

Introduction:

A. Illus.: 64 years ago, on Dec. 6, 1952, the people of London were still burning cheap coal so they could use their quality coal to pay off war debts. But something went wrong. A fog fell on the city and it was so thick that it pressed all that coal smoke down upon the city. Stan Cribb was a young man. *“You had this swirling,”* Cribb recalls, *“like somebody had set a load of car tires on fire... It’s like you were blind.”* The effect of this darkness was that it got colder, so Londoners put more coal on the fire.



According to a report by John Nielsen I heard on NPR radio 15 years ago, *“by Sunday, Dec. 7, visibility fell to one foot. Roads were littered with abandoned cars. Midday concerts were cancelled due to total darkness. Archivists at the British Museum found smog lurking in the book stacks. Cattle in the city’s Smithfield market were killed and thrown away before they could be slaughtered and sold — their lungs were black.”*



“On the second day of the smog, Saturday, Dec. 6, 500 people died in London. When the ambulances stopped running, thousands of gasping Londoners walked through the smog to the city’s hospitals. The lips of the dying were blue. People whose lungs were already weakened by smoking and pollution had no defenses. In essence, the dead had suffocated. After four days, a sudden wind drove the fog away. It is estimated that eventually over 12,000 died from what they call now “the killer fog.” [“All Things Considered”, 12/10-11/02]

B. That is the most vivid picture of the world I’ve heard. Dr.

Carson says that in John, when Jesus spoke of the **world** he wasn't thinking of the world in its *bigness* but the world in its *badness*. "*For God loved the **world** so much he gave his one and only Son.*" This darkness-loving, evil-cherishing, God-ignoring world is what God loved.

- C. God sent his Son into the killer fog of this world to *make his dwelling among us* and to bring us *light*! Jesus said, "*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*" Later he said, "*Believe in the light while you have the light, so **that you may become children of light.***" So that is what we Christians are: children of light in this toxic night all around us. And therein lies the problem, because just as the world hated Jesus for bringing light to their dark sin so it will hate us.

Turn to **John 16:33**. This verse is the conclusion of a three-chapter long discourse by Jesus spoken to his disciples after the Last Supper. He says, "*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.*"

I. "IN THIS WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TROUBLE."

- A. Not many people would disagree with that. But Jesus wasn't actually talking about the troubles of the world— about the murder rate or the wars or the sorrows of our friends. He was talking about the troubles the world causes for Christians.
- B. An undercurrent in this long final talk of Jesus is the suffering ahead for his followers. Jesus told them, "*If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.*" [Jn 15:18] "*In this world—this evil, God-ignorant, Jesus-hating world—you believers will have trouble.*"

- C. Jesus' concern throughout these last words to his followers is that we not fall away under the pressure we will face. He says at the beginning of ch.16, "*All this I have told you so that you will not fall away.*" In other words, if we don't internalize what Jesus told us we will not withstand the onslaughts of the world. We *will* fall away from Jesus. **Since we here face so little push-back as Christians we might not sense the danger we face.** In his parable about the seed and sower Jesus said that some seed is lost because of *trouble or persecution* but other seed is choked out by "*the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth.*" There is our particular threat. They are like the killer fog.
- D. When I was young Christians worried about Communists who would take over the world and then require believers to renounce their faith. *What would you say if you faced a firing squad?* But I don't fear such things much anymore. I know I'm more vulnerable to a great faith-shaking grief, or a wandering heart, or a sin slide. The danger lies in Satan's knowledge of just how proud and vain I am. In one form or another Jesus promises, "*In this world you will have trouble.*" And the trouble could make us fall away from Jesus unless we know how to stand.
- E. I think it is difficult for us to take that threat seriously. I grew up in a time and place where we always left our keys in the car and didn't even know where the house key was. Imagine trying to sell security systems there! We're like that with our spiritual security. But we have Jesus' absolute word here: "*In this world you will have trouble*"—trouble enough to cause you to fall away from Jesus unless you're prepared.

II. “I HAVE TOLD YOU THESE THINGS,” JESUS SAID, “SO THAT IN ME YOU MAY HAVE PEACE.”

A. Jesus is referring especially to the things he’s said in these three chapters:

- *I go to prepare a place for you... I’ll come back for you!*
- *I am the way, the truth and the life*
- *I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*
- *Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching*
- *The Father will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever, the Spirit of truth.*
- *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.*
- *I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me you will bear much fruit.*
- *Love each other as I have loved you.*
- *When the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth.*

You know what stands out to me in all that—that is not casual Christianity. That is an immersive experience.

B. Jesus said, “I have told you these things so that **in me** you may have peace.” Those commands and promises are what it means to be *in Jesus*.

C. These are inward gifts. Soul gifts. To be at peace in Christ means we take care of our own spiritual interior. It is *within ourselves* that we weigh obedience out of love for Christ. It is *within our hearts* that we draw the life of the Vine through the Holy Spirit. It is in *our minds* that we learn and relish what Jesus has taught us. Inward spiritual life invests time away from hurry, noise and screens. It is essentially a work of prayer, contemplation and worship.

But it is also a work of **Christian community**. Christians grow in the grace and peace of Christ *together*. You cannot withstand the world well on your own.

