

Overcomer – Overcoming Sin & Temptation

March 13, 2016 - Pastor Alex Kranjec

Main text: Matthew 4:1-11

Our objective: live a life without sin in the midst of temptation and hardship.

- Jesus was tempted in all points as we are, endured hardship, yet was without sin. He lived a righteous life.
- In order to be like Him we too must resist temptation and avoid sin. However, we simply can't do that because we have a problem:

Our problem is sin. We are at a war that we cannot win on our own.

- We desire a happy life. The secular worldview around us has indicated the means to finding that life is to look within - to discover and pursue our desires and dreams and do all we can to realize them, regardless of constraint or opposition.
- The more we look within, the more we find weakness, sin, temptation, and suffering. The harder we try within our own strength, the more we realize the depth of our depravity
- Following the Spirit will result in resistance, why? We have an enemy - a legitimate resistance to becoming complete in Christ. Verse 3 indicates that Satan himself, that Satan that came to Eve in the Garden. This is the leader of the resistance.
 - Ephesians 2:2 NLT - "You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil - the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God."
- No matter how much we try, the ability to overcome sin, suffering, temptation and weakness does not come from within ourselves. It's not a matter of just "letting go" and attempting to assert our individual desires and expressing ourselves. It's not a matter of looking within to the "magic" we possess.

Our solution, and our main truth this morning: **Jesus' victory over sin is the basis for our right standing with God and our ability to overcome sin and temptation.**

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1 John 5:4 - For everyone who has been born of God [what?] overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Four points this morning in regards to being an overcomer of sin and temptation:

1. We overcome through our faith in Christ.

- The word faith here is actually a noun - a person, place or thing. It's personal faith in the person of Jesus Christ.
 - John 16:33 - I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.
- Jesus' 40 days and 40 nights in the wilderness is a direct parallel to the 40 years Israel spend wondering the wilderness. This is an indication that where Israel failed in the wilderness, Jesus succeeded.
- Christ came to be everything for us. Where we failed, Jesus succeeded.
- Watch how Satan attempts to attack this very core purpose of Jesus:
 - Let's first look at the context of Jesus' baptism. Baptism was a symbol of repentance, of cleansing from sin. So John rightly recognizes Jesus and wonders why he should be the one baptizing him. In other words, John is saying, "What are you doing in my place and what am I doing in your place? What are you doing down there and I up here?"
 - Jesus responds by saying in Matthew 3:15 - "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Jesus is saying, "I am here as a substitute. I am here not only to get baptized like you should, even though I don't need it, I've come to repent in your place; I've come to live in your place, and I've come to die in your place; so you can stand in mine!"
 - In the first temptation, Satan is assaulting this idea of substitution. He's asking Jesus to use his divine power to meet his temporary needs and forego the purpose of God. He's suggesting that instead of depending on the Holy Spirit and on the Father, to rely on his own strength.

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- Jesus, at his baptism, put himself in our place - he lived his life exactly the way we should. That means he prayed to the Father for everything, relied on the Holy Spirit to lead him, and gave up his own strength by clinging to the Father.
- Satan continues to assault the purpose and identity of Jesus in the second and third temptations. It's like he's saying, "I'll give you the crown without the cross." He wants him to come in strength and say, "Be like me and you will be saved," rather than coming in weakness and dependence and saying, "I've come to live your life, so you can be saved."
- Christ came to be everything for us. Where we failed, Jesus succeeded. We overcome through faith in Christ. I love how Pastor Tim Keller puts it, *"Every other religion says, 'You live a righteous life and give it to God,' but Christianity says, 'Jesus has lived a righteous life and he gives it to you.'"*

2. We overcome through a process. Our victory is both complete and ongoing.

- 1 John 5:4 - For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?
 - There are two different tenses of the verb "to overcome" being used here. This indicates that our victory of faith is both a complete action (5:4b) and an ongoing process (5:5).
 - Justification: set free from the penalty of sin. To be made right with God.
 - Sanctification: set free from the power of sin. The grip of sin is broken. We believe this occurs progressively through a process and requires just as much faith as justification does.
 - Philippians 3:12 - I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.

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- Glorification: set free from the presence of sin all together. This is the point at which Christ completes what he begun in us. Where we are made new and the world is made new - absent from sin, suffering, and temptation.
 - We live in the in-between. God is in the business of moving history toward the final redemption. Yet in the in-between, God is actively and progressively redeeming. The realities of Christ's life, death, and resurrection are being realized through the Holy Spirit and His Church. We become redemption vehicles, for God's purpose on the earth.

3. We overcome through life in the Spirit. Our ability to overcome is through the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is the grantor of divine empowerment to live for the Kingdom.

