Tribulation

The bride comes through tribulation, and Jesus has overcome the world

SPEAKER	Amy Cogdell
DATE	Sunday, October 16, 2022
PASSAGES	John 16:33; Matthew 24:3-14; Romans 5:1-5; 2 Corinthians 1:3-5; 1 Peter 4:12-13; James 1:12; Acts 14:21-22; Jeremiah 2:2-3; 1 Timothy 4:1-3
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:02:19 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

"In this world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." Suffering is not a sign that God has abandoned his church. It is how the bride of Christ is purified and how her glory is revealed as she perseveres in love — so the church can face it without fear, while refusing the lawlessness that makes love grow cold.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Asked where his spotless bride was, Jesus answered Amy: "She comes through tribulation." Trial purifies the church and reveals Christ's glory in her.
- The New Testament's words for tribulation and suffering appear almost as often as its words for gospel and salvation — and they usually come together.
- God has always led his people on a difficult path, from Egypt through the wilderness, and none of their suffering was meaningless.
- Living in fear of our enemies is doubting God's love and power — and the people we fear may see us very differently than we think.
- Tribulation produces perseverance, character and hope, and God remembers our suffering with great affection.
- Like contractions in labour, the trials of history are preparing the way for Christ's return.

- Lawlessness, on the left and the right, is a particular tribulation of the Western church, because where lawlessness abounds, love grows cold.

▶ 1:02:19

Amy Cogdell began with show-and-tell: a two-thousand-page 1980s study Bible her parents gave her on her fifteenth birthday, scribbled on by her children. When her son Noah once asked her favourite part of the Bible, she showed him the page that had fallen out of the binding from use — Matthew 24–25.

A word for Hope Chapel

▶ 1:05:06

After a minute for everyone to tell a neighbour their favourite verse, she explained: we need the word written on our hearts because Jesus speaks to us from it. "The word of God is living and active" (Hebrews 4:12). And Jesus has a word for Hope, spoken to his disciples on the night of his passion to give them courage and hope:

▶ 1:05:41

> "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."
>
> JOHN 16:33 ↗

The Spirit began pressing it on her in late May, when she read that the Southern Baptist Convention had for decades covered up allegations of sexual abuse. She was not surprised — "the church is no stranger to sexual abuse or abuse of power" — but she was sad, then disheartened, then depressed. How does God see a church marred by hypocrisy? So she asked, *Jesus, where is your spotless bride?*

▶ 1:07:03

The answer came immediately, bold and confident where she was fretful: *She comes through tribulation.* She heard a double meaning. The bride will be purified by trial, and her glory will be revealed as she perseveres in love. Suffering sifts the heart and burns away the chaff, "and if Jesus abides at the centre, then his glory is made visible."

▶ 1:07:39

Raised on 1970s end-times fear, Amy had dreaded tribulation. Now she felt peace. "He's not going to crush his bride." And since a true prophetic word must align with Scripture, she went searching.

A major theme of the New Testament

▶ 1:08:50

Jesus' word for tribulation, *thlipsis*, occurs forty-five times in the New Testament; *paschō*, to suffer, forty-two. Together they appear almost as often as the words for gospel and salvation, "and that's no coincidence. You'll find they often come hand in hand."

▶ 1:09:31

The first time Jesus uses *ekklēsia*, church, he immediately speaks of his suffering. Peter confesses him as the Christ; Jesus says, "On this rock I will build my church," and then begins talking about going to Jerusalem to die. Peter objects — how can the church grow if Jesus dies? — and Jesus answers, "Get behind me, Satan," and tells them all to take up their cross and follow him (Matthew 16:13–24).

The bride in the wilderness

▶ 1:10:35

God has always led his people on a difficult path. Israel, his bride, fell into slavery for centuries. He was with them, urging them to pray, and preparing a deliverance of unimaginable glory. The Israelites who lived and died making bricks had no idea their lives held meaning. "But they do now."

▶ 1:12:22

Even deliverance came with suffering — bricks without straw — but the Lord came through, and not one Israelite was lost. Then he led them into the wilderness to purify them, testing them with hunger yet feeding them manna from his own hand.

▶ 1:13:38

Yet many preferred "the comfort of cucumbers and onions to the rigours of the wilderness." The spies saw the giants and said, "We seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers" (Numbers 13:33). They were flat wrong; Rahab tells Joshua that Jericho already knew it was doomed (Joshua 2:9–11).

