

62. The overcoming joy

January 1, 2012

In America, the word 'overcome' brings an immediate connection to Martin Luther King, Jr. and his famous "March on Washington" in August 28, 1963 where he delivered his "I have a dream" speech and its anthem "We shall overcome."

Against all odds, against everyone's belief, a person can overcome what he faces and come out as a victor. To him, we applaud for his determination, tenacity, and vigor. We call that person "overcomer." Indeed when it comes to civil rights, Martin Luther King, Jr. was an overcomer.

Though it is important, that is only limited in physical and political areas. But what about the spiritual area which is far more important than the other two? Jesus wants us to overcome this world because He did. Actually He wants us to be more than overcomers; He wants us to have the "Overcoming Joy" as His overcomers because we are with Him.

Let's learn from the Master who overcame the world and death and rose again.

A. CONFUSION TO HOPE

John 16:16-18 "A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father." 17 Then some of His disciples said among themselves, "What is this that He says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" 18 They said therefore, "What is this that He says, 'A little while'? We do not know what He is saying."

Have you ever had one of those days that you felt like you should have stayed in bed, because it just was not worth getting out. I wouldn't be one bit surprised if Jesus' disciples felt that way as they were listening to what the Lord Jesus was talking about.

His comments went from persecution to arrest and torture, to even death. Then, for good measure, Jesus added that the disciples would desert Him and run away. Of course, they largely chose to ignore what He said about the resurrection from the grave after the third day.

Jesus' main desire for them here was to give them hope, to lift their eyes from the immediate rocky future to the glory of His impending departure. But they simply didn't understand what He was saying. So, patiently He acknowledged their confusion and continues to encourage them by giving them something they could grasp.

B. CLARIFICATION FROM JESUS

John 16:19-22 Now Jesus knew that they desired to ask Him, and He said to them, "Are you inquiring among yourselves about what I said, 'A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me'? 20 Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. 21 A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you."

The disciples didn't make it easy on themselves either. Instead of asking Jesus to explain His words, they began to discuss it among themselves. We do not get very far by exchanging our ignorance. It is like a blind leading another blind. It is when we come to the Lord and ask for His help that we learn the important lessons of life.

By the way, don't you just love it when you have a Bible question from the passage you just read and heard, then out of blue, the Lord speaks to your heart through another portion of Scripture or uses a Bible teacher or pastor to explain it to you? I get a serious case of spiritual goose bumps. That is an illumination I talked about last week.

Let me explain what we just read here with an example. Thirty-five minutes of sermon at the church on Sunday morning may seem like eternity to some of you, but fishing in a little cramped boat or playing golf in the middle of a hot summer day for hours seems like a very short time.

The mother feels as though the birth pain is so long, when the baby has been born, pain is forgotten as joy fills her heart. Otherwise, every mom would stop after the first child.

While the immediate impression to the disciples may have been deep sorrow and confusion, but the ultimate application is to all of God's people as they await the coming of Jesus Christ in the rapture. To us, it seems like a long wait, but our Lord does not measure time as we do.

2 Peter 3:8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

Speaking of babies, have I ever told you that I have a grandson? He now is starting to walk and he is about to have his first birthday in 12 days. Yes, he has his grandpa in his pinkie wrapped around tight. My grandson Micah has two emotions – happy or crying, pretty much nothing in between.

If Karen, I, and his parents always try to please him to be happy by substituting his unhappiness with something he can be happy about, we would not raise him in the right way. We would make Micah to be a spoiled rotten brat who will not be able to cope with reality in his adult life if the Lord carries that long.

The way of substitution for solving problem is the way of immaturity. But the way of transformation is the way of faith and maturity. We cannot mature emotionally or spiritually if somebody is always pampering us. Jesus loves us enough to allow us to go through the pain of transformation, not pampering us with shallow substitutions.

Jesus did not say that the mother's sorrow of birth pain was substituted by joy, rather that the sorrow of pain was transformed into sheer joy of her new born baby. The same baby caused so much pain in delivery also caused such a joy. And so it is in the Christian life: God takes seemingly impossible and horrible situations, adds the miracle of His grace. In result, He transforms trial into triumph and sorrow into joy.

*Psalm 30:5b Weeping may endure for a night, But joy comes in the morning.
Deuteronomy 23:5b the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the Lord your God loves you.*

Jesus took the cross, a symbol of defeat and shame, and transformed it into a symbol of victory and glory.

Please go back to v20 with me:

John 16:20 Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy

The world today does not want Jesus Christ or His church. The world is rejoicing while Christians are suffering.

Recently, Bill Maher, a self-proclaimed atheist, the host of "Real Time With Bill Maher" on HBO Cable, ridiculed Denver Broncos quarterback Tim Tebow's faith with obscene language on his Twitter and Facebook after the Broncos lost their game to the Buffalo Bills. I know that Bill Maher is NOT going to be that haughty in the presence of the Lord Jesus at the White Great Judgment whom he mocked all this time.

