

VICTORY!

You know, I did a search in a sermon database on overcoming and found that the large majority of topics were about overcoming various vices such as alcoholism or pornography or discouragement – good topics. However, I am intent here upon presenting the specific things Jesus said we, as members of His church, should overcome and how.

In Revelation chapter two and three, He presented admonitions to each of the seven churches to overcome something. That is, He spoke to all of us because we're all in there somewhere – and so no one beats the rap. So, let's look and see if and/or where 'the shoe fits'. Please read Revelation chapters two and three then continue herein.

Here's Ephesus. Jesus says: *To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.*

Now, when you read Revelation chapter two, you notice that this first church was very good at examining doctrine and ministries to validate their authenticity. They were also quite diligent, laboring with perseverance for the Lord. There are many such ministries today which work to defend the faith against myriad heresies. We need them and appreciate them.

Nevertheless (Jesus also said) I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

In the midst of the garden of Eden stood two trees. The tree of life was there along with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As you recall, it was the ability to discern good AND evil that was the bait Satan used on us and it worked. Unfortunately, man has the sinful propensity ever since to see evil everywhere and to focus on it. When that is the case, the inward desire for love, for life, for the very goodness of God wanes. That's why Jesus told this church to overcome in this way – to put their first love back in focus as the main thing. And you know their first love.

So this overcoming is keeping the heart set on Christ and a deep love relationship with Him.

Next, here's Smyrna. Jesus says: *He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.*

This was/is the persecuted church and thus applies to all who suffer for the cause of Christ. Jesus has no criticism of this church but only empathy and encouragement. These folks suffer physically, endure poverty and even die for our Lord. The things they must endure, Jesus says, are not sent by Him but by Satan and his followers, but neither are they necessarily eliminated by Christ. He simply says not to fear them and adds, *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

Oh, how we want and even expect Jesus to deliver us from all our trials. Why, He even taught us to pray to Father God to lead us

not unto temptation but deliver us from evil. And though we can doubt that He has answered those prayers, I'm absolutely convinced that when we get to heaven, one of the things we'll come to understand is just how much evil and temptation He did protect us from. Nevertheless, this world is a battleground and we must continually realize that we are in a war. We often forget or dispel that notion and wonder why, oh why, has this or that befallen me.

This overcoming is holding on to your faith through all the circumstances of this life.

Then, there's Pergamos to whom Jesus says:

To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat. And I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it.

This church, like those of Smyrna, faithfully hold on to their faith even in extreme trial and Jesus commends them for that. They also hold, though, to two specific false doctrines – Balaam's and the Nicolaetan's. Balaam sold his services to the guy with the gold, he was a 'for-profit prophet'. The name Nicolaetan is oddly linked to the word overcome in the Greek – both are based upon the same root, 'nike' – yeah, like the shoe. It means to be victorious or to rule over. Nicolaetan means one who rules over the people. So together, these false doctrines spell money and power (or

notoriety). They also spell trouble with a capital T.

Of course, most of you remember that Jesus specifically told us to give, not to hoard or even focus on acquiring stuff – He said, *So likewise, whosoever he be among you that forsakes not all that he has, he cannot be my disciple.* (Luke 14:33). He also commanded us to serve, just as He did, rather than seeking the so called 'high seat of popularity and leadership' over other Christians. (See Mat 20:27; 23:11; Mk 9:35; 10:44; 2 Cor 4:5; Gal 5:13)

So Jesus' promise to these overcomers addresses these two problems. In "hidden manna" is a reference to the beautiful treasures buried in the Word of God – that is, true doctrine revealed and confirmed. The "white stone" is referring to "tesserae". These were white stones given to those who were victorious in the public games and indicated that they were to be supported by the public for life. They also gave the holders admittance to special events such as feasts or banquets. But the most remarkable of these were the *Tesserae hospitales*, which were given as badges of *friendship* and *alliance*, and on which some name was engraved, as a testimony that a contract of friendship had been made.

So this overcoming deals with searching out the truth of God's word and expecting Him to feed your soul. In addition, it's about serving. When you are truly a servant of God and to your

brethren, you can be tempted to think of your self as a “nobody”. After all, you’re not in the limelight, others are taking the stage and getting the recognitions. Others have the big names everyone knows. But here Jesus says, “Overcome through serving and I’ll give you a special name and with it a special character. I’ll take care of you forever and admit you to My special events. Best of all, you and I will be special friends throughout eternity.”

And now, here’s Thyatira. Jesus says:

And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations -

‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron;

They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’ - as I also have received from My Father;
and I will give him the morning star.

