's grace, Jamal was baptized last Christmas. Christ's work through His Word and Spirit transformed a life, just as in Acts 11.

What does this mean for us? First, we are called to trust in Christ's finished work. Jesus' *nenikēka* in John 16:33 declares, "*I have overcome the world.*" Not "I might," "I will," but "I have." The victory is won. Sin is atoned for. Death is defeated. Satan is crushed. When you face *thlipsis*—personal loss, societal pressure, or your own guilt—you can hold on to Jesus who has done it all for you.

Second, we can pray in His name. Jesus invites us to ask the Father in His name, not as a magic formula but as a confession of faith in His mediation. When we pray, we stand before the Father clothed in Christ's righteousness, standing in his shoes, as it were.

Third, we can live boldly as witnesses. Like Peter, like Sarah, we carry Christ's victory into a world of *thlipsis*. This is not about heroics but faithfulness—teaching your family the faith, standing for truth, sharing the Gospel with others in our lives who need to hear it. Christ's work empowers us, His Spirit equips us.

Let me close with one final image. In September 2024, a Lutheran school in Texas held a prayer vigil after a tornado damaged their community. Among the volunteers was a teenager named Emma, who lost her own home but served meals to others. When asked how she kept going, she pointed to a cross necklace and said, "Jesus carried my cross first."

Dear friends, Jesus has carried your cross. His *nenikēka* has overcome the world's *thlipsis*. He has secured your place in the new heaven and new earth. He is with you now by His Spirit given in Word and Sacrament, strengthening you for the journey. So take heart. Your Savior has spoken: "It is done." Because of Him, you can have a joy that is secure, now and forever. Thanks be to God!

Amen