

CHRIST Speaks to Churches

Letters to the Seven Churches of Revelation 1-3

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CHAPTER NINE

THE OVERCOMER

At the end of each letter appears a promise to the overcomer. The one who overcomes, according to the meaning of the word itself, is one who conquers, subdues, gains superiority, overthrows, defeats, crushes, prevails, outstrips, wins, gets the better of, becomes victorious, carries off the victory. We see from this that the word envisions a struggle or a race or even a warfare. We want to see this subject from three different aspects: first, CHRIST the Overcomer; second, Man the Overcomer; and third, the Rewards for Overcoming.

CHRIST, the Overcomer

At one time our Saviour said to His disciples, "**These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world**" (John 16:33). Two things are promised here. One is that in CHRIST, men will find peace. The other is that in the world, the Christian will find tribulation.

In order to help us grasp the significance of our having tribulation in this world, we need to be reminded of certain things. First of all, we must remember that over the world system of men is Satan and his organized demonic forces. This evil being lost his battle with CHRIST but seeks now, in CHRIST's bodily absence from the earth, to control all men including Christians. This is where our struggle with the world comes in.

This need not dismay us, however, for we battle a defeated foe. We learn this from Hebrews 2:14, 15: "**Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he (Christ) also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.**"

In reading the various gospel accounts we cannot help but reach the conclusion that Satan sought the Lord's death. Little did the Evil One realize, however, that in dying on the cross the Lord JESUS was actually destroying his, Satan's, power. CHRIST nullified it, brought it to naught, and made it possible for believers in Him to defeat Satan in the everyday experiences of their lives.

A supporting passage is found in the first chapter of Ephesians. Satan would like to have had the Lord remain in the tomb. The enemy apparently harnessed all the powers of darkness to that end.

Satan is no fool, for though the disciples were ignorant at the time of our Saviour's death of the teaching of the Bible concerning His resurrection, Satan knew it. He knew what the prophets had said.

But what Satan apparently did not realize was that his power was broken through CHRIST's death. GOD then brushed aside all the efforts of the forces of darkness and raised our Lord from the dead.

Part of Paul's prayer in the first chapter of Ephesians concerns us who believe that we might know "**what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come**" (Ephesians 1:19-21). CHRIST overcame Satan through death and now rules at the right hand of GOD.

In Colossians we have the same truth where we are told: "**And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it**" (Colossians 2:15). No wonder, then, the Lord JESUS, in anticipating His death and resurrection, could say, "**I have overcome the world.**" He overcame the forces of darkness and was set above them, given control over them by GOD.

The Overcomer in CHRIST JESUS

There are two factors that we must consider here.

First of all, we must see that the Christian is potentially an overcomer in CHRIST JESUS. In addition to that, however, we want to get hold of this truth in such a way that we will be able to demonstrate its reality in our everyday experience.

We have just noted that the Christian, the one who is born again, is a potential overcomer. By the word potential we mean that the provision for a Christian to be an overcomer has been made, it is simply a matter of his entering into his privileges and responsibilities in order to make overcoming a reality.

The subject of the believer's overcoming is related to the work of GOD within him.

Paul wrote to the Philippians: "**Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.**" The Lord JESUS has come into our lives and lives in us and is our life. That good work has begun, then, and Paul is confident (assured), that GOD will continue this work in each believer until the day when CHRIST comes again.

This is confirmed by many Scripture passages.

In Colossians 1:13 we read that God "**hath delivered us from the power of darkness.**" This means that He has "rescued us," showing that we have been released and delivered from the

tyranny of darkness where Satan has had control. But not only have we been released from the power of darkness, GOD has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son. We have been taken out of one kingdom and placed into another.

Suppose, for a moment, that I were a captive of Communism, and my government decided to use all the power and force necessary to rescue me from that captivity and bring me to this land where we have freedom.

That would illustrate only part of the Bible teaching on this point; our freedoms and privileges in this country fall short of what we have in CHRIST. In delivering us from the reign of darkness, GOD has translated us into the kingdom of His Son where that Son is in complete control and where each member of His kingdom is empowered by the King himself, to live the kind of a life that honors Him.

Or we could, perhaps, illustrate it this way.

Supposing there is a person who has been left ten million dollars in trust. He is not to receive the principal until he reaches the age of 65, but in the meantime he is to live on the interest. The interest on ten million dollars at five per cent would be a half million dollars. This person could have all the cars he wanted, and the yachts, and the homes - practically anything the heart could wish for. In addition, he would be able to help with different Christian enterprises, so that he would have a wide stewardship in the things of GOD.

Now look at this from the spiritual standpoint.