- D. **“So that in me you may have peace.”** When Jesus spoke of peace he meant *shalom*—a deep, settled contentment in the Lord, a sense of having all we need, of being safe and secure, of being *home*. Have you observed that God sometimes thrusts us into times of terrible turmoil in order that we might seek and know his peace as we haven’t before? Peace—*shalom*—is our birthright. “*The LORD bless you and keep you... and give you peace.*” It is in Jesus—only in Jesus—that we find that peace. *Illus.*: Once I went to pray with some friends. She was very distressed about the deteriorating health of a loved one. So we prayed. We sat quietly and waited for Jesus to make clear what he wanted to say. Then, “*This is what the Lord says, ‘All will be well. All will be well.’*” My friend wept with relief and then she said, “*I know Jesus is always with us but it was like he was right here in this room!*” Jesus’ peace had come.

III. **“BUT TAKE HEART! I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD.”**

- A. Jesus said this after his last supper, after Judas had gone out to betray him, after he told his disciples that he would leave them. After he said this, he prayed, and then he and his disciples crossed the small Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane where, after praying till he sweat blood, Jesus was arrested. A day later he was dead by crucifixion. So it seems strange to say at that point, “*Take heart! I have overcome the world.*” He means, “The world in its badness.” Even then, Jesus had *already* overcome the world, even on that dark, foreboding night, because he

came into the darkness as the Light of this bad, toxic world. He made his dwelling among us. God was with us. The strangle-hold of the Prince of Darkness was already broken. “*The people walking in darkness had seen a great light.*” Darkness can never withstand light. And we are the children of light.

Jesus’ conquest would spread. In his last breath from the cross he declared, “*It is finished!*” Sins atoned for. Evil stymied. The devil crushed. And then Jesus rose from the dead! Flinging open the cell doors of death and hell, and tearing apart the impenetrable curtain separating the holy God from sinful people. When God raised him from the dead it was living proof that his sacrifice for sin had been accepted. That salvation was complete. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection he created a new race of people—the Immortals, people who pass through death as through a door into heaven. The Lamb who was slain became the King of kings.

- B. This vast triumph is what settles *within us* when we are *in Christ*. This is what Jesus means when he says “*in me you will have peace.*” We internalize the triumph of Christ—his forgiveness, fellowship and eternal life. So Jesus can say to us, even as we face terrible pressure upon our hearts from the world, “*Take heart!*”
- C. It’s an interesting word, that. It can be translated both, *take courage* and *be of good cheer*. It suggests a kind of God-given bravado. It is something we must do. We must summon up joyful courage. We do that by internalizing what Jesus told us—by living *in Christ*. Cheerful courage is something we must summon in the face of the world.

It reminds me of a quote I heard years ago. **William Barclay** said, “*Jesus promised his disciples three things—*

that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy, and in constant trouble. G. K. Chesterton, whose principles constantly got him in trouble, once said, 'I like getting into hot water. It keeps you clean!'' [Com. on Luke]

- D. I'm not so sure most of us could be characterized as "completely fearless, absurdly happy, and in constant trouble." Actually, I think if we were in more trouble—if we realized how much pressure the world is actually effectively exerting on us—we would be forced to take these words of Jesus more seriously. Perhaps a clearer understanding of the trouble this world is causing us would drive us in to Jesus—to the hope he gives us of heaven, to loving obedience, to life on the vine, to reliance on the Holy Spirit. We would be more *immersed in Jesus* and the result would actually be fearlessness and absurd joy.
- E. It's New Year's Day! Be of good cheer! Take heart! Not because you think this year will be better than the last but because you love Jesus and you believe in his triumph.

Illus.: Open Doors is a ministry "serving persecuted Christians worldwide." They passed along this story last week:

Iro stared into the flames shooting high into the sky, felt the heat both in front and behind him, and saw big plumes of black smoke billowing upwards. Looking to his right, then to his left, he quickly glanced at his two friends, Mati and Nuhu, looking for even the slightest sign of fear. But there was none.

Through the roaring fire, he could hear their tormentors, a group of young Muslim thugs, cheering and shouting gleefully — no doubt believing these evangelists would soon die from the ring of fire they had set. They

joined hands to pray, not just for themselves but for the huge crowds who had come to see the JESUS film.

“We could not curse the town because of their attitude toward the gospel,” he remembers sharing afterwards. “We felt a special love for the people who attacked us and for the entire town.”

After about 30 minutes, the flames died down — with no harm to Iro, Mati or Nuhu. Infuriated, their tormentors demanded they leave town. The three friends did as they were told, picked up their projector and headed out.

But as they left, their attackers followed them, flogging them and ordering them never to return.

So it must have been quite a shock to them to see the smile on Iro’s face as he told his two friends, “I felt encouraged to be beaten because of Christ. Even while they were beating me, I was praying, ‘Thank you, Lord, for counting me worthy to suffer for Your Name’s sake.’”

Iro refused to be discouraged. “Sharing Christ with a dying world is necessary. It doesn’t matter the price to be paid,” he said afterwards. “We receive beatings from the angry Muslims, but our joy is that the people who do not know Christ have heard His story.” [Open Doors email, 12/21/16]

Wouldn’t you love to go to church with those guys!?

Jesus said, *“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.”*