Afraid of the wrong things

▶ 1:14:46

The church today is much the same. We doubt that the God who did not spare his own Son can deliver us, and we shrink back from proclaiming the gospel for fear of being cancelled, misunderstood or hated. "Living in the fear of our enemies is doubting in the love of God and the power of God." And the people we fear may see us differently than we see ourselves.

▶ 1:15:20

As a UT student, Amy heard physicist Steven Weinberg debate a Christian apologist. She remembers only Weinberg telling the Christian faculty that in fifteen years they had baited him in public, "but not one of you has ever come to my office trying to convert me." She heard a lonely man. "But I got it. I understood. I'm afraid."

▶ 1:16:21

The disciples fled in fear too. But filled with the Spirit they preached to the Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus, were beaten, and left rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name (Acts 5:40–41). Paul and Barnabas were stoned in Lystra by a mob that followed them from Iconium and Antioch — and then went back to all three towns:

▶ 1:17:23

> "Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,' they said."
>
> ACTS 14:21–22 ↗ (NIV)

What tribulation produces

▶ 1:17:57

> "We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."
>
> ROMANS 5:1–5 ↗ (NKJV)

"Do you hear what Paul is saying? The fruit of tribulation and a faithful heart is hope." Hope is proven and strengthened by trial. And suffering leads to consolation: the God of all comfort "comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble" (2 Corinthians 1:3–5).

▶ 1:19:17

Basilea Schlink, writing after the Second World War, said that in heaven we will wish we had cried more tears, because the joy of having the Father dry them will be so great. Our suffering is precious to him, as Jesus' wounds are. He still remembers Israel's wanderings with affection: "I remember the

devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness" (Jeremiah 2:2–3).

▶ 1:19:58

Amy paused there, sensing Jesus wanted to say it to some in the room: *I remember how you trusted me in hardship.* He remembers, even when we complain and stumble — as Peter, of all people, knew: "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you… but rejoice to the extent that you pa And James agrees: "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial." "The apostles were unified — every last one of them."

Salted with fire

▶ 1:21:19

So what trials are you facing? The Lord sees. In their twenties, Amy and Thomas lost almost everything in a house fire. Before they could absorb it, their church had arrived in force — meals, Philip Owens shovelling ash out with his truck, Caroline taking the kids. They count that fire among the greatest blessings of their youth, and took as their motto Jesus' words, "everyone will be salted with fire."

▶ 1:22:36

When brothers and sisters walk through fire, be present, weep with them and carry what you can, "because in this way we help one another persevere, and the bride of Christ becomes visible." She recalled a cartoon in Al Jazeera, of all places, during the Syrian refugee crisis: Muslim countries shutting their doors and Christians opening theirs.

The birth pains

▶ 1:23:59

Beyond personal trials, the church groans with the birth pains that prepare for Christ's return. Her favourite passage:

> "See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet… All these are but the beginning of the birth pains."
>
> MATTHEW 24:3–14 ↗

▶ 1:25:08

Every generation, Amy believes, has passed through these first pains; the end times began when Jesus ascended. Christ has won, but the world labours like a woman giving birth, and no contraction is meaningless — each is preparing the way. Early labour is long, with time to catch your breath. Then comes transition, which can be overwhelming. “At that point, I usually think, I could be pregnant another nine months, it’s okay.”

▶ 1:26:35

The twentieth century felt like it: earthquakes, famines, plagues, two world wars, the Holocaust — the bloodiest century in history. “And yet the gospel spread further and faster than it ever had,” with revivals unseen since Pentecost. “Jesus is far, far more eager for that day than we are.”

When love grows cold

▶ 1:27:52

Jesus describes a transition to a different kind of tribulation: “They will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you… many will be offended, will betray one another… and because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.” Amy read that line twice.

▶ 1:28:21

Americans do not currently face death for their faith, but brothers and sisters in places like Iran and Pakistan do, “and they really are our family.” We must pray for them — and for ourselves, because lawlessness is rampant in the Western church, a tribulation fallen to our generation. “Do you not feel that love has grown cold in our culture?”

▶ 1:28:55

Think of marriage: when its covenant is broken, love grows cold, children turn against parents, and friends take sides, “because breaking covenant breaks hearts.” We are in covenant with the living God through the blood of his Son.
“Behold what manner of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the sons of God.”

