

12.

LIVING IN THE VICTORY

We have been examining the wonderful possibility of living a life which overcomes the enemy. We have seen that within the body of Christ today there are many thousands of men and women who are, through the power of God, succeeding in resisting temptation and enduring through much tribulation. Thus, they are manifesting the victory of Jesus to the watching universe. But how can we also live in this way? How can we too exhibit to the principalities and powers the manifold wisdom of God?

Some have thought that their victory over the invisible forces of evil is a question of spiritual warfare. In the church today, this is a topic which is very popular. Many are writing books, conducting seminars and focusing intently upon this one aspect of the Christian life. However, it seems that much of what is being taught – although those doing the teaching no doubt have good intentions – involves much misunderstanding and even error. We have already touched on this subject earlier in chapter 5. There we studied the probability that fallen angels are not the same kind of being as demons. (If you have not read or do not remember this chapter, please review it now before proceeding.) Since they are not the same thing, our warfare with them and victory over them are somewhat different.

One tactic which is seemingly very popular today among some groups is to “bind” the devil. Oh, how much breath has been expended, how much energetic shouting and emotional exertion has been wrought “binding the devil to the sides of the pit.” But strangely, he seems some-

how still loose. It seems as if the devil is still able to operate just as always. If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that he is not "bound" at all. The world is just as evil, if not more so, than before. Wars and evil of every kind are still in evidence. Christians still are under attack and still confronted with every kind of trial and temptation.

Let us think about this logically and honestly. If "binding the devil" and his angels really worked, then everyone should be seriously involved in this business. If victory over the devil were a simple question of shouting or praying in his direction, then let us by all means gather together the most spiritual brothers and sisters in the world and "pray" in this way night and day until there is not one single principality or power left functioning. Then we can go about the work of preaching the kingdom of God without hindrance. But if this really does no good and is just a waste of time and even a distraction from the true victory, let us go on to seek a better solution.

If then "binding" the devil is not the key, how is it that we are supposed to be battling these kind of evil forces? How can we overcome them? To understand the answer, we must first look at the life of Jesus. He is the one who has already defeated the foe. He is the one who has gone before us and overcome. But how did He do it? How was it that He succeeded in completely defeating Satan? The answer here is something which seems very simple, yet is extremely profound. Jesus defeated the devil by living by the life of the Father. Through the purity of this Life, He resisted the enemy and all of his temptations. His overcoming life culminated in His dying on the cross. This is how Jesus overcame Satan. Significantly, no shouting was done. It was not some special kind of prayer that did the trick. Instead, it was the result of a lowly, humble life completely submitted to the Father. Ultimately, Jesus was crucified and it was there that He exhibited His total victory over the enemy.

You see, during Jesus' life here on earth, the devil threw everything he had at Him. Jesus was tempted in every aspect of His living. In the wilderness He was tempted with hunger and thirst; even with all the "glorious" things

of satan's kingdom. Later He was falsely accused. He was slandered, mocked, harassed, threatened and rejected by many men. The religious leaders of His day not only refused His words but set about to try to kill Him. All those in whom the enemy had ground and over whom he had control, he employed to try to cause Jesus to do or say just one wrong thing. Even Jesus' own followers were used as part of this strategy (Mt 16:23). Satan's whole effort was to try everything which normally causes men to sin. He tried to create situations in which an ordinary man would finally get angry, say something rash or wrong, become sarcastic, begin to hate, become discouraged or in any other way manifest the fallen nature. The devil used his whole arsenal. But nothing worked. Amazingly, Jesus withstood every trial without sinning. He was the first man over whom all the devil's power had no effect. Eve lasted under the satan's deception perhaps about 5 or 10 minutes. Jesus lived a perfect life and in no way was ever influenced by him.

Finally, in desperation, Lucifer worked through his servants to have Jesus killed. Not only did he have Him killed, but had Him put to death in the most horrible, painful, humiliating way. But throughout all the torture and torment, through all the pain and shame, Jesus never succumbed. He never said one wrong word or did one evil thing. He never even had one attitude or facial expression which was selfish or sinful. Glory to God, here was a man who defeated the devil! How did He do it? He did it by remaining faithful to the Father through it all even "unto death" (Philip 2:8), by never giving "place" (Eph 4:27) to the devil and by refusing to allow His circumstances and difficulties to cause Him to sin. In every situation, He allowed the Father to live in Him and through Him. He submitted Himself completely to God and allowed Him to reign over every aspect of His being. Thus He overcame. He won the victory.

