

Sermons 2008

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Chapter 1. We Win!

READ - Psalm 46

TEXT - *The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. (Psalm 46:11)*

THEME - No matter how things look sometimes, WE WIN.

Introduction

The news has been particularly discouraging lately.

If you believe what is being reported about the economy, the news has been bleak. It's difficult to avoid becoming discouraged. People who are supposed to know about these things are reporting that we are in the midst of an economic crisis which is along the lines of the Great Depression.

We are in the midst of an election cycle, which unfortunately has lasted for well over 2 years now. The constant political maneuvering, the "win at any cost" mentality, the back and forth wrangling of two political parties which have, by most estimates, grown to simply be two groups that hate each other, is discouraging. Can you relate?

Lately, I've had a couple people voice such despair to me. I spoke with a colleague at work who is concerned because he thinks we are facing the last days - the end times (something that ought to thrill us, but he's not the only Christian I've heard speak of it in fear!). He sees prophecy being fulfilled as he hears the news talking of one world currency (which they are now talking about). And this frightens him... he is concerned... he is discouraged. Can you relate?

I spoke with a member of this church recently on the phone, and I could hear their discouragement over the way our country is behaving right now, and over their fears about the outcome of the coming election. Can you relate?

In last Wednesday evening's Bible study, we spent a few moments in *Psalm 37*, which begins *fret not thyself because of evildoers*. I asked if anybody in our small group ever found themselves "fretting" over the evil in our world today. We had quite a lively discussion - consensus seemed be that many are discouraged about the evil that seems to be overtaking our world. Can you relate?

I want to take a break from our series on the Parables this morning, and remind us all of something - WE WIN!

- Regardless of how things look - WE WIN.
- Regardless of what happens in Washington - WE WIN.
- Regardless of what you hear on the news - WE WIN.
- Regardless of any difficulties or trials we may be asked to go through here on this earth - WE WIN.

Do you believe that, Christian? The end of the story has already been written. You can read it for yourself, if you'll just read your Bible. WE WIN. Barack Obama, Joe Biden, John McCain, and Sarah Palin have nothing to do with it. WE WIN. The value of the dollar against the euro has nothing to do with it. WE WIN. The sickening progression of evil in American, such as was seen this week when Connecticut became as Sodom and Gomorrah cannot change the ending that has been written from eternity past - WE WIN!

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT?

May I share some thoughts that may help remind you of it? Four things to remember...

Remember where you live.

We have confused nouns and adjectives to a ridiculous degree in recent years. You are not a democrat or republican - you are a Christian who happens to vote one way or another. You are not an American. You are a Christian, who happens to live in America.

It's amazing how many of us will fight to the death over a D or an R next to some lying politician's name, but we will remain totally silent when it comes to what matters - JESUS CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM! We will flip out over the flag of a country, but ignore the church of Jesus Christ, the thing Jesus said we should care about the most!

Now don't misunderstand me. I love America. I would fight for and die for America. I am heart broken over the direction we are going and the slide into wickedness that continues day after day in our land. I am proud of our flag, and our accomplishments and I love our freedoms. I LOVE AMERICA.

But I am a Christian, who happens to live in a wonderful country - AMERICA. So are you, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ. Do you see the difference? One is a noun and one is an adjective.

We need to remember where we live. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are citizens of HEAVEN!

SONG -
This world is not my home,
I'm just a passin' through.
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue.
The angels beckon me
From heaven's golden shore.
And I can't feel at home
In this world anymore.

ILLUS - There is an amazing thing said about the heroes of the faith in *Hebrews 11* - *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13)*

For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: (Philippians 3:20 KJV) (i.e. our CITIZENSHIP (NIV)

May God help us this morning to re-align our perspectives. If we are American's first and foremost, we cannot help but be discouraged to see our country Slouching Towards Gomorrah, as Robert Bork put it in his book by that name. But if we are Christian's first, we know that we will outlive and outlast this country, no matter what happens to it! WE WIN!

Remember Who's in control.

Consider *Psalms 46* which we read this morning. The whole thing is about how we can trust God no matter what happens (though the earth be removed), because HE IS IN CONTROL NO MATTER HOW IT LOOKS. READ - *vss. 1-3,5,7,9-11*

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1) - HE IS IN CONTROL NO MATTER HOW IT LOOKS.