This church is comprised of those who had/have a real handle on works, love, faith and patience but especially works. Lots and lots of good works. Yet, there’s that “Nevertheless” in the passage which Jesus adds and with it He exposes a most serious problem. In fact, it’s one so serious that if not repented of, He says these folks could find themselves in the midst of the Great Tribulation. The culprit is one called Jezebel. Her devilish poisons focus around teaching the believers in this

church to commit sexual crimes against the Lord.

The name Jezebel had a powerful association. If we called someone a “Judas” or a “Hitler” it would mean something strong. It’s also a strong thing to call this woman Jezebel. “She was one of the most evil characters of the Old Testament, who attempted to combine the worship of Israel with the worship of the idol Baal . . . Jezebel herself had a most unenviable record of evil.” (Guzik, Walvoord)

Mixture of religions or the worship of false deities in place of, or along side of, God Almighty is always referred to in scripture as the equivalent of spiritual adultery before Him. Now, this will be especially prevalent during the coming Tribulation time where I’m convinced Christianity will be mixed with Islam and myriad other religions and will perhaps even be promoted by Rome. But to all believers, the message is to never mix your faith in Christ with any other, not with Mammon (materialism), not with new age theism, not with your own self exaltation or pet philosophies, not with politics or patriotism, no other god period.

So this overcoming is an uncompromising one – no mixture but rather pure religion and undefiled. And it hits all of us squarely in the heart, for we all have the ‘natural disposition’ to join our material, political and philosophical preferences with our faith in Jesus Christ. Of course, the Word itself deals with material,

political and philosophical issues, but we can sometimes assume that our interpretive ‘tangents’ are really on the straight and narrow. All the while, they may simply be a mixture of our own making.

For these overcomers, the rewards are two fold. The first is the power to help rule over the nations. This makes sense for there will be no compromise in this rule, no mixed motives or secret agendas. Those who overcome the problem of spiritual compromise are the ones Jesus wants to rule with Him. Second, He promises them the “morning star”. What’s this? Later in the book of Revelation, it is written, *I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, [and] the bright and morning star.* This is the promise is Jesus Himself. No priest or prophet standing between the believers and their Savior – these overcomers get the ultimate reward anyone can have.

Next, there’s Sardis. Jesus says them:

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Names are always important in the Bible. Naming was the first job of mankind back in Eden. But this church is a misnomer. Its name says it’s alive, but Jesus says it’s dead. So what do you say to a dead person? What critique is

there? Not much. Christ simply says to strengthen what little is left that’s not yet dead and repent. Repent of what? Well, He says to remember what they’ve heard and to hold fast to it. The clear implication is that these people just don’t believe what they’ve heard anymore. At least, their faith has all but disappeared – faith in the Word of God, faith in the risen Savior, faith in His second coming. As a result, they are no longer watching for the Lord. Are you like that? Are you watching?

Sardis was also a city well known for its softness and luxury. It had a well-deserved reputation for apathy and immorality. In Sardis there was a large, stately temple to the mother goddess, Cybele. From the ruins of that temple we can see that its main columns were 60 feet high and more than 6 feet in diameter. This mother goddess was honored - “worshipped” - will all kinds of sexual immorality and impurity.

The combination of easy money and a loose moral environment made the people of Sardis notoriously soft and pleasure loving. “The great characteristic of Sardis was that, even on pagan lips, Sardis was a name of contempt. Its people were notoriously loose-living, notoriously pleasure-and luxury loving. Sardis was a city of decadence.” (Guzik, Barclay)

Whew! This group is in real danger. Jesus clearly says that there’s a dire possibility that He will blot their names from the Book

of Life if they do not overcome. *The risen Christ is saying that, if we wish to remain on the roll of the citizens of God, we must keep our faith flamingly alive.*" (Barclay)

If their names are in the Book of Life, it's because they, at some time, had saving faith in Christ.

Therefore, this overcoming has to do with stoking the fire of faith. How do you do that, and conversely, what is it that tends to quench faith?

There's a clue in the passage itself. Jesus says to them, *I have not found your works perfect before God.* That is, their works are incomplete in God's eyes. Either they are missing closure so to speak in their works or they are missing a vital quality about them. This means that this church has given up walking the walk, or else they are just pretending -- doing what they're doing without the heart attitude that makes their works those of which God approves.

There's no better way to fan the flames of personal faith in Jesus than to get back into a purely motivated, obedient continuation of living out the gospel. The key is to finish what God has given you to do, to walk, to be, with a sincere, humble repentance. Dump whatever has gotten in the way both inwardly and outwardly. Whatever has bummed you, embittered you or bound you is not worth losing a place in the Book of Life. It's quite sobering to read Jesus saying that there are *a few even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments.* Clean

garments speak of sincere faith in Christ.

