

What on earth is happening to our world? John 16:25-33 [v33]

Less than three weeks ago our world was invaded by a free to download smartphone app called Pokémon GO. It became an instant overnight sensation. It has quickly become one of the most popular mobile games in history. This app instructs players to use their mobile devices to catch Pokémon characters in the real world. It has sent multitudes of people into streets, parks, and shopping malls looking for such creatures. Millions of people play the game every day. This app is a location-based augmented reality that has been criticised for taking or what we call data-mining for information to find out what you're buying, what it is you like, and above all, your behaviour by requesting a users' Google browsing history and email. But that's not necessarily the worst thing about it. You may have seen the hordes from Auckland city night and day to Drury village running or if it's wet, driving around the streets with their face in their phones tapping away. Although there is no report of any Pokémon Go app user in NZ being run over by or crashing a car, there have been a number of related ACC claims. Around the world it has been blamed for a wave of crimes, traffic offenses and numerous other complaints. The Pokémon Go invasion has served its purpose though as a somewhat timely distraction from other major world events. Think about it, one reason for the massive popularity is that it provides a distraction from a world that grows more frightening... by the day.

In the last three weeks major world events have included [July]:

4th Pokémon Go App released in NZ, Australia and the USA

6th Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a new anti terrorism law that makes it a crime for any religion, including Christianity to evangelise, witness or invite others to join them outside of their own services held in their own buildings.

7th 5 police officers were killed in Dallas, following the earlier fatalities of two young afro American men shot dead by police in Louisiana and Minnesota.

14th In Nice, France, people joined the Bastille Day celebration. They were waiting for fireworks to begin when a large truck driven by a French Tunisian rammed into the crowd. At least eighty-four died in the attack, including ten children.

15th An attempted army coup in Turkey that left 265 dead.

17th Three police officers were killed in Baton Rouge Louisiana. Three others were injured. The gunman, a former Marine, was killed at the scene.

17th Germany Train attack in Wurzburg – where 21 people were

seriously injured, only the 17-year-old afghan attacker died. 22nd Munich shopping mall 10 dead including the Iranian German gunman and 22 wounded. This was clearly a terrorist assault.

Al Qaeda and other jihadist groups have promoted such tactics, which have been used in Israel, the Middle East and elsewhere. ISIS recently boasted that its operatives killed or wounded 5,200 people during the most recent Ramadan ending July 5th. Jihadist attacks now seem part of our world's present and future. With so much hatred and tragedy in the world- in the face of such challenges, it is vital that we as God's people pray for these issues at this time. In the midst of this I have heard people this week asking the question, as I'm sure many people are asking this same thing around the world right now: What on earth is happening to our world? What is going on here? Such happenings serve to make us uneasy. Recently a psychologist picked up on this noting, "With the frequency of shootings and terror attacks there is a sense of anxiety that's building in people, a sense of vulnerability and powerlessness."

ISIS is inspiring terrorism around the globe; North Korea is advancing its nuclear weapons capabilities freely test firing new missiles; the European Union is fracturing from Brexit; China's military reach is expanding in the South China Sea; crime and violence around the world continues unabated. Security is tighter than ever for the Rio Olympics, along with the threat of the Zika virus, which looms large, and to top it all off, at the Republican Convention in the USA Donald Trump this week has accepted his party's Presidential nomination.

In the face of such crises, it is hard to take the 'long view'. What happens today seems more important than what happened yesterday or will happen tomorrow. Because today's current challenge seems to be more of a challenge than anything we've faced before or will face again. But that is seldom true. You see, every generation has its challenges, and every generation can choose to face them with, or without, God... whether it is an Economic Depression, housing crisis, a World War, a Cold War, an epidemic, drought, crime wave, persecution or terrorism. Whatever it is, our Lord wants to use the crises of these days to show us the folly of self-sufficiency. He wants to draw us from our problems to his loving providential care, from our fears to his invincible supreme authority and all-powerfulness.

God desires that people would turn from their own anxiety and powerlessness to His providence and powerfulness. An important point for us to take note of here is that the world is no more fallen today than it was last year or in any other previous generation. And even more important than that is this truth, today Jesus is no less powerful than he has ever been.

It is vital that we see our world through what we call a biblical lens, that we view happenings in our world in the light of eternal truth contained in God's word. To do this we are to interpret present day historic events in their biblical context.

In our Bible reading Jesus was calling his disciples from their own self-sufficient folly, fears and powerlessness to His providence and all-powerfulness. In the process of which, the disciples were left scratching their heads, thinking and asking the question, "What's going on? What on earth is happening to our world?"

