

**BE A VICTOR, NOT A VICTIM****JOHN 16:33**

The late Malcom Muggeridge was a British writer, journalist, and social critic. For most of his life, he was an atheist and an ardent skeptic of anything to do with religion. But late in his life, he became a devoted follower of Jesus. On one occasion, he was invited to speak at a church in England. All the local atheists turned out for the opportunity to dialogue with Muggeridge. After all the audience questions were asked and answered, Muggeridge noticed a boy sitting in a wheelchair trying to speak. "There is someone here who wants to ask me a question. I'll wait and answer it," Muggeridge said. "I want to hear what you have to ask me and I'll not leave 'till I hear it." The boy had severe physical limitations and could only produce agonized contortions. So Muggeridge walked down to where the boy sat, put his arm around his shoulder and said, "Just take it easy, son. All right, now, what is it you want to ask me? I want to hear and I'll just wait." Finally, the boy was able to blurt something out. "You say there is a God who loves me." Muggeridge agreed. "Then," asked the boy, "why me?"

The silence that fills this room today was like the silence that followed the boy's question. How would you answer him? What would you say? Most of us would find an appropriate response very difficult. We'd be stumped. That crippled boy had asked one of life's hardest and most unanswerable questions. Why is this world the way it is? Why does there have to be such misery, suffering, pain, and difficulty? Why do some people have so much more trouble in life than others? If a loving God's in control of everything, why does He allow it? As a human being, a follower of Jesus, and a pastor now for many years, I've witnessed all kinds of trouble in other people's lives as well as in my own life. Followers of Jesus can be just as confused and perplexed by life's troubles as anyone else. When we go to Scripture to find answers, we discover it never fully answers all the questions as to why there is trouble in this world. Instead, Scripture instead prefers to speak about what to do with troubles that come our way.

Today we conclude a message series on leaving a godly legacy. A legacy is whatever you leave behind to your family and friends. Legacies are often thought of as material things like money or property, but for followers of Jesus we have something else in mind. What kind of impact will my life make? What kind of influence will I have on others? Followers of Jesus want to live lives pleasing to God and finish life well. We want to leave a good and godly legacy for those who come after us. So, today I want you to think with me about yet another aspect of leaving a godly legacy. What do we do with life's troubles? How we respond to them and what we do with them will leave an imprint on others – an impact of one kind or another. I believe when it comes to life's troubles, a godly legacy can be boiled down to one sentence: be a victor, not a victim.

We sang about victory in Jesus earlier today. What does that look like? At the very least, it means learning how to live every day with a certain perspective or attitude based on biblical truth and the power of God's Spirit living within us. One statement Jesus made rings in my heart today and I want us to dissect it together. John 16:33 is the statement, but be aware of the context. Jesus explained that He came from God and was about to return to the Father. He predicted that in the hour of His greatest

personal trouble – the cross - all His disciples would abandon Him. And then He said something marvelous, “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.” (Jo. 16:33 NIV) I suggest in that statement Jesus revealed both how to approach living this life and how to leave a godly legacy when it comes to life’s troubles. In other words, He told us how to be victors, not victims. First of all,

### **VICTORS KNOW LIFE’S TROUBLES ARE INEVITABLE.**

Victors never try to escape all of life’s troubles. To be sure, a lot of trouble in life can be avoided if we just live life God’s way. When you do foolish or sinful things, you’ll often reap very painful, life-changing consequences. For example, if you drive your car 120 mph down I-71 you might kill yourself, or someone else, or get a well-deserved ticket with a hefty fine to pay. Some trouble in life can and should be avoided. To continue the analogy of driving a car, however, I remember driving down 315 some years ago now and seeing a burned patch of median where a young mother and her children had been killed by an irresponsible driver. Their trouble was not caused by their own sinfulness or foolishness, but by someone else’s. We’ve all learned by now that trouble comes to everyone sooner or later. Not every trouble in life is earned or deserved. Many completely innocent people suffer in enormous, painful ways. Jesus underlined the inevitability of trouble in life when he said here, “In this world you will have trouble.” In other words, count on it. It’s a fact of life. Yes, it can be diminished to some degree by not living in godless, stupid ways, but it can’t be completely avoided.