There is a Book of Life, and there are five different references to people being blotted out of the Book of Life (Ex 32:32,33; Psa 69:28; Rev 3:5; Rev 22:19). This means that the idea of being blotted out of the Book of Life should be taken seriously. Perhaps it is only a symbol, and that person's name was never there to begin with. Even if that is the case, the Lord still wants us to take it seriously, because there are some who by every human appearance are saved, yet will not be in heaven. (Guzik)

His reward to these overcomers is three fold – a white garment which speaks of true righteousness (as opposed to self righteousness), inclusion in the Book of Life and His confession of His true relationship with them before God the Father and the heavenly host.

Then there's Philadelphia. The Lord says: *He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.*

Philadelphia is given an open door both to missions and to heaven itself. Their commendation is that they have held to God's Word, have not denied His name – which means

they have lived in such a way that people see God's nature (i.e. name) in them, and they have a little strength – that is, they depend upon God's strength. *"The church of Philadelphia is commended for keeping the Word of the Lord and not denying His Name. Success in Christian work is not to be measured by any other standard of achievement. It is not rise in ecclesiastical position. It is not the number of new buildings which have been built through a man's ministry. It is not the crowds that flock to listen to any human voice. All of these things are frequently used as yardsticks of success, but they are earthly and not heavenly measures."* (Barnhouse)

Now, Philadelphia is known as the faithful church, but even they have an overcoming to do. Jesus tells them, *Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.* What they have is that they're doing it the simple, right way – no fanfare, no spectacle if you would. **Their overcoming has to do with the need to 'keep on keeping on'.** They're running a good race and nothing can prevent them from finishing except themselves.

The promise to them reflects the stability or faithful continuance in their 'race' that Jesus desires. As a pillar in the presence of God, throughout eternity they will no more be far from the Lord. And to boot, these overcomers will have three new names/natures – that of Father God, that of heaven itself and that of Jesus Christ. Wow!

Lastly, there's Laodicea to whom Jesus says: *To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

Now, no one wants to be a part of Laodicea. This is the lukewarm, self-satisfied assembly who has left Jesus outside. Yet, because they are a church, it is reasonable to assume that at some point, Jesus was inside. Their condition, however, has become so repulsive to the Lord, He says *because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.* And yet, there He is at their door, knocking! He is certainly unlike anyone I know. His patience and grace are just unfathomable.

Laodiceans are in 'la-la land'. They're completely unaware of their condition. Jesus says to them, you *do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.* Remember, these are not unbelievers but pastors and pewsters. However, Jesus knows what they need to wake them up – tribulation, trials, persecution. There's fire in their future. Did you think His knock at their door would be a gentle rap? No way. He adds, *I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.*

The church in Smyrna thought they were poor while in truth they were really rich (Rev 2:9), but the church of the Laodiceans believe they are rich when they are really poor. What's the difference? Persecution.

The church of Laodicea needs to have their lukewarm faith put into the fire. Peter wrote, *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:* Now, Jesus will appear two times in the near future – at the rapture and at His second coming. In between, is what is known as the fiery tribulation time. It is in this time that Laodiceans will finally see their true condition, their utter need for Jesus. It is in this kind of situation that they will welcome Him back in to their lives. In Revelation chapter seven, those who come out of the tribulation, having been killed for their faith in Christ, are given white garments.

But this isn't constrained to the tribulation period, is it? Even now, if God has allowed difficulty into your life and you wonder why, it could be that He's knocking on your own door. Listen. Do you hear the voice of His Spirit? Let him back in. He'll do the rest.

So this overcoming is singular in nature, and uniquely, Jesus says that it is the same type of overcoming He did Himself. You see, in heaven Jesus was, in truth, rich and in need of nothing, but He chose to obey

His Father's will and trust Him even in the terrible trials He suffered. Look at Revelation chapter seven again. Many of those people in white robes surrounding the Lamb are from Laodicea. They will share the throne of the Lamb! Fortunately, vomit is not the end of the story but rather victory. Jesus knows how to wake up His church. Being 'left behind' is not a condemnation. It's not about rejection but rather repentance, revival and resurrection. Hallelujah!

In conclusion, to all of us as believers, Jesus says, *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.* To which John the apostle adds, *You are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

Take a sec and look again at all the churches. Notice how all the admonitions to overcome involve faith - simple, sincere, uncluttered faith in Jesus Christ as our risen Savior and Lord. That's because, *whosoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, [even] our **faith**.* *Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that **believes** that Jesus is the Son of God?* (See John 16:33;1 John 4:4;5:4,5)