



## I HAVE OVERCOME THE WORLD

John 16:25-33

April 12, 2009

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### INTRODUCTION – EASTER IS FOR ATTITUDE!

Easter is for attitude.

That's why I hope you've come. I hope you've come this morning to get a little attitude. A little Easter attitude. Or if you have not come for a little Easter attitude, at least I hope you'll leave with a little. A little Easter attitude.

Of course, sometimes we discourage attitude—in our children, for example. “Don't give me that attitude,” we on occasion say to our children. Or with impatient drivers, who for some unknown reason feel absolutely compelled to remind us with repeated honks on their horn that we forgot to use our turn signals. We like to discourage that kind of attitude!

At other times we encourage attitude. Like in athletics, where the right kind of attitude is essential for success on the court or on the field. I remember one team we used to play in high school; they'd always blare over the loudspeaker before the games that classic Queen song, “We Will Rock You,” with those inspiring lyrics: “Singing, we will, we will, rock you, rock you!” That technique was all about, well, intimidating us, but encouraging attitude in the home team.

On this Easter morning, I want to encourage you to have a little attitude. Not the attitude Queen calls for but the attitude Jesus Christ calls for. It's the attitude Jesus Christ calls for in this passage, the attitude captured in the last verse of this chapter, verse 33: “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.” Jesus is approaching the end of his life and wants to encourage his followers to have a little attitude—a little Easter attitude.

### WHAT IS EASTER ATTITUDE?

But what is Easter attitude? That's our first question. Attitude is that inward disposition we have toward situations or circumstances. It's how we inwardly respond to situations or circumstances; that's our attitude.

Now Easter attitude is a particular kind of inward disposition toward situations or circumstances. It's an inward disposition made up of two things, both mentioned in this verse to which we've just referred. The first is *peace*. Jesus says to his followers, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.” That's the first part of an Easter attitude—peace. The second is *courage*. Jesus goes on to say: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart!” That is, be strong and courageous. It's a call for *courage*—for courage in the face of difficult situations and circumstances.

Easter attitude, then, is the result of these two attitudes coming together: peace and courage. But what do you get when peace and courage come together to form a single

attitude? What you get is the Easter attitude of *reverent defiance*. Perhaps you should try saying that phrase for yourself; it may be new to you. It's not my phrase; I didn't make it up. But it's a great phrase; I'm happy to use it. Because I think it perfectly captures the essence of what an Easter attitude is all about.

Reverent defiance is the attitude of a soldier who knows the battle is won even though he's still in the fight. So it's not being cocky or presumptuous. For you know the battle rages on and the stakes are still very high; the bullets are still flying, and you may very well lose your life. Hence, there's a reverence, a humility, a honest recognition that the dangers are very real indeed. But reverent defiance, on the other hand, is not mousy or sheepish or cowardly; nor is it timid or fearful or doubting. Instead, reverent defiance is just that—defiant! Chin-up, hopeful and hope-filled in the face of impossible odds—that's defiance!

So it's this delicate balance of peace and courage, reverence and defiance, to which Jesus calls his followers. And, boy, don't we need it?! Don't we all need a dose of reverent defiance in the face of the impossible situations and circumstances that come at us. Have you been keeping an eye on the news lately? It wouldn't take much effort or much looking to see that we're all up against some pretty serious odds in this world. The recent issue of *Christianity Today* had on its cover: *The Depression Epidemic*, exploring why it is that we're more "down than ever" and what we might do about it. Or perhaps you saw yesterday's *New York Times*, with the picture of rows of coffins for a funeral for the 205 victims who died in Monday's earthquake in Italy. Or, closer to home, you will likely have seen the front-page of the *Chicago Tribune* with the gripping picture of two mangled, smoldering cars and the caption, "2 die in fiery crash; off duty cop held." Two young men in their early twenties had pulled over on the side of the road to check for a flat tire, when an off-duty police officer, who had had way too much to drink that night, slammed his Lexus SUV into their parked car, killing both instantly. Then there's the phone call we received earlier this week of an aunt whose cancer is taking her life much more quickly than we had anticipated, so that she probably only has a few more days to live.