The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. (vs. 7) - HE IS IN CONTROL NO MATTER HOW IT LOOKS.

ILLUS - Jacob had a pretty bleak few days when he was running for his life from Esau, who had vowed to murder him. But God appeared to him and reminded him that no matter how things looked, He was still there... in control... protecting Jacob,

ALWAYS - *I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. (Genesis 28:15)*

ILLUS - When Jesus left His disciples and ascended to heaven, His last words were filled with encouragement about this issue - no matter how things look - HE IS STILL IN CONTROL - *Matthew 28:18-20, esp. All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth (vs. 18), and I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. (vs. 20)*

ILLUS - When Pilate, the governor puffed himself up before Jesus and said, "Don't you know I have the power to crucify you?" Jesus said, "You can do nothing that God doesn't let you do. HE IS IN CONTROL!"

Are you discouraged Christian? Does it encourage you to remember that God knows what He's doing... that He is working His plan... that He is in control NO MATTER HOW THINGS LOOK?

Oh that Christians would read their Bibles - there is so much there to encourage in times like these:

Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. (Psalm 45:6) HE IS IN CONTROL - HIS KINGDOM IS FOREVER - WE WIN!

The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish. (Proverbs 10:28) - THE WICKED DO NOT INHERIT THE EARTH - WE DO! WE WIN! HE IS STILL IN CONTROL!

The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth. (Proverbs 10:30) - WE WIN WE WIN WE WIN WE WIN!

QUOTE (J.R.R. Tolkien, in a letter) - "No man can estimate what is really happening at the present. All we do know, and that to a large extent by direct experience, is that evil labours with vast power and perpetual success - in vain: preparing always only the soil for unexpected good to sprout in."

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: (Philippians 1:6)

It's easy to get discouraged, I know. Some of us are suffering physical infirmity, or the debilitation of old age.

Some are experiencing Satan's attacks. As we try to move forward for Christ here at FBC, those who are willing to stick their neck out for Jesus are going to risk having Satan try and chop it off. That can be a very discouraging experience!

Some of us are struggling with depression.

And some of us just watch too much television and listen to too many talking heads who say the opposite of God's Word.

These things can lead to discouragement if we let them. But we need not be discouraged, because (SAY IT WITH ME) WE WIN!

May I encourage you this morning to turn off your TV and pick up your Bible. The TV will lie to you every minute you have it on. Your Bible will NEVER LIE TO YOU. You cannot believe anything you hear on your TV, but you can believe EVERYTHING you read in your Bible. And when you pick up this book that will never lie to you, I challenge you to find a page where there is not some reminder that NO MATTER NOW THINGS LOOK, HE IS STILL IN CONTROL.

SONG - Get all excited, go tell everybody that, JESUS CHRIST IS KING!

Remember to keep going.

ILLUS - Tom Hanks, in *Castaway*, telling about how he learned to keep on going - "I know what I have to do now, I have to keep breathing... for tomorrow the sun will rise, and who knows what the tide may bring?"

Perhaps you say, "OK, preacher, I hear you. We win... eventually. But I have to live in this world NOW, in the midst of this junk that's going on. How do I get through it?"

Keep breathing... keep walking... keep going for God.

READ - *Psalms 37:3-11*

This psalm contains some very practical advice about how to live in bad times - how to live when the evil in this world "seems" to be winning... when we are tempted to fret over the seeming advancement of evil. It tells us HOW to keep going.

1. TRUST

This just restates our first two points. TRUST Him that He is going to take us to our real home someday - to heaven, where our citizenship lies. TRUST Him that when He says He is in control, HE IS IN CONTROL. TRUST Him that we do eventually and ultimately WIN!

Trust in the Lord with ALL YOUR HEART... (Proverbs 3:5-6)

When you begin to waver - trust Him.

When you are crushed beneath burdens - trust Him.

When depression threatens to overwhelm your mind - trust Him.

2. DELIGHT

Take pleasure in the things of God. Learn to love His people... His church... His work... His Word. Take DELIGHT in them. But mostly, take delight in HIM!

It may be that the Lord allows depressing circumstances in our lives just so we'll draw closer to Him - learn to delight in Him, and Him alone. He is all we need.

