

Overcoming

Harmony M.B.C., March 27, 2011 (Morning)

Robert P. Myers

Revelation 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

When we see words like this from our Lord, and we think about the fact that He is making these kinds of promises to those who overcome, our minds almost always go to thoughts about the millions of brothers and sisters who have given their lives in martyrdom for the testimony of Jesus Christ. The number of these individuals is almost astronomical, because literally millions of faithful folks have been killed for the sake of their belief and fidelity to Christ down through history. We owe them a great debt, since they are the instruments by which the Holy Spirit has kept the Word of God present and active in the world until this day. So, we must be grateful for their sacrifices, and we must acknowledge that they are included in this promise of our Lord.

But, without detracting one bit from the glory and eternal blessing which will be upon these great martyrs, I would like to suggest that these words of our Lord hold promise for other citizens of the Kingdom also. I believe that He contemplates more than the faithful martyrs in these words. I believe that He has something here for every true believer to look forward to. The promise He makes in our verse is conditional. The condition for getting to the place to taste of the glorious fruit of the tree of life is that we must overcome. Like the martyrs down through history, we also have things to overcome. Not many of us will be called to give our lives at the hands of murderers while witnessing about our Lord, while standing fast for the truth. But, we each nevertheless have our own challenges to overcome. Overcoming gives us access to the blessings of God. In this lies the material for our message today.

May the Holy Spirit help us to see the truth about our own overcoming, and to rejoice with all saints of God in the prospect of receiving eternal blessings with Christ in heavenly places.

I. What Does Overcoming Mean?

- subdue: bring under forcible control
- prevail: be stronger: to prove to be stronger and in the position of greater influence and power
- conquer: seize area by military force: to take control of a place by force of arms; defeat people in war: to win a victory over a people in war; master something difficult
- get the victory: win; success in a contest
 - ▶ We can illustrate overcoming by using life experiences: My having finally solved the chronic problem of water running off the hill at my house and getting into the family room
 - ▶ Subdue: First, I cleaned up the mess made by water running in; then went to the upper driveway and did some stuff to divert the water around the house. The water stopped for awhile. I had forcibly controlled where the water would go. I had **subdued** the water's effects on my house.
 - Prevail: But the solution did not last (I subdued the effects of the water, but I did not prevail). Next time the flood was bigger and overpowered my efforts. I then built a berm

around the upper side of the house, and made sure the water would divert somewhere else regardless of where or how much of it came down. Floods came, but no water came in. I had **prevailed** over the flooding of our family room.

- **Conquer:** Then a huge flood came, and more water appeared in the family room. I called in the artillery. This time I reworked the berm, the drainage ditch, and the French drain above the house. Then I went under the house and dug a drainage ditch along the foundation of the concrete slab that was the floor of the family room. I put drainage pipe through the foundation to the outside so the drainage ditch would drain out there. Huge floods came. No water. I had conquered the problem.

- **Victory:** But, this last month, some of my drainage system developed a flaw, we had a big flood, and a little water came in the family room. I realized I needed something more lasting than my otherwise excellent system. I needed for the system to be totally impervious to erosion or any other breakdown. If I could get to the place where nothing could weaken or jeopardize my system, I would have the victory (this is where we will be when we enter our eternal rest).

II. What Do Christians Today Have to Overcome?

■ **Subdue, prevail, conquer our own easily-besetting sins**

- ▶ Illustrate besetting sins: that pack of beagles I once had. All those dogs had bad behavior that I didn't want. But one dog, Jack was particularly bad. He was the first to the food bowl, the one which got the most food, the last to leave the food bowl, the first out of the pen, the last to get back in, the first to dig out of a pen when he was put up; the hardest to control. Jack is a good illustration of our besetting sins

- ▶ I sometimes had to take a switch to Jack, jerk him up by his collar, or pull his ears to subdue him.

- ▶ I spent a lot of time and effort getting Jack's attention in order to prevail over him

- ▶ I never conquered this disposition in Jack. I finally gave him away. Too bad we can't do this to be rid of our besetting sins. But we have to subdue them, so that they don't have free run in our lives; we have to prevail over them, or else they will quickly break out every time they have a chance. Most of all we have to conquer them or else they will rule in our lives, when it is Christ who is supposed to be ruling.

- ▶ My daddy-in-law had an old mule that wouldn't stay out of the corn-crib. He would yell at that mule, take reins to him, take sticks and poles to him, but he would still get into the corn crib and eat corn. One day he caught the mule in the corn crib, got his shotgun, and killed the mule. He stopped the mule from getting in the corn crib. He conquered the that mule's unbreakable habit of raiding the corn crib and he conquered that mule's continual habit of getting on his nerves.

- ▶ I am convinced that we have to do a similar thing to besetting sins. We have to kill them. How do you kill sin in your life? You starve it to death. Did you know that sin will die of starvation if you refuse to feed it long enough?

- See Rom. 8:13 "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but **if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.**"

■ **Subdue, prevail over, conquer, the things of the world and its temptations**

- ▶ There is a life style out there in the world that offers a huge attraction, even to serious Christians. It becomes such a large attraction because it promises so much that appeals to

human nature and to the comforts and pleasures of the flesh. It is even more tempting when Christians look around them and see all their friends, neighbors, even relatives chasing that rainbow and having fun doing it.