The setting of our reading from John 16 is the Last Supper in the upper room. Jesus has washed the feet of all his disciples to model what the life of service and leadership in the kingdom of God looks like. They've celebrated the Passover Meal together during which, what we celebrate these days as the Lord's Supper or Communion, has been instituted by Jesus to continue and do in remembrance of Him. This is followed by his last major teaching on topics including the holy spirit, love, obedience, failure, bearing fruit, persecution, and his own glorification that will come through his lonely suffering and death. There were also prayers to follow led by Jesus for his present and future disciples.

The disciples after Jesus had finally begun to speak to them in plain language rather than figuratively thought they knew Jesus for sure, who he was and where he had come from, and therefore why it was that he knew 'All things' v.30. They no longer felt the need to question him but simply believe that he came from God. But then Jesus bursts their bubble in his reply. He questions their newly perceived level of faith and challenges their belief by telling just what is going to happen to himself and them beginning in the next few hours with the shattering news that they would leave him alone and scatter, but Jesus wouldn't really be alone because his Father is with him. These events would certainly leave the disciples wondering, "What on earth is going on here?" "What have we just heard and what is going to happen to us in the world now?"

It seemed like things were not going to be all right for them or subsequently any following generation of believers beginning in just a couple of hours time. The disciples had faith, but not enough to stand firm in the face of impending disaster. Jesus knew they would fail. However, Christ's church is not built on human strength but on God who is able to pick up the fallen, fearful and feeble to empower and use them to build up his church... after they have failed. Jesus was clear, open and honest about this and did not leave them without hope. Notice the contrast in what he says next. "I have told you these things, so that **in me** you may have peace. **In the world** you will have trouble... other Bible versions use the word tribulation.

"In me" You will have the sense of holding or inwardly possessing a state of tranquility, security, safety, prosperity, because you will have my peace, the Messiah's peace, the peace of your salvation. The peace that leaves you fearing nothing from God and content with your earthly lot, no matter what it is that you will have to face or live through.

"In this world". Where "the World" in this context refers to the inhabitants of the earth who form the majority of the people on the planet who are opposed to God. It also includes the human system and ways of living and doing things that are opposed to God's purposes. In other words this is "the world" that is hostile to God and God's people. "In this world you will have trouble."

Trouble translates *thlipsis*, a Greek term describing the massive stone that crushed grain into flour. It is the pressure that comes from pressing two things together. Metaphorically speaking it is the oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, anguish, and being in dire straits as a Christian in the world. But we do not have to worry about such trouble in the world because in Christ we have peace, and more than that. We are comforted as the disciples were with Jesus' next words in which he commands us to "take heart!" This means that we are to have courage while being of good cheer at the same time. And the reason we have to be and do this is because Jesus said, "I have overcome the world."

Meaning 'I have conquered the world'. I have carried off the victory being victorious over all my foes. Jesus just before his death affirms his final victory to his disciples who were yet to abandon, scatter, run away, and deny him, witness his crucifixion and three

days later his victory over death itself in his resurrection. No matter what humanity planned to do to him, he overcame it along with Satan the ruler of the world. That is why the disciples could take heart along with every subsequent generation of Christians right up to today. In Christ, in his peace we are comforted with the truth that God can pick us up even if we fail along the way just like the early disciples and be strengthened and empowered to stand firm, pray and hold fast to our faith even unto death against the power of worldly foes and systems, temptations and persecutions.

I encourage you during any troubling time that you may encounter to remember what matters most and that is: God the Father loves us personally and passionately because we love Jesus v.27. We have sung about this truth in the words this morning from the Old Testament book of Lamentations 3:22 "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases...". And God redeems all he allows and calls us to focus our passion and heart on him because through our love and trust in His Son Jesus Christ we can go directly to God through him. And in his love and mercy, God receives us and hears our requests and prayers.

In fact, ten thousand years after our world and all its crises are gone, God will still love you and I. Out of everything that is happening in our world today, this is the fact that matters most.

So, is there anything that is happening in the world today that frightens you: Islamic terrorism? Domestic violence or local crime and security issues? Political turmoil? Exams? Challenges with your family? Relationships issues or could it be your health or even finances? Oswald Chambers left this wise word of advice to us, "leave the broken, irreversible past in God's hands, and step out into the invincible future with him."

In these unpredicted and unpredictable days, if you seek and trust God's wisdom and will more than your own, you will be all right. And why? It is because of Jesus' own words of promise to us Today. No matter what is happening in and to our world... In Christ, his spirit of peace in us, rules and reigns over the tribulation of our lives and all the trouble happening in the world! I leave you with Jesus words to finish, "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."