By the way, Bill Maher never, ever goes after other gods or Mohammed, only Jesus Christ. That, to me, proves that Jesus is a real God. If he is such a bold atheist, let him bad mouth about Mohammed and see how fast either one of the fanatic Islam Jihadists chops off his head or some executive of HBO would fire him from his show. No other gods is merciful as our God.

C. ASK

John 16:23-24 And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you. 24 Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.

It is important to note that the original Greek text uses two different words for "ask," although we use the same English word. The first word 'ask' in v23 is "erotao" in Greek which means "to ask a question or request." But the second word 'ask' in v23 and v24 are "aiteo" in Greek which means "to pray," or "to request something of a superior." Jesus never used this word in His prayer life because He is EQUAL with the Father.

One of the many reasons we should pray is that it is God's appointed way of giving things to us that we need in our lives. And there are things that God may want to give you, things that God may want to say to you, things that God may want to do for you, that have not been given, that have not been said, and that have not been done simply because you have not asked.

I am not suggesting that God always will give us everything that we ask for. Nor am I saying that He will heal every person who asks for His healing touch. But He will heal some. And what if there were something that God wanted to do but it has not yet happened because you simply have not prayed about it? Maybe He will say, "No." But what if He says, "Yes"? What do you have to lose? That is why we need to pray. Prayer is a privilege of the believer of Jesus Christ.

D. THE FATHER LOVES YOU

John 16:25-28 "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. 26 In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; 27 for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. 28 I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father."

While Jesus was with His disciples, He took care of their needs. Now that He was departing from them to heaven, He instructed them and us to pray to the Father in heaven in His name.

Contrary to some charismatic Bible teachers, like Benny Hinn, who make their theologies according to what they'd like to happen, Jesus teaches us to pray to the Father in His name; Jesus who is now sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven, intercedes for us; the Holy Spirit who is in every single born-again believer's heart dispenses His gifts or provides what we need according to the will of God the Father. Never anywhere in the Bible that we are told to pray to Jesus or the Holy Spirit.

Jesus would return to heaven to be with the Father, and there He would minister as our High Priest, making intercession for us. He would also minister as our Advocate. As our High Priest, Jesus gives us grace to keep us from sinning. As our Advocate, He restores us when we confess our sins. His ministry in heaven makes possible our ministry of witness on earth, through the power of the Spirit.

E. THE OVERCOMING JOY

John 16:29-33 His disciples said to Him, "See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! 30 Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God." 31 Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? 32 Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. 33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The disciples are finally getting it. Although Jesus knew their weaknesses, He approved their growing evidences in faith and assured them with His promise and encouragement.

Is it possible to have faith, knowledge, and assurance and still fail Him? Yes, as long as we have this carnal nature in us, we will. But we can strive to continue in our faith, apply the knowledge we received from the Lord to our lives, and rest on the assurance and peace of God.

I firmly believe that this study sets the tone for what we need to do as we all face the uncertainty of 2012 – politically, economically, ethically, and morally. It seems that everything is heading to one direction, one direction only – downward.

Maybe you feel as though you are in a rut, or maybe you are discouraged. Maybe you feel that you will have to face the problems and challenges of life all alone.

If any of these things are true of you, then take heart, because you are not the first child of God to feel that way. In case you have not noticed it before, all of His children are dysfunctional children one way or another, not because our Father in heaven is a dysfunctional, but the blame is on ourselves and our sins.

When I was in the South Korean Army, we were trained to use map individually as well as a unit. One thing I still remember is this – Set your mark on the thing that will not be changed, such as the North Star at night, a particular marking on a distant horizon during the day. Good advice!

The source of the disciples' peace was not "in the world", but "in Me." Our source of peace and hope is not in the world, not in our checkbook, the bank accounts, the stock portfolios, or gold, but in Jesus Christ who is our God and Savior.

Please listen to me, my brothers and sisters. Joy of the Lord has nothing to do with happiness which is but a momentary emotion. When you have joy in the Lord, we find strength to go on against all odds, against everyone's belief. How? Because joy of the Lord is our strength in Him.

Nehemiah 8:10c Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

Every believer is either overcome or an overcomer. The world wants to overcome us; this is why satan uses the world to persecute and pressure believers. The world wants us to conform; it does not want us to be different. When we yield ourselves to Christ and trust Him, He enables us to be overcomers. We must claim our spiritual position in Christ and believe Him for victory.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) The way of transformation in Christ is the way of faith and maturity.
- 2) Prayer to the Lord is a privilege of the believer of Jesus Christ. Exercise that privilege daily.
- 3) We are overcomers in Christ Jesus. Don't let the world get under your skin. Keep your faith in Him and be obedient in His commandments.