Of course, we could go on like this for some time, couldn't we? Stacking up the tragedies of this world is an easy job; you don't have to look very far to find heartache or hardship; simply read your paper or read your emails. Which should encourage us to agree with Jesus when he said in this verse: "In this world you will have trouble." We talk about the realities of life; here's a reality of life—trouble. In this world we will have trouble; there's no denying it; there's no getting around it. And it's precisely the *inevitability* of trouble that makes having an Easter attitude of reverent defiance so necessary but also so difficult. It's just plain hard to have peace and courage, to have reverence and defiance, in the face of all the trouble that comes your way and mine. How's the dad, who lost his son in such an egregious and senseless accident, going to have reverent defiance in the face of such tragedy? Or how's my aunt—or your aunt, or your son or daughter or mother or father or friend?

#### **WHERE DOES EASTER ATTITUDE COME FROM?**

In other words, where does an Easter attitude of reverent defiance come from? Right from the start, one thing is for sure: this Easter attitude of reverent defiance

doesn't come from Oprah! Now in saying it doesn't come from Oprah, I mean that reverent defiance doesn't come from the kind of positive-thinking, lessons-to-be-learned psychobabble peddled by people like Oprah and others. Nothing against Oprah, of course—just that you won't find a real source of peace and courage in the face of the troubles of this world from Oprah. Because ultimately Oprah—and thousands of others like her—seeks for the source of peace and courage in the face of troubles in the self.

Where, then, does an Easter attitude come from? Only one place, one person: *Jesus Christ*. But why him? What special claim does he have to be the source of an Easter attitude of reverent defiance? Jesus Christ is the only one who can say with integrity what he says at the very end of this verse: "I have overcome the world." Do you know anyone else who can say that? Can Mohammed say that? Can Buddha say that? Can Oprah say that? Can Obama say that? No, only Jesus Christ can say that, because only Jesus Christ has in fact overcome the world. For only Jesus Christ has overcome that great and unassailable weapon of the world; that one thing that makes the world such a difficult place in which to live; that one thing that will one day confront every single one of us; that one thing being *death*.

Jesus Christ alone has overcome—triumphed over—death. And that's what Easter is all about. Easter is all about celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. For in and through and because of his being raised from the dead by the power of God the Father, Jesus Christ has overcome both the *reality* of death, and the *power* of death. In his resurrection, he has overcome the reality of death. Which is a deadly reality. But as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15: "Death has been swallowed up in victory. 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (vv. 54-56).

And Jesus has overcome the power of death, as well. Did you know that according to the Bible, death holds people in slavery all their lives? How does death do that? The Bible says it does so by fear. Fear is the power that death has; the fear of death is how death exercises an amazing, slavery-creating power over our lives. But according to the Bible, Jesus Christ shared flesh and blood, became a human being, who died and rose again, in order that he might destroy death itself and, in turn, liberate us from the fear of death. So that we can live our lives, as it were, always looking beyond the grave, knowing that the grave is not the end. For Jesus Christ has overcome the world; so too shall we.

### **HOW DO I GET EASTER ATTITUDE?**

But how do I get this Easter attitude? If I want it, how do I get it? How do I live in freedom from the fear of death? How do I live in midst of the troubles of this world with peace and confidence, reverence and defiance?

The Bible tells us that we get this Easter attitude in one way and one way only: faith. Here's what the Bible says: "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4). We must believe. For what we believe will inevitably shape how we respond to situations and circumstances; what we believe will inevitably inform our inward disposition, our attitude.

But *what* must we believe in order to have this Easter attitude? As the Bible goes on to say, “Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 5:5). This is what we must believe: that Jesus Christ is the Son of God—very God of very God, yet born and lived as a man that he might suffer and die for men; that he might pay the penalty for our sins on the cross; that you and I might one day experience that same triumph over the grave as the Father raises us up to be with Jesus Christ for ever and ever and ever.