Victors never deny the reality or pain of life’s troubles. I have in mind here some Christian teachers who insist that any and all troubles in life can be avoided if you just exercise enough faith in God. Sometimes it’s referred to as “health and wealth,” “name it and claim it,” or “confess it and possess it” theology. It denies that trouble is inevitable for followers of Jesus. A serious physical illness, a business failure, a broken relationship, or even a mental health issue are all attacks of Satan that can be avoided if you just learn how to live by faith more. This kind of teaching assumes that trouble – and dealing with trouble - was never meant to be a part of the normal, everyday life of a follower of Jesus. If trouble is getting the best of you, it’s simply because you’re failing to exercise sufficient faith. I can still recall an incident when I was attending Bible college where some students had bought into this kind of thinking. The dean of student’s daughter died tragically of leukemia. There were those who told the grieving father that the reason his child died was either because he had unconfessed sin in his life or because he’d failed to exercise sufficient faith in God to heal her. God is never honored or glorified when His people deny reality. Jesus never did. He said, “In this world you will have trouble.” It’s inevitable.

Now let me hasten to add something right here. There is an attitude toward God that many of our “health and wealth”, “name it and claim it”, “confess it and possess it” friends have that we need to appreciate. Frankly, we need more of it ourselves. What’s that? They actually expect God to work miracles in their lives. They expect God to heal them of serious illnesses. They expect God to heal marriages, perform financial

miracles, and bring lost people to faith in Jesus. They expect the Kingdom of God to break into their lives and do spectacular things. We can lack that attitude in our own tradition. We need more of that godly sense of faith and expectation. Where they sometimes get it wrong, in my humble opinion, is when our sovereign God doesn't answer our prayers in the way we want or desire. Instead of accepting God's sovereignty, sometimes they start pointing fingers at each other or denying reality. Where they get it right, however, is expecting God to show up in their lives in powerful and even miraculous ways. Victors don't hesitate to ask God to do the miraculous. We fully expect Him to do the spectacular, but we don't demand God do it our way either.

The Greek word for trouble in that verse is "thlipsis" which means to press, to squash, or to squeeze something causing pain. Have you ever felt pressed, squashed, or squeezed by some negative event or experience in life? Of course you have! Probably many times. That word is used throughout the New Testament to refer to all kinds of different troubles in life. The first Christians certainly knew troubles in life are inevitable. We read that Paul and Barnabas, early Christian leaders went around and "... strengthened the believers. They encouraged them to continue in the faith, reminding them that we must suffer many hardships (thlipsis) to enter the Kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22 NLT) Contrary to our "health and wealth," "name it and claim it," and "confess it and possess it" friends, we are actually encouraged to welcome trouble not deny its existence! In another place, Paul wrote, "We rejoice in our sufferings (thlipsis), knowing that suffering (thlipsis) produces endurance." (Ro. 5:3 ESV)

Victors know that troubles in life – deserved or undeserved – can be traced back ultimately to our universal human rebellion against God. Scripture teaches that. Trouble is the result of living in a sinful, fallen, and broken world. All of us suffer – personally and individually - the effects or consequences of humanity turning its collective back on God. And those consequences don't just disappear when you become a follower of Jesus. One day in Heaven they will, but not in this life. Victors accept the reality that sin has affected and permeated every conceivable area of life on this planet: our physical bodies, our minds, our relationships with other people including members of our family, our political system, our economic system, even our church. Any and all trouble is directly or indirectly the result of our collective sin and rebellion against God. Victors don't expect trouble to have the power of discrimination. Trouble doesn't get parceled out only to those who deserve it or even in equal measure to everyone. There's nothing fair about how trouble impacts people. All of us have some trouble in life, but some definitely suffer far beyond what seems fair or reasonable. Ironic, isn't it? Many people want to reject God because He allows trouble in this world when it is we - all human beings who have ever lived - who allowed trouble to come into this world through our rejection of God. Victors never blame God for their troubles. But they do more than just accept the inevitability of troubles in life. If you're going to leave a godly legacy, victors find ways to ...

