

Overcoming the World

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You ever have a day so challenging you think to yourself, “I’m going nuts!” Or a week so rough you turn to someone and say, “I’m losing it. If this keeps I going I don’t know if I’m gonna handle it. I feel like the world is against me. Is it *really* possible to have peace? Let’s consider three options: the truth, love, and something else.

The Truth

This week theaters across America screened an 80’s film adaptation of Orwell’s *1984* in defiance of the Trump administration. Alamo Drafthouse participated, and for the record, I was in an elder meeting. There’s a place in the novel where the central character, Winston, has just completed a couple chapters in a secret treatise, *the book* that outlines *the dogma* of the totalitarian regime, *Big Brother*. Winston concludes that, though a minority, even a minority of one, he is not mad for resisting. He reflects: “**There was truth and there was untruth, and if you clung to the truth even against the whole world, you were not mad.**” What does it take to stay sane in our crazy world? Is it the truth? Here we have a minority, narrowed down to one, claiming to have the truth against the whole world. Jesus says: “**I have said these things to you in figures of speech. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech but will tell you plainly about the Father**” (16:25). Jesus admits his teaching has been in “figures of speech.” A word that can have a technical meaning, referring to parables and pithy sayings, but can also refer to a veiled way of teaching, probably the meaning here. Perhaps you’ve felt this, the difficulty of grasping Jesus’ words, the truth, or the Bible in general? The disciples respond, “**Ah, now you are speaking plainly!**” You’re speaking in a way that conceals nothing. Why was Jesus so hard to understand? Maybe you’ve thought, “If God would just tell me what to do, if he was just clearer, then faith would be so much easier.” *Some of us want God to give it to us straight. Just tell me the truth, I can handle it.* I think of people who ask valid, intellectual questions about Christianity. Can we trust the Bible if it was written by people? Is it possible for Jesus to be both God and man? Challenged by intellectual doubt, they find it incredibly difficult to go all in with Jesus. Well, the disciples have been dealing with this kind of intellectual confusion for three years, while living *next to Jesus*. Did he come from God or is he just a prophet? Is this the promised Messiah or not? Jesus says the hour is coming he’ll speak clearly *about the Father*, meaning he’ll clear things up about his relationship with God. If you skip the explanation here, I want you to notice how the disciples respond: “**Now we know that you know all things and do not need anyone to question you**” (16:30). His plain words triggered some kind of epiphany. Now we *know*...what some of us would give for that kind of certainty! What are they saying? There was a Jewish belief in circulation that a person’s ability to anticipate questions and offer answers was a mark of divinity. The disciples are probably picking up on this and saying now they believe Jesus is sent from God. No more doubt. No more confusion. We’ve grasped the truth. The epistemological search is over. But notice how Jesus responds, “**Do you now believe? Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone**” (16:31-2). Let this settle in. The disciples have been personally mentored by the Master, heard his crystal clear teaching, and still, when the heat gets turned up; they

will run. Apparently, theological clarity and epistemological certainty are not enough. Is the truth enough to keep you sane?

Love

Maybe what we really need is love? Jesus says, “[In that day you will ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will ask the Father on your behalf; for the Father himself loves you](#) (26–27). Now what’s he saying? He’s saying there’s an age coming when the disciples won’t need Jesus to be present to ask God for things; they’ll be able to go directly to the Father. Why? *Because the Father himself loves you.* What a statement. Because the Father himself loves you. There’s an experience of God’s love coming, that is so strong, it will usher you into his presence. Maybe you’ve tried the truth, or maybe you haven’t, but perhaps you’d say *what we all need is a deeper experience of love.* That’s what makes sense of life. If you know true love, you can get through anything. Love, not truth, makes sense out of chaos. This is the message of *Silver Linings Playbook*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Cinderella*. If you can find someone who accepts you, just like you are, then you’ll be happy. But we’ve actually moved on from that sentiment. We don’t really need others to accept us; we just need to accept ourselves. If the modern citizen looked out, to answers, to truth, the citizen of late modernity looks in, to self-understanding, self-love. Self-love can move outward or inward. When it moves **outward**, it puts everything on display. Think Kardashians, reality TV, the confessions of an imperfect mom blog. The person who confesses everything on FB. No hiding. I accept myself so deeply that I can project my every thought to the world and feel no shame. Confession can become an identity. Christopher Lasch notes that when this happens our external life becomes a parody of our inner life, inarticulate, weightless, void. And we lose touch with real meaning. Self-love can also turn **inward**. It says, if I can understand my hurts, my disappointments, my painful experiences, my flawed genetic inheritance, *then I can learn to love and accept myself.* It’s the woman who thinks if she can identify all the negative influences in her life for who she’s become—that will free her from depression. Or the guy who shows up to FC or CG with his sin thoroughly analyzed, his idolatry broken down into fine detail, that people think there’s nothing to say. Self-understanding is no path to salvation. We can go on introspective journeys that relocate blame our whole lives and never be healed. We can analyze our idolatries to the nth degree and still remain trapped inside of them. *We need a way out. What would you say to that person? You just need to know much you are loved. Or what do you say to yourself? I just need to know how much I’m loved by God. If he would give me a more consistent experience of his love, then I wouldn’t struggle so much. If he would give me the an inner warmth and acceptance my parents failed to give, meet my needs then I wouldn’t doubt.*

