

# Lesson One Sermon

THE  
GOSPEL  
IN  
HARD  
TIMES

## The Gospel in Hard Times

### Lesson One

#### Hard Times, Hard Questions

**Story:** Steve Saint was born in 1951, to Nate and Marj Saint, while they were serving as missionaries in Ecuador. Steve's father was a missionary pilot with Mission Aviation Fellowship. In 1956, Nate Saint and four other missionaries, including Jim Elliot, were killed when they tried to make peaceful contact with the Waodani Indians living in the jungles of Ecuador. The men were speared to death, and their bodies were left on the riverbank. It was a story that drew international attention, and you can read more about it in the classic book by Elisabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*.

After the death of Steve's father, the family moved to Quito, Ecuador, where he attended school. Steve's aunt, Rachel Saint, and Elisabeth Elliot continued trying to make peaceful contact with the very Indians who had killed their brother and husband. After five years, and much prayer and effort, Elisabeth and Rachel were able to successfully reach out to the Waodani Indians. In fact, the two women missionaries even lived with them in the jungle. This resulted in many of the Waodani becoming Christians, including those who had killed Steve's father.

At 10 years of age, Steve went to live with the Waodani, staying with them during the summers. As a young boy, he learned about living in the jungle, and developed friendships with many members of the tribe. In June of 1965, Steve Saint was baptized in the same river where his father's body had lain, by two of his father's killers who had also opened their hearts to Christ.

**Introduction:** This is a hard story to hear and it challenges the beliefs of many Christians in America today. Many of us would say that we have followed Jesus with all our hearts since making a commitment to Christ as our Lord and Savior. We do our best to confess our sin daily, asking God to empower us and direct our lives by his Spirit. We pray in faith based on Jesus's promise that we as his followers will do even greater things than he did during his life on earth. We have also believed that if we do these things, most, if not all, of our problems will go away. Why? Because Jesus promised us the abundant life, right? In John 10:10 he said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Clearly, an abundant life will not include suffering or problems or heartaches?

The only problem with this belief is that if we honestly read God's Word from Genesis to Revelation, we realize that God has a lot to say about the reality, benefits, and normalcy of suffering in this life here on earth—even for Christians.

So, if suffering, loss, and hardship are normal in the life of the Christian, can we also believe Jesus wants us to experience peace as we go through life's struggles, whether they're physical, emotional, or spiritual? Can we have faith like Steve Saint, who came to terms with his father's tragic death, and find the peace to go on?

**Big Idea:** As the storms in the world deliver crushing blows to the ships of our lives, Jesus desperately wants to give us a reality check to prepare us to persevere through life's hardest times.

**Text Reading:** John 16:32-33

**Context of Scripture:** If appropriate, provide some historical or situational context to the immediate text.

**Transition Question/Statement:** What is essential for me to have in order to thrive in hard times, according to Jesus?

**Point 1) Jesus Gives Us His Word in Order That We Might Have Peace (Vv. 32-33a)**

- A. Jesus's Word to us is the primary means through which he prepares us to thrive in the world.
  - a. Jesus reveals to the disciples that they will abandon him in the face of adversity, but Jesus reassures them that he is never alone because the Father would be with him. (V. 32)
  - b. Keep in mind: Jesus is having this discourse with the disciples the night of his arrest and betrayal, with the crucifixion the next morning. During Holy Week Jesus shared the famous Olivet Discourse, phenomenal parables, and other teachings about his imminent suffering, and signs of the end of the age.
  - c. There's irony in Jesus's teachings to the disciples. The complexity of what he taught may have produced anxiety, uncertainty, or even panic. However, Jesus's purpose<sup>1</sup> in sharing was that the disciples would experience peace. (V. 33a)
  - d. There are several key aspects to Jesus's concept of peace:
    - i. Jesus emphasizes that our peace is "In me/him."<sup>2</sup>
    - ii. How are we to understand peace?

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<sup>1</sup> "So that" (ὅτι/hina clause. V.33a) is a conjunction, functioning as an adverbial clause of purpose. Jesus is displaying intentionality in what he is sharing with the disciples.