HOW TO LIVE IN THE VICTORY

The incorruptible life of Jesus makes for wonderful meditation. His undefiled character and purity is a great encouragement and inspiration. Yet, far too many believ-

ers remain content just to know that Jesus overcame. They rejoice in what He has done, but do not realize that this has important implications for themselves. What they fail to understand is that we too must experience this victory in our daily lives. It is not enough that Jesus has overcome and ascended into heaven. We also are required by God to follow Him in this victorious path. So then the question becomes, how can we also “overcome” and live in this kind of victory? How can we defeat the devil and manifest the Kingdom of God in this world? How can we “do spiritual warfare” which will be successful?

To understand this clearly, we must first have a most basic revelation. That is that once we receive eternal life, we have within us two “lives.” We have our old, natural life which we received from Adam and we have a new, supernatural life which we receive from the Father. It is this new life of God which has the holy nature necessary to overcome. *Only* God’s life which He gives us in Christ Jesus can withstand the enemy. There is no amount of effort, no level of consecration, no intensity of zeal on our part which will do the job. Only God’s life is and will be victorious. On the other hand, just as certainly, our old, natural life will always fail. The natural man which manifests the sinful nature will always succumb to the temptations and trials of the enemy. Just as Adam and Even fell quickly and easily, so the natural life which we inherited from them will never and can never pass the test.

Therefore, to overcome we need to learn to live by the new life which we have from God. Just as Jesus did not live by His human life but lived by the Father (Jn 6:57), so we too must learn to “walk in newness of [God’s] life” (Rm 6:4). You see, Jesus had a natural life which He inherited from Mary. But He also received a supernatural life from His Father. So He also had within Him these two lives. However, He constantly chose to live by the uncreated life. He faithfully chose to let the life of God dominate His every thought, attitude, word and action. He said, “The words which I speak, I don’t speak on my own, but the Father who dwells in Me does the works” (Jn 14:10). All the words and works of Jesus were the result of the manifestation of the Divine life within Him.

In the same way, we also can live “by Him” (Jn 6:57). We have the possibility of living as Jesus did, not by our own natural life, but by the life of God within us. This same Jesus who overcame the devil in every aspect of life, who resisted temptation even unto death, now lives in every believer. It does not matter if we are weak. It makes no difference what our personal capabilities may or may not be. The God of the universe lives within us and He has already overcome. All we need to do is to submit ourselves completely to Him. We must only choose to let His life dominate and predominate within us. As we allow His life to fill us and live through us, we can then demonstrate the same victory over Satan and sin.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

One of the most important aspects of this victory involves dying to self. We too must experience death, even the death of the cross. Jesus taught His disciples that in order to follow Him, they must deny themselves, pick up their cross and follow Him (Mt 16:24). This does not mean that we must carry around a piece of wood in the shape of a cross. It means that our old life, which we received from Adam must die. While it lives, it will inevitably express itself in sin. The devil will always be able to be victorious over it. The only answer is for it to be eliminated. When Jesus died on the cross, we also died with Him (Gal 2:20). Therefore, the reality of this death can and must become our experience. We can “die daily” (I Cor 15:31). We can always experience “the dying of the Lord Jesus” (II Cor 4:10). One of the great secrets to living in victory over Satan is our death on the cross. We must die to self and live to God. This is the way in which Jesus exhibited the final victory of the devil. If we want to also have the spiritual power to defeat the kingdom of darkness and live in Christ’s victory, this is the only way. We too must die.

The more we experience living by the supernatural life and dying to our own self, the more we will overcome the devil and his evil forces. The more the cross operates in us and upon us, the more victory we will experience. Please notice that those who make up the manchild in Revelation “did not love their lives unto death” (Rev 12:11). This word

“lives” here in Greek is “PSUCHE” indicating our natural, soulish life. One of the ways they “overcame him” was by not loving themselves. They were willing to die. Our victory here has little to do with shouting and “binding” and very much to do with submitting and dying. It is as we submit our lives to Jesus, allowing Him to actually “be” our life (Col 3:4), that we will overcome. It is as we die to self and live to God that we will notice that the “strong man” is bound and we will have the power to plunder satan’s kingdom. May God grant us grace to live every day more and more in this victory.

