

Demystifying Overcoming

Let's have a word of prayer:

Lord, we do come rejoicing in You, rejoicing in Your mercy, the greatness of who You are, and the great wonder of who You are and all Your wondrous works. Lord, we thank You that You have given us Your Word, and by faith we want to step into the fulness of what You have for us today from Your Word. In Your precious name. Amen.

I Corinthians 2:9-10a: "But just as it is written, Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man. All that God has prepared for those who love Him. For to us God revealed them through the Spirit. But just as it is written, things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him. For to us God revealed them through the Spirit."

I have been thinking about this verse lately and just that little phrase at the end of verse 9: "All that God has prepared for those who love Him." Do we know the vastness of what that 'all' is? When we start touching all that God has prepared for us, you understand a little bit of what Paul touches on in Ephesians where he speaks of the "unsearchable riches of Christ. Throughout our whole life upon this earth here, we are progressing through more and more, learning more and more of what He has prepared for us, allowing us to enter into more of His riches.

One of the things that He has prepared for us and paid the price for us at Calvary is the overcoming life. We can overcome because He overcame. And we are thankful for the privilege we have that that has been given to us, and we are going to consider that today. And as we look back at the hymn "A Life of Overcoming" verse 1 that we just sang, it is wonderful how she just affirms that.

“A life of overcoming, a life of ceaseless praise, Be this thy blessed portion throughout the coming days. The victory was purchased on Calvary’s cross for thee.”

Praise God, that is a fact, the victory of Christ in all that He has for us is a settled issue. “And sin shall not have dominion because the Son has made thee free.” Praise God for that. We are very thankful as we consider this more today. We will read a couple of other verses in Revelation 2. Now to each of the churches in Revelation chapters 2-3, a similar call goes out, but I am not going to read all seven of those verses.

Revelation 2:7: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. And to him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.”

Revelation 5:4-5: They were looking around to see who was worthy to open that book. “John began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it, and one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping, behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.”

Praise God, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the root of David has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.

Revelation 12:11: They had just overcome the dragon of Satan, and how did they overcome? The testimony is here in Revelation 12:11: “And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.”

I John 5:4: “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world, and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.” Our faith is in Him; He is our faith. It is not something we work up in ourselves, but He is our faith, and we are thankful for that.

God is Doing a Great Work

As we look around the world and everything that is going on today, there is probably one thing that most everybody in the world, whether you are talking about believers or unbelievers, agree on. Everybody pretty much agrees that we cannot go on the way we are going. There is debauchery, declension, everything out of control. The world even has a doomsday clock, and they have an answer. And what they think is the answer is man. Man can fix it; we will bring climate control under this, we will eliminate this, we will do all of that. And we see through history that man has always failed, but God has an answer. God has an answer in His Son and in His bride. And praise God in spite of the days of debauchery and declension, we believe God is doing a great work. It is not seen by the whole world, but God is doing a great work of preparing a people for Himself and for His soon return.

He is calling out to His people in a marvelous way to wake up. As we have been lulled to sleep, as we have drifted away as it speaks in Hebrews, He is crying out to us to return to Him. And praise God, many are returning because He is preparing a people all over the world; He is doing a great work. This is the question for us: "Are we involved in that great work?" Are we actively involved in it or are we just spectators who are reading about it, googling about it, seeing all the marvelous things that He is doing. Are we actively involved in it? This is the challenge that He has for us.

There is one cry that goes out from God's heart, particularly characteristic of the last days and the last hour, and I am using the word, "Cry." Some people say called, but I am using "cry" because cry comes more from the heart. It is a heartfelt thing. You do not cry about things you do not care about, but we hear the cry from God's heart. And you see it particularly in John's writings: "It is the cry to overcome." And it is the last hour. In spite of everything that is going on, there is a cry going out to all of God's people to overcome.

Now as soon as I mention the word “overcome” everybody has various reactions to this because we have a lot of false concepts. There have been those who have had false teaching about this in most everything, and it has created so much misunderstanding. What is upon my heart today is to bring this down that some have lifted up so high, and make it entreatable for us because that is the testimony in my life. I remember when I first heard some dear brothers sharing about overcoming, I said, “That is a great teaching, but that is not for me.” I looked at myself; I saw my struggles, my failures, my weaknesses, the circumstances I was in, my priorities in life, and I said, “Not for me. Praise God, I will support them, and they can just go on.”

But I thank God for His mercy. As I have been thinking about this more and more, by His wonderful mercy He is helping me to gain a little more understanding of this call and cry to overcome. It is a progressive thing because we are overcoming in our whole life. It is not like all of a sudden, “Boom,” you have overcome. No, it is day by day. We face something one day, and by His grace and His victory we go through it. Then we go through another thing the next day, and that is why I am so thankful how the Holy Spirit and His Word have been helping me. At least in my own heart I have called it the demystifying of overcoming, because I had such a mystique about it that I had to have it shattered. Now I am still working through that, but I am thankful, how by His grace, He is ever patient with us.