<sup>2</sup> "In me" (ἐν ἐμοί/in me) is an emphatic prepositional phrase. The emphasis is that "in Jesus alone," in his nature, character and life-giving words can we ever hope or expect to experience peace. Also, this prepositional phrase (in me) is a causative preposition, so in this construction the object of the preposition causes the related verbal action to occur. In other words: Jesus causes (the verbal action) "you may have peace." This is technical, but theologically significant because we don't find peace, muster it up from the depth of our spirituality – it's in Jesus, he causes us to have it! Wow.

1. The Hebrew word shalom was and is a fundamental idea, a hope, and a way of life for Jewish people. It is such a staple in Jewish culture that shalom is both a greeting and farewell.<sup>3</sup>
2. Shalom means to be whole, uninjured, undivided, it's to experience tranquility, serenity, or essentially well-being.
3. Peace in the biblical world is a communal reality,<sup>4</sup> it is not merely a personal hope. It is a gift of God to his righteous people.<sup>5</sup>
4. To the Jewish person, if you have shalom, then you have everything.
5. The Jewish understanding of peace incorporated the entirety of one's being: physical, social, spiritual, psychological, and emotional components.
6. In the Jewish mind God is the quintessential source of peace which explains why Gideon called him: Yahweh-Shalom (The LORD is peace).<sup>6</sup>
7. Peace is a reality of the kingdom of God and the Messianic Age.
8. In the New Testament, peace had a negative connotation: absence of war. In the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament, emperors boasted of the *Pax Romana*: Peace of Rome. The pax, Latin for peace, conveyed the idea that Rome had either squashed their enemies or negotiated terms of peace with other nations.
9. For the apostles, peace is an aspect of salvation which accomplishes reconciliation with God through Christ, but is also an effect of the new relationship with the triune God. Put another way, peace is the cause and effect of becoming a son or daughter of God.

iii. Jesus intends the same peace for us as well.

iv. If we desire peace, it requires that we labor in the Scriptures primarily, and secondarily in prayer.

B. **Illustration:** Years ago, a major art gallery sponsored a competition for painters, and they were offering prizes for the best painting on the subject of "Peace." Some artists painted serene landscapes, some painted sunsets, others painted endless fields of beautiful flowers, someone else portrayed peace as a calm lake with water so still it could serve as a mirror for the sky. The painting that won was a real surprise. The scene was the oceanside in a violent storm. The sky was ominous with lightning cutting through the clouds and waves crashing into the rock walls of the cliffs by the shore.

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<sup>3</sup> See Numbers 6:22-27; John 20:19, 21, 26.

<sup>4</sup> See Psalm 29:11

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 48:18, 22

<sup>6</sup> Judges 6:24

Where was the peace? There was anything but serenity portrayed in the picture. If you looked twice you would see what the artist was up to. About halfway up the cliff, was a bird's nest tucked into a tiny hollow in the rock. A mother bird was sitting on that nest with her little babies tucked underneath her, sleeping soundly. What a picture of peace! The painting, "Peace in the Midst of the Storm" was done by artist Jack E. Dawson.<sup>7</sup>

- a. Like in the painting, the storms of life will rage all around us. Will we exhibit serenity like the little birds resting under the protective wings of their mother? Jesus purposed that we would know his peace.
- b. Peace is not the absence of storms, but serenity in the midst of them.
- c. Our prayer should be, "Lord, if it's not your will to calm the storm, then calm me while it rages."

**Transition Question/Statement:** Jesus has purposed that I experience peace, but why am I so devastated when adversity comes my way?

