

To him who overcomes

David Baker

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In this season, the Lord has been speaking to us about our participation in the communion meal. We eat the bread as a participation in the body of Christ, and we drink the cup as a participation in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. In the fellowship of Christ's offering, the resurrection life of Christ is given to us to become our life. We know that His resurrection life is both *our provision* and *our protection*.

In this week's meditation toward the communion table, we are considering that it is our ongoing participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings that enables us to *overcome* Satan and the world. The apostle John declared, 'Whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith.' 1Jn 5:4. John was referring to the faith of the Son of God that compels us to participate in the fellowship of His offering.

We will also consider that it is our participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering that qualifies us to receive the seal of the living God on our foreheads when Christ appears in glory at the opening of the sixth seal. Rev 7:2. The seal of the living God is the complete attainment of the resurrection life of Christ in mortality. Php 3:8-14. It is the full revelation of the glory of sonship while still in a mortal body. Joh 6:27. Significantly, this seal is the guarantee of *our protection* from the coming judgement of God upon the seventh and the eighth world kingdoms. Rev 9:4.

I have overcome the world

Jesus encouraged the disciples by saying, 'In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, *I have overcome the world*.' Joh 16:33. Jesus had personally overcome Satan and the world during His earthly ministry by walking in obedience to the Father's will. Luk 4:1-13. Joh 14:30. Nevertheless, He willingly submitted Himself to suffer at the hands of godless men, including the religious leaders and the secular rulers of the world, *for our sake*. Act 2:22-24. The offering of Christ delivered us from our bondage to sin and death in the world, and it also invoked the judgement of God upon the world. Gal 6:14.

Speaking about His offering on the cross, Jesus said, '*Now* is the judgement of this world; *now* the ruler of this world will be cast out.' Joh 12:31. The ruler of this world is Satan. Joh 14:30. Joh 16:11. The eternal judgement of God upon sin, Satan and the world was fully accomplished between midday and 3pm on the day of Christ's crucifixion. Jesus endured the eternal judgement of God, in His physical body, while He hung on the cross. He was delivered from this judgement because of His obedience to the Father.

Satan was cast out of heaven and confined to the lake of fire forever by the offering of Christ during those three hours on the cross. However, we will not see the fulfilment of this judgement upon Satan until the blowing of the seventh trumpet in the end of the age. Rev 12:7-9. Even though 'the whole purpose of God' has been accomplished in the offering of Christ, the present heavens and earth have been preserved by the word of the Lord. 2Pe 3:7. They have been preserved for the sake of our inclusion and participation in that which Christ has already finished on the cross.

In relation to the present universe, Jesus took the whole of the first creation out into the sea of God's forgetfulness and brought forth the new creation in those same three hours. Darkness covered the whole earth because the natural creation had been struck at its source of light. This was the end of the first creation.

The prophet Amos spoke of this judgement by saying, ' "And it shall come to pass in that day", says the Lord God, "That I will make the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight"; I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; I will bring sackcloth on every waist, and baldness on every head; I will make it like mourning for an only son, and its end like a bitter day.' Amo 8:9-10.

In the same way that Satan has already been cast from heaven, the old creation has already been abolished by the offering of Christ. The only reason that God reactivated the present elements of the universe at the ninth hour was to give mankind an opportunity to mourn and repent by looking upon Him whom they had pierced. Zec 12:10. Rev 1:7. The mercy of God has granted us time to escape His judgement upon the old creation by joining the fellowship of Christ's offering *as overcomers* who belong to the new creation. 2Pe 3:9.

The promises to the overcomers

Having already overcome and judged the world, Jesus now walks among His lampstand churches with seven stars in His right hand. Rev 1:12-16. He invites each presbytery and lampstand church to join the fellowship of His offering and sufferings so that we become *participants in His overcoming*. It is the life of Christ that we receive in the fellowship of His offering that enables us to overcome. Jesus concluded His admonition to the presbytery of each lampstand church by making a specific promise 'to him who overcomes'.

It is important to recognise that *becoming an overcomer* in the fellowship of Christ's offering is an essential prerequisite for salvation. If we are not overcoming Satan and the world in the fellowship of Christ's offering, then Satan and the world will be overcoming and enslaving us. In this regard, we are reminded of the words of Peter, 'By what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved'. 2Pe 2:19. Every issue that Jesus identified within His lampstand churches was a matter of life and death. The difference between heaven and hell was dependent upon their response to His word.

To illustrate this point, we will briefly consider the clear and sharp distinction between salvation and judgement in relation to each of the seven lampstand churches addressed in the book of Revelation.