The Victory Has Been Won

As we consider this word “overcoming” we can go to the Greek word “Nike.” It means “to win the victory and to overcome.” Thank the Lord, it is that thought that we have; He has won the victory, He has overcome, and He is the all victorious One. In many ways, when we look at the Nike Swoosh, it is like a ‘V’ for victory. Actually, do you know what that ‘V’ came from? It came from the Greek goddess Nike; she was the god of

victory, and it is representative of one of her wings. I like it as a 'V' for victory, but it is really not that at all.

However, we see the confidence we have is that He has won the victory. He has overcome and He is the victorious One as we read in Revelation 5. He has overcome the world, He has overcome sin, He has overcome the flesh, He has overcome the devil. Whatever is out there, He has overcome it. There was a complete and full victory. And because He has overcome, each believer, each one of us now has that overcoming life living within us, and that overcoming life is desiring to burst forth in every circumstance we face to prove Himself to us. He does not force Himself on us. As we surrender to Him and allow Him to come into what He is calling us to, we can start experiencing that.

I was thinking about this, and in that hymn we sang it says, "Though all the path before thee, the host of darkness fill, Look to thy Father's promise, and claim the victory still. Faith sees the heavenly legions, where doubt sees nought but foes, and through the very conflict, her life the stronger grows."

Praise God for that! Praise God, that faith sees through all of the circumstances of life to the victory, to the heavenly beautiful picture that we have in Him.

There is another hymn, I was thinking of sharing today, but one that we like to sing is, "Faith is the victory. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world." It is a faith in Him, and He is desiring to really show forth the excellency of all that He has prepared for us and desiring us to enter in and share that.

The Cry Has Gone Out

There is a cry that goes out, and who does it go out to? Really, it goes out to all of God's people. In Revelation chapters 2-3, you can see this cry going out to the seven churches which are representative of all God's people. It goes out to all of God's people, but you will notice the response

is individual. The response to overcome is an individual response. There are no overcoming assemblies. Assemblies do not overcome; individuals overcome. In the end, there will be a corporate vessel of those that have overcome, but it is made up of individuals not assemblies.

I think all of us in many ways will probably be surprised. When you look around, you will see people from every tribe, tongue and nation. You can also add from every denomination, from Catholicism, or whatever group it might be. Some will be there that have never even heard of the teaching of overcoming. Why are they there? Because they have within them the life of the Overcomer, the One who had won the victory. It is not dependent upon our teaching, it is not dependent upon knowledge, but it is dependent upon His life being lived out and expressed to Him and through us.

Why is this cry to overcome? The cry to overcome comes out of a jealous heart for the Son's bride to be made ready. The Father is so jealous that His Son's bride would be make ready, and He sends this cry that goes forth. His cry goes out and His great love for the people of God to return to Him, to repent, and put aside things that are distracting us, things that are weakening us, and be the testimony that He has called us to be.

Today, as you look around Christianity, there is a lot of outward form of Godliness, but where is the inward reality of His life being expressed through His people? It is one of the reasons I appreciate the testimony times every month because you get to see that life being expressed in so many wonderful different ways. I am very thankful for that. But we hear this cry of love that is going out to us today. And the question today is: "We all have an ear to hear. Having an ear to hear is not the issue, but do we hear what the Spirit says to the church? Do we hear?" We have the ability, we have the enablement; He has given us everything we need to hear His voice, but do we hear it? And the hearing in the Scriptures also means responding and obeying. It is not just to gain knowledge about it,

not just to hear about it, but it is allowing it to impact our lives. The decisions we make, where we go, what we do, the priorities we set, are they coming from the foundation of His call upon our lives? As we respond to Him in faith, it allows the precious Holy Spirit to use the work of the cross to allow us to experience more and more of this victory of overcoming. It is not our efforts. It is not our efforts at all, but it is simply His life being lived out in us.

The Hindrances to Overcoming

There are a couple of great hindrances to overcoming, and one of them is unbelief. Our eyes are on self, the circumstances or being entangled in the world. It is like what we read in the hymn: “Faith is the opposite of unbelief; faith sees the heavenly legions, where doubt or unbelief sees the foes. Faith sees the victory; faith sees the Overcomer.” It is so easy and comes so natural to us to see the circumstances around us and say, “I can never do that.” But may the Lord help us to deal with this issue of unbelief in our hearts and lives.

This is the way the Lord has always worked. If you think back upon His first coming, who was there to greet Him? It was a few faithful, unnoticed people— Mary and Joseph, Elizabeth and Zachariah, some shepherds out in the field. A great religious ceremony was going on in Jerusalem. They had the knowledge of His coming. They could tell you exactly where He was to be born, but they missed that Life that came, and they could not see through. If you look at all the parables related to our Lord’s second coming, what does He commend people for? Does He commend them for their Biblical knowledge? Does He commend them for how many meetings and conferences they went to? He commends them for being faithful. He commends them for being on the alert. He commends them for being wise and watchful. Now as you are on the alert, you are faithful and wise, and you are following Him, you will be at meetings, you will be with God’s people, you will hunger and thirst for those opportunities to be with them. But it was not the other way around that allows us to enter

into the overcoming life. It is allowing His life to be lived out and expressed through us in the daily activities we encounter.