▶ 1:30:19

So we must live as Jesus lived, with the law written on our hearts. Gentile believers are not bound by circumcision or food laws, but we are obliged to live by God’s righteousness — and Jesus raised the bar: lust is adultery and anger is murder (Matthew 5:21–28). Lawlessness is found on the left and the right: “For a Christian, hatred is lawlessness. Violence is lawlessness. Sexual immorality is lawlessness.”

▶ 1:31:35

Jesus has boundless mercy for sinners; when we sin, we run to him. But if we sit in judgment of the law and say it is not good or valid, we are in danger. Paul warned that in later times some would depart from the faith, forbidding marriage and foods (1 Timothy 4:1–3). Those are not our heresies, but redefining marriage is. As Matt said, we are not to point fingers outside the church, but we must let God define our boundaries, even when they conflict with the world. "If the love of Christians is lukewarm, we have no witness."

Take heart

▶ 1:33:22

The good news: lawlessness does not surprise Jesus. He told us it would happen, and "our job is not to prevent lawlessness or to reverse it, but to serve as faithful witnesses." If our hope is in politics or in going back to an easier time, it will fail. "It's like going backwards in labour. You can't do that."

▶ 1:34:04

Amy reads her children the stories of saints like Corrie ten Boom, Brother Andrew, Maximilian Kolbe and Edith Stein, who did not love their lives unto death. "They are not sorry for anything." And Elijah, fed by ravens under Jezebel's threat. "I want my children to see that. Even if they suffer."

▶ 1:35:12

Her firstborn, Noah, now preaching the gospel in a foreign nation, once begged her to take him to hear a visiting prophet. Out of three hundred people, the man called Noah out: *I see you as Rocky Balboa in the ring with the Russian boxer, taking blow after blow. What is Rocky doing? He's winning. You will take blow after blow from the enemy, but you will keep standing, and that is how you will win.* Her heart sank, because she knew it was true, and she prayed for his courage for years.

▶ 1:36:57

This summer she learned that above the bed Noah shares with his wife Kara hangs a plaque: a phrase in their new heart language meaning "a blood tie through thick and thin," the Rocky line — "it ain't about how hard you hit, it's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward" — and their wedding date. "A pretty heavy motto for a marriage." But there is no hit that can take us out of God's hand.

▶ 1:37:43

Jesus has overcome death, shame and sin, and nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38–39). "Faithfulness in trial is in fact the most powerful way we attest to the reality of God in his coming kingdom."

▶ 1:38:18

> *"Let our love never grow cold, even for our enemies, because we were once enemies of Christ. And let us take heart, for Jesus has overcome the world."*

▶ 1:38:52

She invited anyone facing a trial or fear of the days ahead to come forward, and the church gathered to lay hands on them and pray for courage, for hope, and for the glory of the coming kingdom where every tear will be wiped away — closing with "Bind Us Together."

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- Matthew 24–25
- Hebrews 4:12
- John 16:33
- Matthew 16:13–24
- Numbers 13:33
- Joshua 2:9–11
- Acts 5:40–41
- Acts 14:21–22 (NIV)
- Romans 5:1–5 (NKJV)
- 2 Corinthians 1:3–5 (NKJV)
- Jeremiah 2:2–3 (NIV)
- 1 Peter 4:12–13 (NKJV)
- James 1:12
- Mark 9:49
- Matthew 24:3–14
- 1 John 3:1
- Matthew 5:21–28
- 1 Timothy 4:1–3
- Romans 8:38–39

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Amy heard Jesus say his bride “comes through tribulation.” How does that change the way you see the failures and sufferings of the church?
2. Where has fear of being misunderstood or disliked kept you from sharing the gospel, like the faculty who never visited Steven Weinberg’s office?
3. Looking back on a hard season, what perseverance, character or hope did it produce in you?
4. Amy said lawlessness makes love grow cold. Where do you see that in our culture, and in yourself?
5. Who around you is walking through fire right now, and how will you be present to them this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Amy Cogdell and her husband Thomas run Christ the Reconciler, a ministry and retreat centre. She is the author of Runaway Bay, a testimony of healing and reconciliation with her father. The Cogdells have been pillars at Hope Chapel and in the Austin House of Prayer community for decades.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NUaR2XEzQ&t=3739s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.