- ▶ The words of Christ about overcoming should remind us that this allure of the world is nothing less than a gigantic temptation.
- ▶ As with besetting sins, we must be prepared to see this for what it is, subdue it, prevail over it, and seek to conquer it.
- ▶ The problem with conquering this temptation (laid as a snare made of worldly pursuits and/or worldly possessions) is that captives to it don't know they have been snared until they are immobilized spiritually by it. The very words of Jesus when He warned us about being caught unaware in the day of His coming plainly points to the great danger of being caught unaware by worldly things: (Luke 21:34) "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares."

- Illustrate: When I think of how people can get trapped and spiritually disabled by the things of the world, I remember a TV show I used to watch back when I was a boy. Back in those days there was a show called Ramar of the Jungle. I used to watch the show every chance I had, and a part of the show that happened every so often, and always hypnotized me, was the scene where the villain ran into a quicksand pit. When he first got in there, his face told us that he just thought it was a momentary annoyance; but he kept sinking a little deeper, a little deeper; when it got to his chest, his face told us that he knew he was in trouble...but he kept sinking until just his head was above the quicksand. It was then that the look on his face told us that he knew it was too late...struck with terror he realized that he was irretrievably immobilized by the quicksand. Then in a moment he disappeared below the surface of the quicksand, never to get out. This is how it happens sometimes with people regarding the snare of the temptations offered by the things of this world. At first it is only an annoyance, but there is still spiritual mobility; then spiritual mobility begins to be very hampered, then there is no spiritual movement at all and that person's entire spiritual meaning in this life is totally swallowed up by the quicksand of the world.

- ▶ Before this happens, Christians need to wake up and realize that they are in the quicksand of the world and they need to ask for the Lord's help to escape (the one thing I remember often about those Ramar scenes was that sometimes the victim in the quicksand would be calling out for someone to help him...sometimes someone would pass him a stick to try to drag him out, but it didn't always work...the stick would break and he would be swallowed up anyway; or sometimes it would work and the rescuer would haul the victim out).

- ▶ Notice in Mark 4:18-19 (Christ's own words in the parable of the sower and the seed) how powerful and destructive the things of the world are to the spirituality which might otherwise be prevalent in the life of a person: 18 "And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, 19 And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful."

- ▶ This statement tells us that the drawing of the world's temptations has the power to snuff out any spiritual production in the life of a person.

■ **Subdue, prevail over, conquer spiritual error**

- ▶ Christ was certainly talking about overcoming doctrinal error when He spoke in our text.

There are doctrinal errors that lead people into hell. Many of these errors are found in established religions. Our Lord has said we must subdue, prevail over, and conquer these errors that are promoted by organized religion if we should expect to eat of the tree of life. He will give us the tools to do that, but we need to remember that the responsibility for overcoming lies within us.

- ▶ Today, more than ever before doctrinal error is leading people astray and making a lot of people think they are OK with God when, in fact, their souls are in danger of hell fire
- ▶ Here are some things that have been twisted completely out of shape in religious teachings; things we must overcome by continually standing for the truth:
 - Teaching that Jesus Christ is not the only way to heaven
 - Teaching that there is no hell, no final judgment (some advice for any who are confronted by anyone with this notion: In the new testament, the word hell is written 23 times; of those, 17 of them are from statements made by Jesus Christ Himself, while only 6 are by any other speaker or writer. Regarding judgment as it is meant in this context: scripture uses the word judge or judgment at least 59 times in this exact context)
 - Teaching that the Jesus Christ of Islam, or the Christ of other false religions is the real Christ
 - Teaching that since God is love there can be no such thing as a God of wrath and judgment
 - Teaching that morality and personal holiness do not matter in the greater scheme of salvation or reward
 - Teaching that since we cannot stop sinning as long as we live in the flesh, then we need to just make peace with any sinful practices we have in our lives and not try to do anything about them
 - Teaching that we can work our way to heaven
 - Teaching that people can be truly saved, then lost again
- **Subdue, prevail over, and conquer the ills and trials of life, so as, in all these respects, to show that our Christian principles are firm and unshaken**
- Nothing makes a more bumpy ride down the road of life than sickness, pain, and emotional or financial, upsets in our lives.
- In fact, these are the kinds of things that often trigger besetting sins in every one of us.
- These are sometimes the earthquakes in our lives that cause emotional chaos around us and in us (the orderliness that was once our lives starts looking like scenes from Japan we have recently seen on the news).
- Trials of life may be the tsunamis that would wash away or damage the structures of our spiritual and physical stability. Our feelings of well-being and closeness and our communion with the Lord may get swept away by waves of personal or family illness, by personal, social, or business setbacks, or family troubles.
- They are the disturbances that can compromise and break open the nuclear reactors of carnal emotions and thoughts that lurk in every one of us, and threaten to make our social, business, and spiritual environments toxic with resentment, bitterness, squabbling, pettiness, fears, uncertainty.
- Because of that, these things are dangerous to our spiritual well being and we **MUST** find the grace and spiritual determination to subdue, prevail over, and conquer their influences in our lives.

- How to do that? James 4:7-8 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *ye* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *ye* double minded.

III. The Ultimate Overcoming - Victory!

- Notice that I did not say much about victory as we looked at subduing, prevailing, and conquering. That is because the better part of our overcoming is yet to happen. We will finally have the victory over besetting sins, the temptations and things of this world, spiritual error, and ills and trials of this life. That victory will be complete when we awake in Christ's likeness.