Who Is an Overcomer?

I wanted to consider what some people have said when asked the question: “Who is an overcomer?” But before I say that, how many times in the Scripture is the word overcomer used? Actually, zero. The word “overcomer” is never used in Scripture. That does not mean the principal of it is not in a life. It is like the word “trinity” which is never used in Scripture, but there is a truth in it. The word “overcomer” as a noun is never used. Overcoming is always a verb; it is an action being lived out in a life. I was speculating on this that maybe the Holy Spirit did it on purpose. He never named a person as an overcomer because we would turn it into a position. We would turn it into a title. Now for fellowship we can use the word. I am not telling you to eliminate it from your vocabulary, but be aware that it is not a noun; it is an action, it is a life lived out within us. So often we can hear ones say, “I am an overcomer, or he is an overcomer.” No! If anybody is an overcomer, we could say Christ is *the* Overcomer without any doubt. He is *the* overcomer, and we have that overcoming life living within us.

Speaking of an overcomer Brother Sparks said, “An overcomer is not someone who is perfect, elite or a superman, but someone who is in the will of God at the end of their earthly life.”

It is finishing the race well. No matter how many times they have fallen, in the end they have gotten back up into the will of God. There is nothing to boast of in ourselves. Praise God! We all fall. The enemy says, “You are out now; no more hope.” No, we can get back up by the blood of the Lamb.

One of the things that all of these brothers consistently speak of is that it is not some elite group, it is not some special group, it is not someone like a superman, it is not like the Equalizer or Terminator. No, it

is Him; that is who He is, it is His life. But the enemy wants us to get our eyes on ourselves instead of seeing the Victor. As soon as our eyes get on ourselves, we actually see truth in ourselves. We see our weakness, we see our frailty. We give up at times, and we start to believe the enemy's lies. And that is where unbelief comes in again instead of standing on the truth of what He has done and believing in the Word of God. We want to be those who are allowing Him to show us in a fuller and greater way this matter of overcoming.

Brother Kaung says, "An overcomer is one who is living (note the word living) the normal Christian life." It is not supernormal but normal. Sadly, many today live subnormal Christian lives not possessing our inheritance in Christ. Notice that last little phrase: not possessing our inheritance in Christ, not possessing all that He has prepared before us as we read in I Corinthians. Ah, there is so much of the riches that He is wanting us to possess and enter into and live that normal Christian life.

Brother Lance says, "An overcomer simply means to "come over." Whatever the obstacle, we come over it by His overcoming life in us. We have that all victorious life regardless of the circumstance; we have a life that can overcome.

Some say as they talk about this matter of overcoming that it appears to be based on works. But what about grace? Isn't it all of grace? There was a dear brother in California, Floyd Police, who was a great proponent of the grace of God. He could out talk anybody on grace, but when he saw this matter of the overcomer, he said in his commentary on Revelation, "It is idiotic to say it is contrary to the doctrine of grace." These are ones who actually know more of His grace in their daily lives than the rest of us because they know it is not of them. Out of these ones there are works, but their works are a fruit of His life in them. It is not the way to His life. Some of us get it backward. We think our works will make us more spiritual or they will allow us to enter in more. No, our works are the fruit of His life working in us. When we deny ourselves and allow the

grace of God to take over and bring us into what He has. That is the overcoming life.

How Do We Overcome?

In the letter to the church in Laodicea it says, “We overcame as He overcame.” We are encouraged to overcome as He overcame. How did Jesus overcome? He overcame as the Lamb of God. He went to the cross and He died. He did not overcome as the Mighty Lion. In those verses in Revelation it speaks of Him as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, but when you turn around and looked at it, you see a Lamb of God freshly slain. How do we overcome? By dying, going down. How did those ones in Revelation 12 overcome? How did they overcome the works of the enemy? It says, “They overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and they loved not their life unto death.” They are three very simple straight forward things. It is not some high elevated things that are so far out of reach, but it is right before us, very entreatable—the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, loving not our life unto death. And it is so precious these dear ones. But we could easily forget in the hecticness of daily life the necessity of the Word of God. The Word of God is there every day for us to feed upon in order to be strengthened. It is interesting when maybe you are with somebody at a time in their life that they are going through something, and you say, “As you read the Word this morning, what did God speak to you?” “I did not read the Word.” “How often do you read it?” “Well, I am so busy I have so many problems in my life, I do not have time for it.” Sometimes it is a shock to our system to realize how little the people of God read the Word. It is one of the ways we get to know Him through the Word of God or through fellowship. It is so precious. It is not only the Word of God that we come into communion with Him, but also in meditating upon Him through fellowship with brothers and sisters. That is the reality of how we get to know Him.