Truth through Love

Is this what Jesus is saying when he says: [for the Father himself loves you](#)? Just soak up enough divine love and you’ll be okay? Notice why the Father loves us: [because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.](#)” What is this saying about the Father’s love? That it’s not carte blanche. It isn’t automatic for everyone. So how do we get it? Loving and believing Jesus. Why is that necessary? Jesus says: “[I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father.](#)” This is a poetic summary of the gospel. It’s the V-movement of Christ, from the Father into the

world, then out of the world and back to the Father. His spectacular humility (down to the cross) and his glorious resurrection (up). The great condescension of God. Jesus is saying faith in that movement, in that act, in that person is what lands us in the Father's love. Apart from that movement, we are stranded forever from the love of God. That might seem harsh? But think about it like this. There is only one person that understands you completely, who sees everything, knows the complex experience of pain, joy, failure, shame. It's God who knows all things...the things we hide and things we don't see. The secret sins and the invisible ones. God sees all the things that, if we were to see all at once, would level us, *and we could not accept ourselves.* We would be crushed and lose hope. But God sees all that, and instead of abandoning us; he comes into our world of utter depravity. But he doesn't just come into it; he allows it to get onto him. He allows it to pile up and crush him. And then rise victorious over sin, death, and hell. The Father says, I love you because of that, because of my Son taking your place. I don't love you because you are so inherently lovable. *In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* Apply enough pressure and everyone breaks. When tested to the limits, everyone buckles except one. Jesus is left standing alone. And with the Father's help, who raises him from the dead, Jesus overcomes the world. He overcomes the system that insists an infinite God answer our every question. He overcomes the system that feeds the big Me, the system that teaches salvation by self-love and self-understanding. He overthrows Big Brother, snaps the power of sin, death and hell and rises victorious from the grave, a shimmering witness to his eternal truth and perfect love to redeem sinners like you and me. This is what the disciples haven't grasped; not that Jesus is God but that Jesus is redemption. And then he says: *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world"* (33). How do you get peace in a chaotic world? The world has to first be overcome, its lies, its traps, its deceptions. I have said these things to you that IN ME you may have peace. Trace the triumph of Christ, down the redemptive V, to his death, and back up to resurrection life, *and be stunned enough to throw yourself at his feet.* Love him, trust him and then know the Father's love. In 1984, when Winston reads *the book*, he reads to his lover, Julia. Winston and Julia chose to risk everything and fall in love in an age when love isn't permitted. Their love an act of rebellion. Then one evening realizing their relationship can't last, eventually we will be caught and tortured to death, they discuss *what really matters, what can get them through it all, what can keep them sane.* In this inspiring moment, they agree it's *their love* for one another—no one can take away that. Then the thought police come, take them away, and torture them both. In a moment of weakness, Winston screams out for them to torture Julia in his place. He betrays his true love, falls under their indoctrination and ends up a miserable old man nursing drinks in a shady bar. He believed in truth, tried desperately to love, but in the end he snapped. He needed something neither truth nor love could give him, but truth *through* love could give him. He needed *redemption.* He needed someone to come and suffer in his place, to be tortured and not give in, to stay true. The disciples couldn't stand it. You and I can't stand it. We all run away, which is why we need We all need redemption. The one who insists on the truth, who masters themselves. We all need redemption. And one Person that can give it climbed on a cross for you and for me, kicked open a Fort Knox tomb to give you life. Cling to Jesus and you'll have peace. And take heart, for he has overcome the world.