So let me ask you: do you believe this? There can be no reverent defiance without it. There can be no real and lasting peace without it. There can be no bold and enduring courage without believing that Jesus is the Son of God.

### **CONCLUSION – LIVE WITH EASTER ATTITUDE!**

I would like to illustrate for you what it looks like to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and thus to have an Easter attitude of reverent defiance pervading your life. To underscore the point I would in fact like to give you two illustrations dealing with what is roughly the same situation. The situation is something that has probably touched or at least will touch all of our lives at one point or another. The situation is cancer.

The first illustration is what it looks like to confront cancer without an Easter attitude of reverent defiance borne out of a confidence faith that Jesus has overcome the world by overcoming death. Just this week I received an email from a young woman in her twenties, who is just a few weeks away from delivering her first child. Yet her mother is just weeks, perhaps even days, away from breathing her last breath. This is of course a tragic and gut-wrenching situation; but it is made even more tragic by the fact that neither she nor the mother have Easter attitude. Listen to her describe the situation.

*This is the hardest reality I could have imagined for myself. As I write this I cannot believe that this is truth that I am living with. My mom is not just my mom, as you all know she is my best friend and my soul mate. I cannot express my grief, anger and sadness. . . .*

*. . . I am getting through this with a lot of denial and by trying to live in the moment. When I am able to do that, I am aware that I have her today, and that none of us know what tomorrow will bring. When I am not able to be in that space I am overwhelmed with fear and sadness. . . .*

When you try to live in a world full of troubles without Easter attitude, you sound like what you’ve just heard. And it’s sad; indeed, it’s tragic.

The contrast with an Easter attitude couldn’t be sharper. Listen now to another woman describes her own bout with cancer in remarkably different terms.

*Two weeks from the day I had my first infusion of chemo, my hair fell out. I had been warned, of course. But secretly I cherished the hope that my thick locks would defy the statistics, clinging to my scalp despite the red stuff dripping into my veins.*

*A volunteer barber at the hospital suggested that if I shampooed less often and used a wide-tooth comb, I would keep my hair. I tried both. But when I began shedding like an unkempt dog all over my pajamas, pillows, and bathroom floor, I recognized the inevitable. I called a friend from work who suggested clipping my*

*hair back to two inches so that going bald would be less traumatic. She came to my hospital room and began buzzing.*

*The snappy do lasted about two days. One morning in the shower, I watched in horror as water washed off shampoo, and clumps of hair that gathered around my feet. When I looked in the mirror, all I saw were stray wisps and a shiny scalp. I was undeniably, irrefutably bald. And there wasn't a thing I could do about it.*

Well, almost nothing, as she goes on to say:

*We can trust God. Because no matter what happens to us, God, the creator and ruler of the universe, the one who made the great creatures of the deep and flung stars all over the heavens, is in control. He controls the tides of the oceans and the wind in the trees. He controls the tiny little birds that ride the colors of the dawn.*

So she says with an Easter attitude of reverent defiance:

*Nothing—not the probing fingers, the painful needle stabs, the interminable waiting for results, the surgery, the pathology reports, the naming of the dreaded word cancer—can separate us from the love of God [in Christ Jesus our Lord].*

And to that I say: Amen! That's Easter attitude! That's an attitude of reverent defiance in the face of impossible odds. And that's the kind of attitude followers of Christ are called to have; that's the kind of attitude followers of Christ *can* have because of who Christ is and what Christ has done for us on Easter.

Friends, I don't know what sort of attitude you came in here with. But it is my prayer that you leave with a big dose of Easter attitude – a big dose of reverent defiance, peace and courage, reverence and defiance, in the face of whatever life has brought or will bring your way.

“In this world we will have trouble,” Jesus says. “But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

**Amen.**