Jesus taught that “unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit” (Jn 12:24). Here we see that dying is the secret of a fruitful life. It is as we die that the life of Christ has more “space” to live and move within us. It is also as we die to “self” that the kingdom of darkness has less influence over us. Therefore we can, following the orientation of the Holy Spirit, be ever more fruitful in our work for Him. We can live a life of victory over sin and over all the wiles of the enemy while helping others to do the same.

The Bible teaches us that it is only through much tribulation that we enter into the Kingdom (Acts 14:22). We read that, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (II Tim 2:12 KJV). Thus, our entrance into His Kingdom will certainly involve much difficulty, struggle and affliction. This is a biblical fact. Jesus never said that following Him would be easy. He did not indicate that we would have no sorrow or pain. Those who insist that believers must always be healthy, happy and rich are deceiving both themselves and their followers. Jesus did promise us however an inward joy and strength which comes from believing obedience.

It is only when we deny our “self” and lay it down at the feet of Jesus that we can enter into the eternal, spiritual joys which are available in Christ. It is only as we lose our own life that we can experience His. Much of Christianity today is shallow simply because it has not passed through the cross. The life which we Christians live has so little of the power of Jesus’ resurrection because we

have so little of the fellowship of His suffering (Philip 3:10). We do not experience His exaltation and glorification because we do not share in His cross. We do not exhibit His victory because it is still our own life which is predominant within us.

It is very easy for us in the middle of our life situations to become discouraged. There are some sufferings which never seem to end. Sometimes we find ourselves in situations which are emotionally or physically painful. We pray and pray and pray. Yet, no answer seems to come. We cry out to God. Yet the heavens seem to remain shut. The suffering goes on year after year after long year. The great temptation here is to give up, to do something we know is wrong to end the pain, or to become bitter. What in the world is God doing? Why doesn't He respond? The truth is that God is indeed hearing and responding. But instead of doing what we want, He is doing what is best for us. Instead of doing what we think is right in a worldly, short-term sense, He is doing what He knows is for our good from an eternal perspective. You, yes you, need desperately to die. Your old life with its old nature with all its desires and "needs" is in tremendous need of crucifixion. Your death to self is essential for your eternal joy. The answer is to humble yourself before God, accept His will for where you are and let His Spirit do a transforming work within you. It is as you submit yourself to God in the middle of your trial and pain, that you will find a sweet deliverance from what you are and from what you want. Little by little you will be put to death. Someday you will even thank Him for your experience.

Finally, when you have given up your own important desires and precious "feelings," when you are no longer troubled by your situation, when you are content in Christ in whatever condition you find yourself, then you are ready for a change. When Jesus has delivered you from what you are, then He can deliver you from *where* you are. When the bread is well baked, it is time to take it out of the oven. It is then that your life becomes a testimony, both to the world and to the principalities and powers. It is as you become faithful unto death that you become victorious over the enemy, self and sin. It is then that your life can

begin to be used by God in a powerful way to plunder the kingdom of darkness and bear much fruit. When you have passed through death, you can then experience the resurrection life and victory.

RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT QUALIFIES

While teaching about the Kingdom Jesus said: "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:20). Here is a surprising statement. The scribes and pharisees were the religious elite of their day. They had an appearance of righteousness which was right down to the letter of the law. They tithed, fasted, prayed, studied the scriptures daily in a manner which was very impressive. Apparently they were the pinnacle of what God was requiring. Many Christians' lives do not even come close to this kind of dedication. Yet Jesus insists that we exhibit even more righteousness. How can this be?

In God's word we find that the righteous requirements for entering into His Kingdom are defined even further. We read Jesus' words: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Mt 5:5). "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom" (Mt 5:3). So we see that there is a requirement of meekness and humility. In II Peter, we are presented with an even longer list of prerequisites. Peter exhorts us to: "add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love." "For if you do these things you will never stumble; for so an entrance shall be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom" (II Pet 1:5-7, 10,11). What a list! All these things are desirable Christian characteristics, but how could anyone possibly live in this way? If such godly character is required, how could any of us even imagine that we could enter in?

What God is seeking and what will enable us to enter into His Kingdom is this new Life about which we have been speaking. Once again, our own life, even exerting all the effort and energy we possess, can never measure up to the Divine standard. Perhaps there are many believers

today who imagine that they are consecrated. They have zeal and determination to please God and do His will. It is even possible that they secretly imagine that they are somewhat above others spiritually because of their dedication. This opinion could be somewhat reinforced if they have evident, powerful, spiritual gifts. But this does not qualify as meekness. It is not humility. It is only the kind of righteousness the scribes and pharisees were able to produce. And we have been clearly told that this will not suffice to enter into God's Kingdom.