When Jesus admonished the Ephesian presbytery and church concerning the need to return to first love, He promised that the overcomers would be able to eat the fruit of the Tree of Life. Rev 2:7. This is a wonderful promise that must become the reality for every Christian. It is only those who have the right to the Tree of Life who will be allowed to enter by the gates into the New Jerusalem in the new heavens and new earth. Rev 22:14. The only alternative is to be in outer darkness with the 'dogs', the sorcerers, the immoral persons, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practises lying. Rev 22:15.

Even though Jesus did not address any specific issues within the presbytery and the church in Smyrna, He still instructed them to be *faithful until death*. In other words, their salvation was dependent upon their finishing the race that Christ had already pioneered for them. Jesus indicated that some of the believers in Smyrna would die as martyrs.

There would be other believers in Smyrna who needed to persevere through the affliction upon the church. In either case, they all needed to continue to walk in the will of God until their final breath. Jesus promised that the overcomers would receive the crown of life. Rev 2:10-11. The alternative was to become subject to 'the second death', which is the judgement of God upon the ungodly in the lake of fire. Rev 20:6,14. Rev 21:8.

Jesus promised those in Pergamum who turned from, and overcame, the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and the doctrine of Balaam, that they would receive hidden manna and a white stone with a new name. Rev 2:17. However, Jesus also warned that He would make war, using the sword of His mouth, against those who continued to promote or accommodate those false doctrines. Rev 2:16. If Jesus makes war with a person in this manner, it means that they will be 'cut asunder and judged along with the unbelievers'. Luk 12:46.

The presbytery and the church in Thyatira were called to turn from, and to overcome, the doctrine of Jezebel. Jesus promised that the overcomers would receive the rod of iron and the morning star. Rev 2:27-28. The only alternative was to be 'cast onto a sickbed and killed with death'. Rev 2:23. Paul identified this situation in the Corinthian church when he observed that many were 'weak, sick, and dying before their time' and outside of the will of God. 1Co 11:30.

Jesus promised the overcomers in Sardis that they would walk with Him in white priestly garments. The alternative for those who did not receive these white robes was to have their names blotted out of the book of life. Rev 3:5.

The presbytery and the church in Philadelphia had already overcome by persevering in the weakness of Christ's offering. For this reason, the Lord declared that He had put before them an open door that no man could shut. Rev 3:8. Nevertheless, even this presbytery was required to hold fast what they had attained so that they did not lose the crown that they had received. Rev 3:11. In this way, Paul encouraged every Christian by saying, 'To the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule.' Php 3:16. Significantly, Jesus promised that the overcomers in Philadelphia would receive 'the seal of the living God' so that they would be preserved and protected through the coming judgement upon the world. Rev 3:10.

In many ways, Jesus identified the most graphic difference between those who receive His word and those who reject His word when He addressed the church in Laodicea. He promised to spew out of His mouth those who continued to walk in their blindness, complacency, and religious arrogance. Rev 3:16-17. In stark contrast, He promised that the overcomers in Laodicea would be seated with Him in His throne, in the same way that He overcame the world and took His seat with the heavenly Father in His throne. Rev 3:21. Jesus promised that those in Laodicea, along with the overcomers from all the lampstand churches, would be part of His coming kingdom in the time of the end.

The kingdom of God

In our present day, the Lord is speaking from heaven, through the messengers in His right hand, to restore His lampstand churches. However, in the years *just ahead of us*, the time will come for the saints to receive and to possess the kingdom of God on the earth, as the Lord revealed to the prophet Daniel. Dan 7:18. In Chapters 4 and 5 of the book of Revelation, the apostle John described how the administration of the throne of Yahweh will function in the kingdom of God. Under the leadership of twenty-four elders, or

courses of elders, the kingdom of God will include both Jew and Gentile in the one body of Christ.

The restoration of the kingdom will immediately precede the opening of the seven-sealed book. Rev 5:1-5. This prophetic book contains the final revelation of the purpose of God in the world, which has already been accomplished by Christ on the cross. When Jesus Christ, as the Lamb of God, opens the first seal, the white horse and rider will be released into the earth. Rev 6:1-2. The gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed by the messengers in the right hand of Christ, in every nation. Mat 24:14. This will be a time of great revival, and the beginning of *the major ingathering* of believers into the kingdom of God.

However, this revival will soon be followed by *a great persecution* of the church by the nations of the world. When Jesus Christ opens the second seal, the fiery red horse and rider will be released into the earth. A great sword will be given to this rider, who will have the mandate to take peace from the earth so that men will kill one another. Rev 6:3-4. This will be a time of great trouble and distress in the world. Dan 12:1.

Jesus described this time by saying, 'For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened.' Mat 24:21-22. The persecution of the church by the nations of the world will be led by Gog from the land of Magog. Eze 38:2. The Scriptures reveal that the Lord will cut short this tribulation for the church, by sovereignly judging the armies of Gog and Magog on the mountains of Israel. Eze 38:18-23. This miraculous deliverance will happen when the sixth seal is opened. Rev 6:15-17.