**Point 2) Jesus Gives Us a Reality Check—The World Will Crush Us (V. 33b)**

- A. Jesus has essentially guaranteed that the world will crush us.
- B. In order to thrive in a fallen world, we need a paradigm shift regarding the nature and role of the world.
  - a. The world is not our friend, it will never be kind to us.
  - b. Part of our disillusionment with the world is the unfortunate reality that we expect heaven on earth, when Jesus tells us that we can expect hell on earth because Satan, the god of this world, is wreaking havoc everywhere.
    - i. When the world crushes us—and it will—we will certainly suffer and we may stagger from the blow. What makes these tragedies and adversities fundamentally different is that we are no longer surprised by them, we expect them.
    - ii. This paradigm shift changes everything in terms of how we see the world.
- C. Note the important contrast in the previous statement, Jesus emphasizes that our peace resides "in me/him" and in this statement says, "in the world..." This juxtaposition is insightful because of the dichotomy, or contrast, presented: ***in the world*** we will receive tribulation, but ***in Jesus*** we will receive peace.
  - a. Just because our peace is found in Christ alone, does not mean that we shouldn't promote peace. We definitely should. However, human peace is fleeting. Lasting peace is only the result of knowing Christ Jesus.

**Transition Question/Statement:** In Jesus I will experience peace, but in the world I will

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.jackdawson.com/categories.php?category=Seek-%26-Find-Prints/Peace-in-the-Midst-of-the-Storm>  
Pastor consider showing the painting on the screen for your audience.

experience tribulation, is there something else I can point to that will embolden me when faced with hard times and suffering?

### **Point 3) Jesus Commands Us to Be Resolute as He Has Triumphed Over the World (V. 33c)**

- A. While we are being crushed by the world, we are to be encouraged.
  - a. The one Greek word, *θαρσείτε*, is translated in English as a phrase, “Be courageous, Be of good cheer, Take heart, Be confident.” Moreover, this word is an exhortation to be resolute or firm in the face of danger or adverse circumstances.
  - b. This exhortation to be brave is in the present tense and imperative mood in the Greek Bible. Meaning that this is not just good advice, optional, or a suggestion, but a divine command. The present tense conveys the idea of continuity and repetition.
    - i. **Every time** we are crushed by the world, we are to showcase the unwavering courage that Jesus commands.
  - c. The obvious question is, “What is the basis for this courage, confidence, or fearlessness?”
- B. Jesus has overcome the world.
  - a. Our courage, confidence, and fearlessness are based on the fact that Jesus has overcome the world.<sup>8</sup>
  - b. There is a well-known theology called in Latin: *Christus Victor* (Christ the Victor). Without going into the intricacies, at its core this theology teaches that Jesus triumphed over the world, sin, death, the grave, Satan, and the evil forces that enslaved humanity. Jesus, therefore, liberates humanity from their demonic bondage and empowers us to live godly lives for the glory of God.
  - c. The tacit implication of the *Christus Victor* is that because Jesus conquered the world, so will we as his spiritual siblings. Now that is good news!

### **Takeaway**

On the night of the greatest demonic activity the world has ever seen, with the weight of the world on his shoulders, with the dreaded cup of the Father’s wrath that he must drink down to the very last drop encroaching upon him, coupled with Judas’ betrayal, Peter’s denial, the

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<sup>8</sup> What Jesus says is fascinating. When he says, “I have overcome the world.” The word overcome (*νενίκηκα/nenikeka*) is the base for our English word Nike. The same Nike as the shoe apparel giant is the name of the Greek goddess, which means victory. The word “overcome” is in the perfect tense. The perfect tense conveys the idea of something happening in the past, but the effects of it exist in the present. Allow me to illustrate with a hypothetical: I won the lottery 10 years ago & I’m still wealthy today. This is the perfect tense. Winning the lottery in the past made me wealthy then and I’m still wealthy today. The emphasis of the perfect tense is not on the past action, but on the present reality. Back to Jesus’s statement, he says that he prevailed over the world in the past and it is still true in the present as he speaks to the disciples on the eve of his crucifixion. Christ’s victory as evidenced in the resurrection is the once-for-all proof that Jesus is indeed the one and only Son of God. That’s powerful!

desertion of his disciples and followers, the rejection of his own ethnic group, the brutal, inhumane beating that he would endure from the Romans, and of course there is the barbaric, humiliating horror of the crucifixion, yet he never flinched, except for a moment in the Garden of Gethsemane – Jesus stared tragedy, adversity, suffering, and hardship in the face and triumphed! Because Christ Jesus is the Victor, so are we. May we live victorious Christian lives in him!