One of the things you notice about ones who are experiencing this overcoming life, is that it comes from a firsthand experience with Him. It is not secondhand; it is a firsthand experience. You have a firsthand encounter with Him as He meets you in a particular problem or a particular situation. You experience that overcoming life. Praise God for that!

As we look at these three things, the blood of the Lamb, the Word of their testimony, loving not their life unto death, they are very straight forward. What does the blood of the Lamb speak of? It speaks of our salvation, how we have been redeemed and the past is concluded. Daily, it speaks of our continual cleansing of the blood of the Lamb from all of our sins, and also that He is our shield, He is our defender, He is our Mighty One.

I love that little chorus: “No weapon formed against us can stand because we are under the blood of the Lamb.” Praise God for that! It is His blood, and all that He has done.

It also shows us that living an overcoming life is not living a sinless perfect life. Every person that is overcoming is a great sinner, but they are sinners cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. Somehow we think that the more spiritual we become, the less we are sinners. Now we might stop sinning less; we might not sin as much as we used to on certain things. Our vocabulary changes; things like that happen. But we are thankful when we do sin every day that we have the blood of the Lamb. And because of that certainty and security we have of the blood of the Lamb, we have a strong testimony. It strengthens our testimony because of all that He has done we can say, “Jesus Christ is Lord.” That is our testimony. He is Lord, and it is not just words in our mouth. We might not even utter the words, but it is seen in our life; it is expressed. God is jealous for the life of His Son to be expressed through His people. When you look at all the different aspects of the Lord, God is always jealous that these aspects of My Son would be manifest through My people. This aspect would be

manifest in you and me. Praise God for that! He wants ones to know Jesus Christ is Lord of this person's life. It is far more than just words.

And then there is "loving not our life unto death." In the recent book out on some teachings on Ezekeil, there is a phrase in Ezekeil over fifty times. What was God's cry consistently throughout Ezekeil? "That they might know that I am Lord." Over fifty plus times these words were spoken by Ezekeil. That was a burden within Ezekiel's heart coming from God's heart for His people, simply wanting them to know that He was Lord, He was Master, and He was caring for them. They could say it with their lips; they could sing the songs about Him being the King, but was He lived out in their lives? That was what He is jealous for.

And finally, loving not our life unto death because at times it can involve physical death, but more often it involves a death to self. That is our great enemy—self. Self is full of unbelief in Him; it believes in our self. No matter how many times we fail, what do we say? Next time I will get it right. It is amazing how in some things we can be so positive about our self. It is like for fifty years every time this happens you are wiped out, but next time I will get. It is that unbelief in Him and what He has done. And that other great hindrance to pressing on in our personal life and our life together is self. Self-love is so strong. We are watching out for our own interest. Because of our self-love we get so attached to the things of the world, and we become rooted in this world. We get entangled with it, and it overwhelms us and ensnares us, and we say, "It is impossible, I cannot overcome this. I cannot; just look at this situation." No, look to Him. If we look at our circumstances, it always discourages us. Often when we are overwhelmed, and we look at these circumstances, sure some of the circumstances are overwhelming absolutely. I am not making light of anybody's circumstance, but I am just trying to show how God is greater than our circumstances. Praise God. It does not matter what circumstance you have, how overwhelming it is, God is greater and He has a way for us.

Sometimes when we find ourselves overwhelmed by a circumstance, it is because of His great love. He is wanting to do something within us; He wants to set us free from ourself more and more. He is desiring to disentangle from the pull and perils of this world because if we are honest, each one of us has deep hidden character faults and flaws. Only the Holy Spirit and the working of the cross can deal with them. Praise God! One of the greatest displays of God's love is that He does not deal with us publicly. He does not expose your sin to everybody on Facebook and say, "Now what is he going to do?" He does not deal like that. He comes in with that still small voice. He speaks to us and says, "I want you to be set free of it because it is entangling you." Unconsciously, we can love these things because they are our identity; they are our security, and He wants us to be set free so that He will be our identity. He would be our security in all of these things. Sometimes the circumstance does not change, but we do, and we overcome in them. In the life that we see in Him, circumstances might not change, but we see how He changes us. That is why this verse 4 from this hymn meant so much.

It says, "More stern will grow the conflict as nearer our King's return, and they alone can face it who this great lesson learn, that from them God asks nothing but to unlatch the door to your heart. Unlatch that door admitting Him who through them will conquer evermore."

He is calling us to surrender unto Him and allow Him to conquer evermore. Praise God! This is what we are looking for. And He is wanting each of us to enjoy and have that firsthand experience with Him.

I mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 the call to the seven churches, and in each one of them there is a cry to overcome. And you will see consistently within the cry to overcome there are some things that are mentioned. It is not once things get better, then overcome. No, so often we will say, "Once the circumstances change, once they get better, then I will overcome." No! It is not when your circumstances change, nor when someone else does it for you, nor by going somewhere else. We are

called to overcome right where we are, and we could put the word 'today' there—right where we are today. This is where we are called to overcome, and this is the provision that He has made for us. He has called us to overcome, even if things never change.