Three groups of overcomers

The book of Revelation identifies that there will be three groups of believers who will emerge from this period of great tribulation as victorious overcomers.

The faithful martyrs

The *first group of overcomers* are those who will be killed during the persecution of the church by the nations of the world under the leadership of Gog and Magog. These martyrs will die in the Lord because of the word of God and their personal testimony as sons of God. Rev 6:9. When Jesus Christ opened the fifth seal, John saw the souls of these martyrs under the altar in the true tabernacle of God in heaven. He heard them asking the Lord, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Rev 6:10.

John saw that each of these martyrs will receive *a white robe*. Rev 6:11. The white robes are their priestly garments for the new heavens and new earth. Having received their priestly garments in the fellowship of Christ's death, they will rest in the hope of the resurrection at the last day. The Lord told them *to rest a little while longer* until the number of their brethren, who will also be killed for the word of God and their testimony, is completed.

The 144,000

The *second group of overcomers* are the 144,000 messengers who receive the seal of the living God on their foreheads. Rev 7:2-3. The 'seal' is the name of the Father. Rev 14:1. They will receive this seal immediately following the judgement of Gog and Magog and

the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ at the opening of the sixth seal. The 144,000 are the *firstfruits* of the great multitude who have been redeemed from among men. Rev 14:4.

The 144,000 are *messengers* who proclaim the word of truth. There is no deceit found in their mouths. Significantly, the 144,000 will be *without fault* before the throne of God. Rev 14:5. Having followed Christ, who is the Lamb of God, all the way to the endpoint of His offering journey, they will be fully mature and obedient sons of God. The seal of the living God signifies that they have received the fullness of Christ's resurrection life in their mortal bodies.

Having received the seal of the living God on their foreheads, these messengers of Christ will be *completely protected* from the judgement of God upon the seventh world kingdom and from the following eighth world kingdom. Rev 9:4. The book of Revelation reveals that the judgement of God upon the seventh world kingdom will be manifest in the earth when the seven trumpets are blown in heaven. Rev 8-9. The judgement of God upon the eighth world kingdom will be accomplished when the seven vials are poured out. Rev 15-16.

The great multitude

The third group of overcomers is the great multitude which no man can number from every nation, tribe, people and tongue in the earth. This great company of believers will endure to the end of the great tribulation of the church. Mat 24:13. They will be delivered from this time of persecution by the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ at the opening of the sixth seal. One of the twenty-four elders explained to John, 'These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' Rev 7:14.

Like the 144,000 messengers, the great multitude will also stand *without fault* before the throne of God and before the Lamb. Rev 7:9. They will be fully mature and obedient sons of God. Clothed in their white priestly garments, they will serve God day and night in His temple. He who sits upon the throne will spread His tabernacle over them so that they are also *protected* from the coming judgements of God upon the seventh and eighth world kingdoms. Rev 7:15-16. We read in the book of Revelation concerning this great multitude that 'the Lamb in the centre of the throne will be their Shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes'. Rev 7:17.

They overcome Him

In summary, these three groups of firstfruits Christians will overcome Satan and the world by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony and, by laying down their lives to the death. Rev 12:11. It is these *same three elements* that enable every individual believer, along with every Christian family and congregation, to overcome Satan and the world in every generation of the church.

We 'overcome by the blood of the Lamb' by continuing to eat and drink the communion meal, which is our participation in the body of Christ; and by continuing in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. In this fellowship, the blood of Christ is purging our conscience from dead works and is washing our priestly garments so that we are becoming an effective minister of the New Covenant. Heb 9:14.

We 'overcome by the word of our testimony' when we continue to hear and receive the word of faith that is proclaimed to us by the messengers of Christ at the communion table. Rom 10:8. The word of faith is in our heart when we apply our heart to gain

understanding by prayer, and through fellowship with those who have proclaimed the word to us. 1Jn 1:3. The word is in our mouth as we then speak with one another by testifying about the word that has become our life and culture.

We overcome by 'loving not our life to the death' by continuing to pray in the Spirit so that the love of God is being poured into our heart through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. Jud 1:20-21. Rom 5:5. The love of God that is poured into our heart gives us the motivation and the capacity to let go of our own religious aspirations, and to lay down our life for the sake of our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. Joh 15:13.

There is little doubt that we live in perilous times and that there are difficult days ahead of us. 2Ti 3:1. However, as we consider these things, we have no reason to be troubled and no cause for anxiety. We can be encouraged by the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy. He declared, 'Nevertheless, the solid foundation of God stands, *having this seal*: "The Lord knows those who are His", and "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity".' 2Ti 2:19.