**VICTORS LIVE COURAGEOUSLY BECAUSE OF JESUS.**

Jesus didn't just remind us trouble is inevitable and leave it at that. The first and the last parts of v. 33 reveal how to approach trouble as victors, not victims. "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." (Jo. 16:33 NIV) Right there Jesus gives you and me reasons to live courageously despite the presence of troubles. We can still live life confidently, boldly, and full of joy. Why? How? Victors live courageously because Jesus has given us the gift of His peace. Elsewhere, Jesus said, "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid." (Jo. 14:27 NLT) Right now, my brother-in-law is dealing with a blood disorder that can only be cured through a bone marrow transplant. He's undergoing preparatory treatment right now. They're waiting for an acceptable bone marrow donor. How long? None of us know. It's a time of great trouble with a capital T. On several occasions, my sister has remarked on the remarkable peace they have both received which they know comes directly to them from God. God doesn't always remove the trouble in our lives, but He does give us the gift of His peace so we can face those troubles courageously.

Victors live courageously because Jesus has overcome the world. Not them. Jesus. What does that mean? At the cross and the empty tomb, Jesus won an eternal victory over sin, evil, and all the trouble that comes from them once and for all. "How can that be?" you might ask. "There's still an abundance of trouble in my life and in the world." Yes, but Jesus limited the effects of life's troubles. None of them are eternal or endless. The Bible says, "What we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later." (Ro. 8:18 NLT) Troubles in this life last for a short time compared with all the joy, wonder, and glory of living with God for eternity. Victors live knowing there are no endless troubles. God will absolutely put an end to each and every one of them. Sometimes in this life; certainly in Heaven. Just imagine being in year 998 trillion of perfect joy in God's presence. Do you think you'll care then about what trouble is so deeply affecting your life today? Of course not! The Bible says, "For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever." (2 Cor. 4:17-18 NLT)

Jesus also gave to our troubles a purpose they never had before. In His hands, they accomplish something that can't be done any other way. Victors know that in His hands, there's no useless trouble. The purpose of your life – if you're one of God's children today – is to become the person God intends for you to be. Your destiny is to reign with God forever and ever. The fact remains, however, that each of us still have this spiritual crud left inside of us – our sinful natures – that is destructively self-centered and hostile to God. So God has to "de-centralize" you and me. He often does that through exposing you to life's troubles. That's how He gets you ready for your eternal destiny. You can't learn patience in Heaven. There won't be anything to be patient for. This life is for learning patience by waiting for God to act in and through your troubles. You can't learn to trust God in Heaven. There will never be a time or an opportunity to doubt God there. This life is for learning to trust God. You learn to trust God by going

through troubles, and knowing God is still there even when it feels like He's far away. You can't learn forgiveness in Heaven. You won't sin and no one is going to sin against you there. This life is for learning forgiveness. You learn forgiveness by taking the hurt, the anger, and the violation to God and allowing Him to heal it all. You won't learn how to love in Heaven. You'll love effortlessly. You learn to love by dealing with what's unlovely in people here and now and having God pour His love through you.

Victors live courageously because they know God makes our troubles avenues of His grace and blessing. God can re-purpose life's troubles or transform them from something negative into something positive. It was the great Christian leader Paul who might have articulated that truth best. He had a great trouble in his life – probably some kind of physical ailment – he called “a thorn in the flesh.” He asked God to take it away at least three times. But God never did. Instead, God said to Paul? “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:9 NLT) That changed Paul's perspective forever. He said, “So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.... For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor. 12:9-10 NLT) Instead of being a victim, Paul became a victor.