Now we are not trying to make light of the circumstances, whether it be physical circumstances, emotional circumstances, natural disasters, conflicts with brethren, conflicts within our own families, or others. If our eyes are upon the circumstance, our response is, "I can't." And that is true, but we end up stopping there so often in unbelief instead of taking a step of faith, "I cannot but He can because He has overcome." For many of us the circumstances just put us in a whirlwind, and we cannot think straight, we cannot go this way, we cannot go that way, they can paralyze us. But praise God, by the grace of God, wherever we find ourselves in life there is a way through because He has made that way, and He has overcome. When He died at Calvary and prepared this life for us, there was not anything that He did not conquer. There is not anything that He did not make provision for us.

Each one of us love to play a lawyer's role. What is the little phrase that we love to say? "Except! I know God did all of this stuff, except for this." All of it period, full stop. That is it; He has made the full provision for us, and He is calling us to enter into it. One of the calls we have upon our lives in this day and time as God's people is to restrain evil. How do we restrain evil? How is evil restrained? By saints overcoming. We cannot restrain evil in ourselves, but the overcoming Life within God's people can restrain evil. It is going to get worse and worse in these days, but we have got to be those that are overcoming in the midst of the debauchery of this world and hopefully by God's grace, and our yielding to Him, there will be a restraint of evil. Evil is coming; it is not going to turn around and run. Evil is coming; it is in our face now, and it is coming even harder and more intense in the days ahead. That is why the overcoming life has overcome evil, and by that life being strong in His saints, strong in His people, the testimony of God being strengthened, there can be a

restraint upon evil and a restraint that protects us individually, protects us as families; it is a mighty shield for us. And can we really enter into that?

Overcoming Is A Reward

One other thing I wanted to say about overcoming before we look at those seven letters to the churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. As you consider overcoming, we find that overcoming is a reward. If you look at each of the promises that was made in those verses that you read, there is a promise within them. I am not going back and read the all the verses but in verse 2:7 it says, "I will grant you to eat from the tree of life." In 3:21: "To sit down on My throne." Praise God, that is to Laodicea. They were not disqualified. "You repent and return to me and sit on my throne with me." There is another phrase that is used four times: "I will give you the crown of life; I will give you a new name; I will give you authority over the nations." Praise God for what He has done! He is giving this to us as we return to Him, and He gives us these wonderful privileges.

Verse 3:5 says, "I will confess His name before my Father and the angels." I think it is interesting that He puts the angels in there. He said, "I will confess your name."

Verse 3:12 says, "I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God." What precious, magnificent promises we have by His grace as we respond and return and enter into His call to overcome. We enter into the greatness of what He has for us.

Now as we look at this matter of overcoming, I am not going to get into any of the prophetic interpretations of when this is going to occur. There are many interpretations, but my desire is to bring the thought of overcoming down to our daily life, and keep it that way because all of the interpretations of the future speak of overcoming as a reward. There is a reward for those who are faithful, and all interpretations agree on that. We are not going to get distracted by the when this occurs or when that

occurs because the issue is His life in us. You know, we do not get extra credit at the end by getting the interpretation right nor do we get punished if the interpretation is wrong. But if we can follow Him daily, live in the light of His life, let His life lead us and guide us, let Him truly be Lord of our life, loving not our lives unto death, regardless of how all this works out, we will be in the right place at the right time and He will carry us through. It is absolute security!

One of my least favorite interpretations is post tribulation. I do not like that thought of everybody going through the tribulation and everybody is taken afterwards. I do not like that one. But I know if that is the way it works out, we have a place of absolute security, an absolute confidence in Him that He will carry us through victoriously by His life. So praise God, we do not have to fear that. We might not look forward to it, but we do not have to fear it. So in His great love He is crying out to us.

One of the things that you will notice as we look at these cries to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, most all of them except for two, there are two sets of people. There are ones that have gone astray, and there are ones that are continuing faithful. Who is the cry to overcome to? Who is the cry to repent and return to? Who does that cry go out to? Is it just to those who are pressing on? No! It goes out to everyone. You see His great love and mercy in that He has not written anybody off. Some of these places were in pretty bad shape, but He has not written them off. No matter how far down the wrong road you have gone, no matter how far you are off on your teaching, doctrine or belief or whatever else is going on in your life, there is a way to return. His great love and mercy is manifest in each of these letters. We are not going to do these letters in detail, but we are going to overview them.

The Church at Ephesus

The church at Ephesus is very familiar because we hear that little phrase, "They left their first love." They were doing many outwardly religious things. They were very active, doing the right things, going

through all the right motions, they had all the right meetings, but there was a call to them to overcome their religious life and return to their first love that they had left. And it can be a challenge to not fall into becoming outwardly religious. That is why I appreciated what Joey said last week about the Lord's Table. Sometimes we can make it routine and fall into it making it a tradition.