ILLUS - In his book *The Pressure's Off*, psychologist Larry Crabb uses a story from his childhood to illustrate our need to delight in God through adversity:

One Saturday afternoon, I decided I was a big boy and could use the bathroom without anyone's help. So I climbed the stairs, closed and locked the door behind me, and for the next few minutes felt very self-sufficient.

Then it was time to leave. I couldn't unlock the door. I tried with every ounce of my three-year-old strength, but I couldn't do it. I panicked. I felt again like a very little boy as the thought went through my head, "I might spend the rest of my life in this bathroom."

My parents - and likely the neighbors - heard my desperate scream.

"Are you okay?" Mother shouted through the door she couldn't open from the outside. "Did you fall? Have you hit your head?"

"I can't unlock the door!" I yelled. "Get me out of here!"

I wasn't aware of it right then, but Dad raced down the stairs, ran to the garage to find the ladder, hauled it off the hooks, and leaned it against the side of the house just beneath the bedroom window. With adult strength, he pried it open, then climbed into my prison, walked past me, and with that same strength, turned the lock and opened the door.

"Thanks, Dad," I said - and ran out to play.

That's how I thought the Christian life was supposed to work. When I get stuck in a tight place, I should do all I can to free myself. When I can't, I should pray. Then God shows up. He hears my cry - "Get me out of here! I want to play!" - and unlocks the door to the blessings I desire.

Sometimes he does. But now, no longer three years old and approaching sixty, I'm realizing the Christian life doesn't work that way. And I wonder, are any of us content with God? Do we even like him when he doesn't open the door we most want opened - when a marriage doesn't heal, when rebellious kids still rebel, when friends betray, when financial reverses threaten our comfortable way of life, when the prospect of terrorism looms, when health worsens despite much prayer, when loneliness intensifies and depression deepens, when ministries die?

God has climbed through the small window into my dark room. But he doesn't walk by me to turn the lock that I couldn't budge. Instead, he sits down on the bathroom floor and says, "Come sit with me!" He seems to think that climbing into the room to be with me matters more than letting me out to play.

I don't always see it that way. "Get me out of here!" I scream. "If you love me, unlock the door!"

Is that you? It's me, sometimes. But we need to learn to DELIGHT IN HIM.

3. COMMIT

You'll never commit yourself to God until you start learning to TRUST HIM and to DELIGHT IN HIM.

It's as if you were to say, "Ok, God, from the day I placed my faith in you, I've tried to trust you, and you've never let me down. I'm learning to delight in my relationship with you, and am learning every day how wonderful you are to me. You never let me down. SO... I'm committed to this thing - I'm going to do things your way, always. I'm committing my way to you!"

ILLUS -

QUOTE - (Rod Cooper, in a message entitled "Worship or Worry") - I remember watching a father play with his little boy, repeatedly throwing him in the air and catching him just before he hit the ground. The child is relaxed and having a great time saying, "Do it again! Do it again!"

I thought, If that was me, I'd be stiff as a board .

"Can you explain why he's so relaxed, even when he's out of control?" I asked the father.

"It's very simple," he said. "We have a history together. We've played this game before, and I've never dropped him."

Trust Him - Delight in Him - Commit your way to Him, and finally -

4. REST

ILLUS - I love the picture of Jesus sleeping on a pillow during a raging storm at sea - that's the picture of someone resting in the Lord.

QUOTE - There is nothing - no circumstance, no trouble, no testing - that can ever touch me until, first of all, it has gone past God and past Christ, right through to me. If it has come that far, it has come with a great purpose, which I may not understand at the moment, but as I refuse to become panicky, as I lift up my eyes to him and accept it as coming from the throne of God for some great purpose of blessing to my own heart, no sorrow will ever disturb me, no trial will ever disarm me, no circumstance will cause me to fret, for I shall rest in the joy of what my Lord is. (Pastor and author Alan Redpath)

Conclusion

One last "Remember" in our outline, which I saved for the conclusion - it's kind of a summarization, or a restatement of what we've already seen - Remember that no matter how things look, EVERYTHING IS ALL RIGHT.

ILLUS - Road to Emmaus - things had never looked worse for these people - and yet even though they couldn't see it, EVERYTHING WAS ALRIGHT.

And whether the sky falls tomorrow or not, my brothers and sisters, EVERYTHING IS ALRIGHT. He will see us through. WE WIN.