Amy Carmichael went to India as a missionary in 1895. She was single and physically small and frail. The other veteran missionaries only gave her six months before she'd flee back to England. She stayed in India for 55 years without one visit back home. Her early years as a missionary were filled with intense, very hard work that yielded only disappointing results. Then, God led her to open a school for Indian girls who had been sold to serve as prostitutes at Hindu temples. That ministry grew, flourished, and became a dynamic witness to the transforming power of Jesus. But in 1931, Amy Carmichael fell into a pit by accident. She never fully recovered. Arthritis plagued her back. She suffered constant infections. She hardly left her room until her death in 1951. But in those 20 years, Amy Carmichael wrote fifteen books. Those books have profoundly touched the lives of thousands of people all over the world. Sometimes trouble releases a spiritual power and potential that never existed before.

Victors live courageously because they understand Jesus' victory has an “already, but not yet” quality to it. An analogy from World War 2 has helped me understand this truth. It's the difference between what's called D-Day and V-Day. D-Day was June 6, 1944. The Allies stormed the beaches of Normandy off the coast of France and successfully invaded Nazi-held Europe. It was the greatest victory for the Allies in World War 2, and it broke the power of Nazi Germany. But V-Day (or Victory Day) was almost a year later on May 8, 1945. Victory over the Nazis was all but assured on June 6, 1944, but it took a year to work out that victory. Many bloody battles were fought over the next 11 months. Many, many Allied soldiers died during that year as they marched toward Berlin. D-Day was kind of an “already, but not yet” victory.

The three day period when Jesus died and rose again some 2,000 years ago was our spiritual D-Day. The ultimate power of sin, evil, and Satan was broken. Ultimate victory was assured back then and there. But all of the spiritual battles aren't over yet. That happens when Jesus returns. The second coming of Jesus will be our spiritual V-Day.

Victory Day! In the meantime, we're going to have battles and face troubles of many different kinds. It's going to be ugly and painful at times. Nevertheless, we can live courageously and joyfully because the most decisive battle in this war has already been fought and won. It happened at the cross and the empty tomb. Jesus was so confident of victory He even said, "I have overcome the world, not "I will overcome the world!"

Again, let's try and stay balanced about what to expect between the empty tomb and the second coming of Jesus. On the one hand, we should expect spiritual battles of all kinds to continue both personally and globally until Jesus returns. Not everything will go well. On the other hand, we should expect the Kingdom of God to break into our life and world from time to time, also. We should pray for, ask for, and expect to see miraculous healings, restored marriages, positive financial reversals, hardened unbelievers turning in faith to Jesus, and great spiritual revivals in our country and around the world. The Kingdom of God is coming and God loves to give us a foretaste from time to time as to what that future looks like. Victors anticipate the breaking in of God's Kingdom here and now – in my life, your life, and everywhere in this world.

Please take careful note of the basis for this courage victors are invited to experience. "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." (Jo. 16:33 NIV) It's not because of anything we are or anything we do. It's not because we have great faith. It's not because we've somehow stopped sinning and are living a so-called "perfect" life. The reason we can have courage is simply because of what Jesus did and who Jesus is. Jesus gives us His peace and Jesus has won this incredible victory. At the cross, Jesus defeated the powers of Hell and evil and now you and I can live life from and on that foundation every day. The Bible says, "For every child of God defeats this evil world, and we achieve this victory through our faith. And who can win this battle against the world? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God." (1 Jo. 5:4-5 NLT) In other words, victors live courageously because of Jesus.

Did the boy in the wheelchair ever get his question answered? He asked Malcolm Muggeridge that searching question, "You say there is a God who loves me. Then, why me?" I like how Muggeridge responded. He asked the boy, "If you were fit and whole, would you have come to hear me tonight?" The boy shook his head. "God has asked a very hard thing of you," said Muggeridge. "But, remember, He asked something even harder of Jesus. He died for you. Maybe this was His way of making sure you'd hear about His love and come to put your faith in Him." The boy said, "Yes, that could be."

Many of our questions about life's troubles are not going to get answered this side of Heaven. Not fully. But you can still live as a victor, not as a victim. You can still finish well. You can still pass on the godly legacy of being a victor, not a victim when it comes to life's troubles. 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." (Jo. 16:33 NIV) Yes, victors know life's troubles are inevitable. But victors also know they can still live courageously because of Jesus. May that be part of our legacy. By the grace of God, may each of us finish well.