What does it mean to be religious? It is separating His life from what we are doing. It is simply separating His life, disconnecting from Him, going through on auto pilot, tradition, routine, self-interest, good intentions. He is not Head anymore, and that is where you become purely religious. Actually, at the Lord's first coming many of the Jewish people were very religious, but He found ones who knew Him and were faithful unto Him. The wonderful thing about this call is that it is not focused on our outward actions but on our inward heart, the inward cry of our heart to return to Him. If you have gone away or you are going through all the religious motions, repent and return to that place of having that intimate, personal relationship, that first love with Him because those who overcome are lovers of God. Our Lord Jesus overcame because He was a lover of God. Those who overcome are lovers of God. May we stay in that place of first love, keeping it fresh daily within our hearts and lives.

The Church at Smyrna

The church at Smyrna was not rebuked because they were going through a lot of persecution. So it is a great letter of encouragement to them, encouraging them to be faithful even unto death, and they would get that crown of life. And those who are suffering will not be hurt by that second death. Praise God! We know that there are ones in this world that are undergoing severe persecution right now. The torture, the killing, the various persecution that goes on such as in Pakistan where ones are being enslaved.

It turns out that a brother lives a couple of houses down from us and Stella was talking with them the other day. He is fairly new in the

neighborhood, but finally we were able to talk with him. He was from Tunisia which is in N. Africa, a Muslim country. And he was saying how when his parents and he became believers, they had to leave Tunisia. You lose your job, you lose your place to live, you lose everything by simply becoming a believer, and they knew that when they became believers, but they were able to migrate over to this country. There is a persecution that goes on in many places. But we actually encounter persecution every day of our lives as we observe the world around us that we are living in. There is persecution in the schools, in work places, friends, family, various ways that we go through persecution. Within the work environment there are so many social justice programs, and schools. There are diversity programs, inclusive programs, many things that are going on, and they force themselves upon you. If you do not conform to a certain standard in the program of the academic world, you have a challenge on even passing the course.

There is a young brother In the work environment in Houston, and he works for one of the major accounting firms. His firm celebrates Pride Month in June every year. On every one of the work emails, there is a footer with some wording about celebrating Pride Month in June, and the flag is on it. Any work email that he sends out has this information on it. So he was trying to send as few emails as possible during June. He was texting people and calling people, trying to avoid it in any way possible. But when you are in that environment, sure, you have a choice and you can quit. There is always a choice.

So we can see just how trying it is to overcome and be faithful right in the midst of certain situations. This is what the persecution has for the Christians, and we can be faced with all these challenges with various pressures to be tempted to give in so we will be accepted. We like being accepted by people. We do not like being rejected by anyone, but our Lord was willing to be rejected. And in that overcoming life He was able to enter into rejection and be despised by man. But the wonderful thing and the encouraging thing about it in this letter is that even if we have

succumbed to persecution or to the temptation of not allowing Him to be our sufficiency, He still calls. He says that there is a way: “Repent and come back to Me, and I will carry you through this.” Praise God! What love! One who overcomes is one who is living a martyr’s life. You know, Peter suffered a martyr’s death and John lived a martyr’s life. If we are going to overcome in these days, we are going to have to live a martyr’s life of loving not our self-life unto death, then we can be those experiencing Him.

The Church at Pergamon

The third church is Pergamon which means, “you compromise with the world.” Today, Christianity is so entangled by worldliness. As you look, at times it is hard to separate the things of the world and the things of Christianity. And it is a great challenge for believers in assemblies in this day and time because there are many ways of the world that have come in, and there is such a lack of separation today.

I think about the music industry. I enjoy listening to Christian music, but the challenge that I have sometimes is, if I am in an unfamiliar area and I turn on the radio, (I still use radio and not some of the other programs such as Spotfire or any of that stuff.) if a channel comes on, and I am listening to the music, whereas it used to be that as soon as the music came on, I knew whether it was Christian or non-Christian. Now as I listen I am not quite sure, maybe it is, maybe it isn’t, and I am trying to differentiate. It comes in so much like that. Even the whole thought of fund raising is not right, “Just put an ATM machine out here for the people; it will make it a lot easier, and everything will go much smoother.” Another thing that has come into the church today which is very sad is the whole matter of politics. At times, I think some believers trust politicians more than they do the Lord. But we see how politics can come into the church. Now we need to be faithful in the country where we live, and there is a place for all of that. However, that place is not to govern the church and direct the things of the church.

But praise God, even here in that cry to Pergamon where ones were fully compromised, there is that love that calls, “Separate yourself back, and continue on.” Because ones who overcome are ones who are separated unto the Lord, not just out of the world but unto Him, separated unto Him.

The Church at Thyatira

The next church is Thyatira, and this is what is called the apostate church. As you read through that church letter, it says, “They rejected the Lord and actually brought in the teaching of Satan and Jezebel. And sadly, in Christianity today, that is occurring. There are ones who are teaching things totally contrary to the very character and nature of our Lord, calling good evil, evil good, devaluing the Word of God, even saying, “It is worthless.” Even the very precious things that God has created are being devalued such as marriage. We will not go down that road today. How about the gender identity? We are not going to do that today. How do you get saved? How many ways are there to be saved? The enemy has brought so much in, and there are actually so-called churches and groups out there that are saying this is all okay, and it is wonderful. It really shows the signs of the end days.