We learn from I Peter 1:4, 5 that there is an inheritance reserved for us in heaven. This is an inheritance that cannot be destroyed or lost. It is not one of dollars and cents, but a spiritual one guarded and kept by GOD Himself and reserved for us until we get there. And, at the present time we are living on the interest from it. I like to look upon our inheritance as being described in the seven different statements made concerning the overcomer. Consequently, we need not be spiritual paupers but rich in our everyday experiences as we live on the interest of that great inheritance laid up for us in heaven.

What would we think of a man who had a material inheritance such as we saw in the previous illustration, having a half million dollars a year on which to live, and yet put on a poor mouth, as we say. He drove a horse and buggy rather than a car, lived in an old shack, existed as a miser rather than as a man of wealth. Perhaps we would consider such a man to be mentally ill, and we might be right.

But what can we think of ourselves who have been provided with everything for spiritual life and victory and yet live as though we were spiritual paupers? We have potential power for living godly lives so that people can look upon us and realize that JESUS CHRIST lives in us. Do the unsaved see in us those who are completely different from them and yet are attractive to them because we utilize the new life in CHRIST? Are we living up to the standard possible to us through the provision GOD made for us through salvation in CHRIST?

In his first general Epistle John wrote: "**Love not the world**" (2:15). Later on he said, "**Greater**

is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (4:4).

Then in the fifth chapter we find the words:

"For whatsoever is born of GOD over cometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that over cometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (vv. 4,5).

The salvation we receive from CHRIST is a complete salvation. It not only covers salvation from the guilt of sin but includes salvation from the power of sin. This does not mean that we will overcome only in a few things, for the power is so great that we may be overcomers in all things.

Paul wrote to the Romans: **"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"** Later on in this same eighth chapter he says, **"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."** This tells us, then, that we are more than overcomers. This indicates the great potential of power that lies back of us. It is the power of the HOLY SPIRIT who forms CHRIST in us. The Christian life is a conquering life, an overcoming life.

It helps us to multiply promises and statements in connection with these great truths. In I John 5:5 we find: **"Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of GOD?"**

Do you believe that? This is a definite statement as to what has already been accomplished for us in CHRIST. And that overcoming life of CHRIST is now ours because He lives in us.

It is true that we still live in our old bodies, and that they, as yet, are not changed. Nevertheless, GOD leaves us here for a little while so that we might learn to lay hold of the power of CHRIST and have the members of our bodies bring forth fruit unto righteousness instead of unto sin.

A Practical Key

In Colossians 2:6 we have a very practical key to this whole new life. The apostle says, **"As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith** (keeping in mind that in Him we are already overcomers)."

We build ourselves up in Him by having faith in Him. We believe in Him in order for the victorious, overcoming walk to be ours. Not only do we trust Him for salvation, but after the initial phase of salvation has been accomplished, which is by faith, then every step along the way is also by faith. The practical outworking of the overcoming life will be seen in our lives when we grasp the truth that He has already provided the overcoming life for us and will produce it in us as He lives through us.

Not to believe this is to continue in our sinful ways, the result of which is death. Now if a person who professes to be saved has no appetite for the overcoming life, if he has no longing for the deeper things of GOD, that one might well question if he is in the way of GOD. This is not my

word but GOD's Word: **"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life"** (I John 5:10-12).

Again in this same letter John writes: **"We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not. And we know that we are of God and the whole world lieth in wickedness. And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ"** (I John 5:18-20).

This means that CHRIST JESUS who does not sin, lives in us and makes it possible for us to live above sin. We are not saying here that every Christian does live above sin, but provision is made so that he may.

Rewards for the Overcomer

It is clearly evident from many of the statements made concerning the overcomer that he is a believer in CHRIST. But that is not all. The subject of rewards is indicated in some of the promises made to the overcomer so that we have a right to look upon the overcoming life as the out-working of the new life in CHRIST. This means, then, that we are overcomers or conquerors first of all because we are born again into the family of GOD. In the second place it means that if we allow this overcoming life to express itself in our everyday experience God will reward us.

This means that only believers can be overcomers, but it also means that only faithful believers can be overcomers in the fullest sense as revealed in these letters to the seven churches. There is abundant evidence in the Scriptures to show that the rewards which include sitting with CHRIST on His throne, the position of reigning, will be assigned on the basis of faithfulness on the part of the believer.

The Saviour made this clear when the disciples came to Him asking what their reward would be since they had left all to follow Him. His answer is recorded in Matthew 19:28,29: **"And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."**

Ever lasting life we know from other Scriptures is given as the result of believing in the Lord JESUS CHRIST, but the reward is clearly given for faithful service.

