

Oikodomē. January 2, 2011.

“Take Heart, I Have Overcome the World”

By Pastor Christopher Seah

What does the thought of the New Year feel to you? Does it feel like a new beginning? Or have you begun assuming Hinduish sentiments—that life is a meaningless cycle, that every New Year is a repeat of the previous one, that your bad karma will come and get you this time round, etc.? Perhaps the coming New Year holds some challenges for you. The dreaded scrutiny of a new overly-zealous supervisor. The possibility of retrenchment. More treatment for your oh-so-mortal limbs. The impending death of a loved one. The very thought of such things, coupled with the life-sucking boredom of the mundane, can certainly make life seem gray, colorless, and tasteless.

Before we rush to deny such feelings, it would be wise, at the very least, to discern the truth behind them: *The World is fallen and subject to futility* (Rom 8:20). As much as we would like a sense of energy behind our step at the start of every New Year, it would be wise to note our feelings and sense something of the futility of life in this world. Through the words of the Preacher, God has told us: “there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9). That means we can expect seasons of great boredom in this World. And under the sun, things aren’t always fair either (Eccl 9:11). We can expect unfairness, even injustice in this life. To top it off, our Lord said in John 16:33: “In the world you will have tribulation.” Not “you *may*...,” but “you *will*...” We can expect struggle, difficulty, and conflict in this life. Those sacred words all call us to a healthy God-inspired realism. As much as we crave for newness, fun, etc., the whole of this-worldly existence with its sea of angry faces and deadlines seems gathered against us, threatening to snuff out all rebellion against its unmoving fatalism.

But people find all sorts of ways of coping with the all-pervading, unforgiving World. For some, it’s *stoic resilience*. Don’t bother thinking too much. Just push ahead with work. Others would thirst for more and more *pleasure*. They would live for the weekend and spend their hard-earned money to buy up more and more fun. *Physical exercise* is another way of coping. The notable rise of the fitness culture in Singapore may be testimony to this way of managing the increasingly stressful World.

Now, there is nothing necessarily wrong with those approaches. But they are all inadequate. Stoic resilience is helpful for some moments—like war. But it can only carry you so far. By itself, it can make you cold, superficial, and arrogant. Entertainment too can help only so much. But the movie and the song will come to an end. Physical exercise is good. But it also depends on your having some health to begin with. All those coping techniques have their place. But they are limited. And when used to the exclusion of the Lord, they can blind us from his purposes in the midst of the struggle.

What then is the Lord’s purpose for us as we face the trials of the New Year? *God wants our trials to be opportunities to look away from ourselves and find our*

resources in him. More: God wants us to know in our trials that Jesus Christ our Lord has overcome the world (Jn 16:33). By his life, Christ has fulfilled God's law for us. By his death, Christ has removed our sins from us. By his resurrection and ascension, Christ has established us in the presence of God forever. That is the multi-faceted Truth that gives us the strength to address our struggles. We do not have to let the weight of the World break us because we are already in the New World that God has prepared for his own. As citizens of the New Creation, destined to inherit the nations, our Father wants us to be the ones calling the shots, not the World. So speak grace even when you are surrounded by cynicism. Love people even when they drive you nuts. Encourage even when you are discouraged. Pray even when your mind is assaulted by doubt. And stand on the gospel of Christ even when everything questions it. Our Lord has overcome the World. Now we can as well. "Father, give us Christ Jesus for our New Year. Amen."

Oikodomē. Greek for "edification"

Announcements

1. Welcome to our Worship Service this morning. It is good to be in the House of God worshipping together to give praise and worship to our covenant-keeping God.
2. Today we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Please make preparation to participate at the Lord's Table. The Lord's Supper is supervised by the Elders. Those who are baptized and members of good standing in a local church may come to the Table of the Lord.
3. There will be Children's Sunday School and hymn singing for adults after morning tea. Do join us for a time of fellowship around the Word.

Activities	2 January	9 January
Preacher	Pastor Christopher	Pastor Christopher
Worship Leader	Pastor Christopher	Pastor Christopher
Pianist	Yaw Kai	Lynette
Usher	Kok Yeow	Erry
Adult Bible Study	<i>Hymn Singing</i>	Pastor Christopher
Refreshments	Sandra	Lynette
Lunch Coordinator	--	--
Librarian	Joyce	Yun Nong
	This week	Next week
Prayer Leader	Keng Ho	Pastor Christopher
Church Cleaning	Brian's SEG (8/1)	Yaw Kai's SEG (15/1)

"The tenets of [the Christian life] seem paradoxes to carnal men; as first, that a Christian is the only freeman, and other men are slaves; that he is the only rich man, though never so poor in the world; that he is the only beautiful man, though outwardly never so deformed; that he is the only happy man in the midst of all his miseries." *Richard Sibbes*