But praise God, even if we have gone down that path and accepted the untruth, accepted the false teachings, He is saying. “I love you so much that I want you to return. It is not too late; you have not gone too far down the path. It is not too late; you can return to Me, and I will return to you, and I will strengthen you.” Because those who overcome are those who have a single heart towards the Lord. They are not double minded, they are not divided in their ways. There is a purity within them, a singleness of heart towards Him.

The Church at Sardis

Then we come to Sardis, and this is the characteristic verse in Sardis: “You appear to be alive, but you are dead.” And there is a call to wake up.

There is a great wake-up cry going out today among all God's people. In all of these natural disasters and the debauchery, everything that is going on, there is really a cry, "Don't you see what is going on? Wake up in the midst of this." And thankfully, it is still called today, and we have this opportunity to wake up. Where we have been disillusioned, where we have been disheartened, where we have been offended, if we have given up, if we have fainted, we can still get back up. He calls us to get up and come back into the race. That is love; that is mercy. His great love and great mercy is to all, encouraging ones that are faithful to keep pressing on, but those who have been unfaithful in whatever it might be, it is under the blood of the Lamb.

How did they overcome? By the blood of the Lamb. They say, "Lord, I was wrong." And we continue on. Those who overcome are ones that are having a daily, living abiding relationship in Him just like He has with His Father.

The Church at Philadelphia

The next church is Philadelphia. This is one of the churches where there is no rebuke at all, and they appear to be very faithful. Outwardly, if you looked at Philadelphia they were somewhat insignificant, but what did they have? They had a little power, they kept His Word, and they had not denied His name. They were faithful in that. So why was there a call for them to overcome? What was the great temptation that Philadelphia would face? He told them to hold fast to what they have. What did they have? They had His life, they had His presence, but He was warning them not to give in to the temptation of pride because the more you have of Christ, pride can easily come forth, and it can begin to separate. "So hold fast to what you have."

Remember in I Corinthians some of the groups that they had. Some were of Paul, some of Cephas, and some said, "Yep, but I am of Christ." They were not saying that in a very humble way. That was a very proud boasting. It is like many groups today because of certain teachings or

experiences they say, “We are it.” Now they probably never come right out and exactly say that, but that is the message they give. And we need to be those that are staying humble before Him.

As we look upon these dear ones in Philadelphia who looked so insignificant, what was their key? They were dependent upon the Lord in everything. They lived a dependent life because He lived a dependent life. He did not do anything on His own, only what the Father did.

The Church at Laodicea

Then we come to Laodicea: “He who overcomes I will grant to him to sit down with me on my throne as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

What a great call we have here because Laodicea is very much the picture of the days we are living in. It is a church of pride. They say that they are rich and have no need of anything. But we are thankful how the Lord still loves them and calls out to them to return to Him. One of the things about Laodicea was that they were not living in spiritual reality. They were living in their own little world, their own imagination. They thought everything was great, but they were not living in spiritual reality. They did not know who they were.

It speaks generally of the condition of the church today, and particularly in this country. Compared to many places in the world we have it pretty good. We are free to gather, we are free to worship, we can study the Bible, and most people have multiple Bibles. Most of us do not even know how many Bibles we have. How do we select a Bible? We look at the outside cover; that is a pretty cover, I think I will take that. We have so many choices, even on the colors of the Bible, and other various things. We have good jobs. People have a nice home, comfortable living. So the sad thing within this country is that ones can appear to have no need of God, and that gets a hold, even among believers. They are doing okay. “I finished college, I have my job now, I am married, I have my

house, I am going on and doing pretty well. Outwardly, it can look like there is no need of God. But in His great cry He calls out to each and every one to wake up, to see the spiritual reality of what He is calling us into because ones who overcome live in reality just as He lived in reality.

As we look at these seven cries, we see what mercy is in the Lord's great grace and His loving kindness. I hesitated putting this slide up here because I did not want it to be a checklist of what I can do. If I can achieve all of these I will have overcome, I will be a so-called overcomer. This is actually a picture of the character and nature of Christ. "Christ is the lover of God. Christ lived a martyr's life in addition to dying a martyr's death. Christ was separated unto the Father. Christ was singlehearted for Him. Christ was daily abiding in Him. Christ was living a dependent life. Even though He has so much ability in Himself, He lived that dependent life. He did not do anything but what the Father told Him; He did not speak anything, and He lived in reality. It is His very character and nature and not a check list.