- Jesus is baptized and filled with the Spirit. It was the Spirit that led him into the wilderness. And Acts 10:38 tells us it was the Spirit that enabled Christ to live the life he lived. Jesus himself depended on the third person of the trinity for guidance and power to live out the Christian life:
 - Acts 10:38 NLT - And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.
- Paul highlights the role of the Spirit in helping us overcome sin. Romans 8:1-2 NLT - So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.
 - There's no condemnation - that's justification. It's a done deal. You don't have to do anything to earn it. Then Paul says it's by the power of the Spirit that frees us from the power of sin - that's what we just defined as sanctification. The Spirit brings us into the Godhead - gives us new life through Christ in us (Romans 8:10) and gives us access to the Father:

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- Ephesians 2:18 NLT - Now all of us can come to the Father through the same Holy Spirit because of what Christ has done for us.
- Romans 8:26 says the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness and helps us to pray. When we face our weaknesses, we must turn to the Holy Spirit, rather than turning to ourselves. For we overcome through life in the Spirit.

4. We overcome through weakness - by embracing trials and suffering as God's vehicle for our maturity and growth.

- James 1:2-4 - Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing [which is another way of saying to be an overcomer].
 - The means in which God uses to produce faith that overcomes is through trials.
- Let's go back to Matthew 4:1,2 - Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.
 - Jesus embraced a path of suffering. The Spirit led Jesus to the wilderness and fasting. The Spirit sent Jesus there to be tested and allowed Satan to tempt. Satan tempts but God tests. He demonstrated that weakness is not sin and that the testing of our faith is an essential part of becoming like Christ.
 - Every overcomer is tested! Abraham was tested by God in offering up Isaac (Hebrews 11:17), the people of Israel were tested in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 8:2), and Psalm 26:2 tells us David sought the testing of God.
 - As we face testing in life, we must be careful that we don't rebuke the very tool God is using to bring about maturity and strength in our lives! As we read, it's the test that brings about steadfastness. It's through testing we overcome! Listen to how Paul describes it:

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- 2 Corinthians 12:8-10 NLT - 8 Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. 9 Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. 10 That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
- 1 Peter 1:6,7 NLT - So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine [that you've overcome] It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold - though your faith is far more precious than mere gold.
- We overcome through weakness. We embrace trials, suffering, insults, hardships, troubles and persecutions as God's vehicle for our growth. We view them as the answer to our prayer to become more like him. As we do that we find freedom and life. Instead of bitterness toward God, we find the joy James talked about!
- One quick disclaimer here: throughout church history there has been at times an exaggeration of this truth - people that bring about harm on themselves and caused troubles in order to manufacture this spiritual reality. What you need to know here is that Satan actually misquotes Psalm 91 in Matthew 4. He's asking Jesus to create a context where God would have to deliver him - to be the one who causes the need for God to rescue him. Jesus responds by saying, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" It is not our job to manufacture the wilderness. It is the Spirit who leads us.

Our tendency is to do everything we can to avoid our sin and weaknesses. We do everything we can to build a life that covers up the suffering and brokenness of our world. We embrace comforts that help us self-soothe and hide from the realities around and within us. But it's the way of the cross.

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We're just a few weeks away from what the church calls Holy Week, the week between Palm Sunday and the Resurrection. Often the Thursday that week is called Maundy Thursday - the day of The Last Supper and Jesus' prayer in the Garden. Listen to the account:

Matthew 26:36-39 NLT - 36 Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and he said, "Sit here while I go over there to pray." 37 He took Peter and Zebedee's two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed. 38 He told them, "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." 39 He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, "My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine."

Luke 22:44 NLT - He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.

This is indeed the way of the cross. Some applications as we close this morning:

- First, let's remember we overcome through faith in Christ, and not from within our selves. We have nothing to bring, nothing to add. No talent, strength, brains or "magic" that is enough to overcome. We let go, and come with what Psalm 51:17 calls a broken at repentant heart ready to rest in the arms of our savior.
- Secondly, let's remember we overcome through a process, led by the Holy Spirit. Romans 8 reminded us that the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. We are sanctified, set free from the power of sin, through the life-giving Spirit that is given at salvation.
 - How can you more directly engage the Holy Spirit in your daily life? Do you even acknowledge that He is there - an equal part of the Trinity, ready to help, guide, and empower you?
- Finally, we remember that we overcome through weakness - by embracing trials and suffering as God's vehicle for our maturity and growth.

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- Missionary Hudson Taylor and his wife were missionaries to china. Hudson's wife suffered greatly towards the end of her life and became totally blind. In seeing him deal with the challenges of that someone asked, "why should God do this to you when you have served him so faithfully?" "Oh," he said, "he is putting the finishing touches to my character." Oh to have that perspective... That's what it looks like to overcome.

Coming back to main truth this morning: **Jesus' victory over sin is the basis for our right standing with God and our ability to overcome sin and temptation.**