The parable of the pounds in Luke 19 gives a similar thought. The King who went into the far country in this parable is no doubt the Lord JESUS Himself. The words of this ruler were, **"Occupy till I come."** He left His servants with talents which speak of opportunities and open doors, suggesting the very thing we have seen in Revelation 3 where the Lord said, **"I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it."** What have we done with the opportunities

GOD has given us? Let us see what these men in the parable did with theirs.

When the nobleman returned, having received the kingdom, he called before him his servants to whom he had given the money so that he might learn how much each man had gained by trading. **"Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds"** (v. 16). This man had used his opportunities to where he had tenfold what he had received. He was commended by his Lord who said, **"Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities."**

Then another came who had received five pounds, and he had gained five more. As a reward he was given the rulership over five cities. The last one, the one who had received one pound, returned the one pound to the Lord, unused. This servant had kept it hidden away, and for that reason there was no increase for his master. The man had no further opportunity to use what the Lord had given him. The open door placed before him was closed as far as he was concerned, and given to the man who had been faithful over ten pounds.

This truth of rewards is clearly indicated, as we have stated, with regard to the overcomer. In Revelation 2:26,27 we find the Lord saying, **"He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father."** This is clearly a matter of reward granted to those who not only are born again but are faithful in service.

In Revelation 3:5 we learn that the Lord will confess the names of those who are overcomers, before His heavenly Father. This, in the light of Matthew 10:32, would indicate a confession before the Father for the purpose of rewarding the faithful servant.

Then in the twelfth verse of Revelation 3 the promise is made to the overcomer that the Lord will make him a pillar in the temple of GOD and he shall no more go out. You recall that there were certain men who forsook all and followed David when he was an outcast in Israel and hunted for his life by King Saul. These men stood by him during that time of his rejection, and he rewarded them with high positions in the kingdom when he was elevated to the throne. They were made pillars in Israel. And such, we believe, is indicated for the believer who is faithful to his Lord. He will be elevated to a high position in the millennial kingdom of the Lord JESUS CHRIST.

There are certain benefits and privileges which belong to the overcomer which are his by right of the fact that he is born again. For example, we are told in Revelation 2:7 that to him that overcomes, the Lord will **"give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God."** The tree of life is that which gives continuous life. This could be true only of the person who has received CHRIST and in receiving Him has received eternal life.

The same truth is given in the eleventh verse where we are assured that the overcomer **"shall not be hurt by the second death."** The second death is passed upon those who reject CHRIST, but those who receive Him are saved from it.

The overcomer will be given the hidden manna to eat, we learn in 2:17. Now manna was for the sustenance of life, and we find through study of various Scriptures that JESUS CHRIST is the

manna for the believer. He is that Bread which came down from heaven and which becomes the possession of all who trust in Him. CHRIST is the lifegiving power in the believer which is hidden from the world and is seen by the people in the world only in the changed conduct and outlook of the Christian.

Another statement bearing out this factor concerning the overcomer is the promise: "**[I] will give him a white stone.**" At the time these words were written a white stone was given to a person when he was brought before a special tribunal. The white stone was the symbol of acquittal or approval.

In addition to this a new name was to be given to the overcomer. We are not told here what that new name will be, but there are indications in Scripture of the nature of it. For example, Saul of Tarsus had his name changed to Paul. Saul means a great one, whereas Paul means a little one. As long as Saul was a great one, GOD could not use him; but when he became Paul the little one, he became the Apostle to the Gentiles.

The one whom we know as Peter the Apostle was first known as Simon the son of Jona. The Lord JESUS said of him: "**Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone**" (John 1:42).

Again we find from Revelation 2:28 that CHRIST will give the overcomer "**the morning star.**" This, we believe, is the promise of the rapture of the church before the tribulation breaks upon the world. When CHRIST comes to set up His kingdom, He comes as the Son of Righteousness, but His coming for the church is the Morning Star. The morning star precedes the rising of the sun. We believe the counterpart is seen in JESUS CHRIST coming into the air for His church preceding the time He will come in judgment on the world.

The overcomer, according to Revelation 3:5 is to be clothed in white raiment which has reference to the righteousness and the glory of GOD. In this same verse the promise is made to the overcomer: "**I will not blot out his name out of the book of life.**"

It is very possible on the basis of certain Scriptures to understand that a person's name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life from the very foundation of the world. According to GOD's foreknowledge such could be the case. We know that the Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 8 that whom God foreknew He did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son. The believer, then, has the assurance that his name will remain in the Book of Life.

We do not imagine for a moment that we have exhausted the teaching concerning the overcomer in these two chapters in the Book of the Revelation. But it is surely evident that we must view these statements concerning the overcomer from the two standpoints already presented. First, there are certain things that belong to the overcomer because he is born again. Then, there are certain rewards that are promised him if he is faithful as a child of GOD. Let it be the desire of our hearts to be overcomers, more than conquerors, through CHRIST who loved us.

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