As we see this we see God's great love and His mercy calling out to us. And there are a couple of questions you all may get asked. If I am a new believer, can I live the overcoming life? What do you say to the young person about the Lord's return? "Can I be living an overcoming life?" Absolutely! If you love the Lord, if your life is given to Him, it is not a matter of how long you have known the Lord, it is how we knew the Lord. How much of Him that we were faithful, walking faithfully with the light that He showed us. We might not have a lot of teaching, we might not even have a lot of Biblical knowledge as a young believer, but if we know Him, and we are trusting in Him, that is the overcoming life.

And sometimes on the other spectrum some will say, "Maybe I am too old. I have known the Lord a long time, but maybe it is too late for me. I have drifted away. I have given up, I wasted my life. I look back over forty, fifty, sixty years, what do I have to show for it? It is not too late. That call goes out to return to Him. Brother Sparks said, "It is how you

finish; it is finishing in the will of God, and we can live the remaining days of our life unto Him. That is what He is calling us to. It is a great cry of love.

In response to His cry of love, Christian Chen said, “An overcomer is one who has been overcome by the love of Christ. They now live to serve and please Him. They are bondservants, one prepared to meet the Lord.” That overcoming life within us prepares us to meet Him. That overcoming life is simply yielded to Him and is allowing His life to be lived out through us.

How much do we overcome? Do we just overcome a little bit? I love Romans 8:37: “But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.” That “overwhelmingly conquer” some say, “More than conquerors.” It is a compound word in the Greek and it is **hyper-nike**. You are hyped up; you are super overcoming. That is how much we overcome. If you look at some scores in a ballgame especially in the first couple of weeks in college football. There are all of these mismatches, and the scores will be sixty-six to 0, seventy-four to six, overwhelmingly conquered. He does not bring us an overcoming life to just simply conquer something, but it is overwhelmingly conquer. He just loves to come in and eliminate any excuse: “I cannot do this because of this. I can’t because of this.” No, we overwhelmingly conquer, but the key is through Him. It is not “we conquer.” It is Him and through Him. His life within us overwhelmingly conquers and makes the provision for us in this day and in this time. Praise God for that! So as we conclude, I am going to conclude with some questions, some things we have touched on.

Questions

Do we desire all that God has prepared for us? Or are we content with just a little bit that we have experienced? There are unsearchable riches of Christ that He has prepared for us, and He wants us to experience each and everything, always more and more. Praise God for that!

Do we believe that in His victorious life that we can overcome? Lord, help my unbelief. I believe in all of us at times we face situations. I am not going to stand up here and say, "I don't." When a situation or a circumstance hits you immediately, there is a moment of panic. "Oh my gosh, what is this? How is this ever going to clear up?" I remember a few years back in a business, one of my clients sued me, and my first reaction was not in overcoming; I was panicky. But just because our first reaction might be panic or fear, which is understandable, it does not have to stay that way. We can say "Yes, Lord, in myself this is too much. I cannot handle this physical condition, I cannot handle this relationship with this brother or sister. I cannot handle this work situation. I cannot handle school and deal with all these things. I cannot! But Your overcoming life in me can enable me by faith to go through. That is what He is looking for. We have a life in us that is desiring to burst forth and prove to us and to everybody else how great He is. Help our unbelief.

Do we know the absolute necessity of the Word of God? That can sound so redundant, but we have got to get to know the Word of God in a fuller and greater way in these last days because false teachings and deceptions and all of these lies come in with a small element of truth. And we say, "Oh yes, that says that in the Bible," but we do not know the rest, and we can be caught up in it just like that and be led astray.

Do we desire to be disentangled from the world? We are in this world, but the Lord does not want us to be of it. But do we even have a desire to be disentangled? Are we comfortable in the world? Are we comfortable with our life? May the eyes of our hearts be open to see and get disentangled.

Do we allow His life in us to keep us from being overwhelmed by the circumstances of life? Do we believe we can overcome right where we are even if nothing ever changes? Do we believe that? Do we believe His life, that overcoming life is all-sufficient for us right in the midst of the

circumstances no matter how hard and evil they are, even if they never change?

It is. He is the all-sufficient One. In the days that are becoming more and more evil, and we are going to have to enter into the reality of that in a greater way because in Him the answer to each of these questions is “YES, and AMEN!” And not just a little but overwhelmingly conquer in each one of them, more than conquerors. Praise God! This is so vital in these days. May the Lord help us with this. I think whenever you start thinking about the overcoming life, my fear today is that the only thing I have done is complicate it. We try to bring it down so it is more entreatable, and we end up complicating it. We trust the Holy Spirit to take what we have shared and use it in our hearts and lives that we could be those that are surrendering to Him and allowing that overcoming life to come forth, not only individually but together as His people.

Let's pray:

Lord, we are thankful for all that you have prepared for us. We are thankful for this life that You have given to us. We are thankful for the price that You paid, and Lord, we come and we have many, “But God, I can't do this. Many things come to mind, but Lord help us to see, to look up, that our redemption draws nigh. You are our salvation, You are our way through, You are the One who has the victory, and You are the One who has overcome, and by Your grace and our faith in You we can be those overcoming in these daily situations in our lives. In Your name we pray, Amen.