When Jesus was walking on this earth, He said, "I am the way" (Jn 14:6). It is significant that He did not say that He was merely showing us the way, but that He actually *was* the way. God's way today is a person. It is by allowing this Person to live in us and through us that we go along this divine path. Jesus exhorts us to "enter in by the narrow gate" and further states that "many will seek to enter in and not be able" (Lk 13:24). He is also the narrow gate. It is by allowing Him to be our life and we will succeed in entering. As we enter in through this narrow opening, all that we are must be left behind. What we have and what we are by nature, even if it seems to be "good" in our eyes, simply will not fit through. When we seek to enter in but are not willing for all that we have and are to be removed, we fail to pass through the Gate and enter into the Kingdom.

Only the life of Jesus living in us and living through us can satisfy the Father. It is with Him that the Father is well pleased (Lk 3:22). Indeed the way is narrow. It is only one Person and we must enter in through Him. The gate is exceedingly narrow and so, just like the camel passing through the eye of the needle, the only way to get through is to unload ourselves of all our baggage. Our abilities, our zeal, our natural leadership, our possessions, yes, even our own life will not fit through. When we yield our life more and more to Him so that our life can be put to death and His life can live through us in its place, then these wonderful attributes of God's own nature begin to be seen in our lives. All the attributes of His character are in evidence. When it is no longer we who live, but Christ (Gal 2:20), then the world around us can begin to see what Jesus

really is like. When the life of God is dominant in us, then our testimony is no longer just words, but also in evidence in all our attitudes and actions. In this way, our entrance into His kingdom will be “abundantly supplied.”

OVERCOMING THE WORLD

Another aspect of the Kingdom victory involves overcoming the world. The Bible teaches us that the world and everything in it is part of the devil’s kingdom. Therefore, any believer who desires to enter the kingdom of God must also overcome the world. This includes what could be called “the system of this world” with all its lust, opulence, greed, flash and glitter. God has called us to separate ourselves from the world. He says in His Word: “come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord, and do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you” (II Cor 6:17). Another verse states: “Do not love the world, or the things in the world... For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life is not of the Father but is of the world...And the world is passing away and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides for ever” (I Jn 2:15-17). The world and all the things in it are an important ingredient of the devil’s kingdom. It is one of the most subtle snares in which he entraps the people of God.

Satan offered to Jesus and he is offering to us today all the kingdoms of this world if we will submit ourselves to him. The devil is able to give men and women many things which seem, from a human standpoint, to be desirable. This includes such things as money, fame, possessions and status in the eyes of others. He is able to bestow recognition, power, influence. But like our Master, we must learn to flee from these things at all costs because if we do not, it will cost us the Kingdom. In the scriptures we read, “No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will be loyal to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6:24). The mammon that the scripture is talking about here is the riches, pleasures, entertainments and accolades which the world and its inhabitants might impart. It is impossible to serve God and be pursuing the

things of the world. Unless our hearts are purified from these things and we determine to serve God alone, we will be swallowed up by the cares of this life, by the things of this world which we think that we need, and we will fall short of the goal to which we have been called. "Whosoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (Jas 4:4).

Money is the singularly most powerful thing in the physical world today. Jesus says that it is harder for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of heaven than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (Mt 19:24). His disciples thought surely this must be impossible, but Jesus assured them that with God all things are possible. Riches are deceitful. They deceive those who possess them into thinking that they are an end unto themselves. More people have been deceived by this one thing perhaps than any other.

Today there is even a whole segment of Christianity that is teaching men and women to pursue wealth. By so doing these teachers turn the minds of believers away from the Kingdom of God and towards the most powerful influence in the kingdom of Satan. I Timothy 6:9,10 reads: "But who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Not only are riches a distraction, but if we are taken in by them and spend our time pursuing them we will not enter into the Kingdom which God is preparing.

If we do possess money, it is only by subjecting all that we have completely to the authority of Jesus Christ that we can overcome. And like the rich young ruler, this may require that we give much if not all of it away. Money should be used for doing God's work and fulfilling His purposes and not for setting ourselves up in a comfortable and secure position, gaining material possessions and satisfying all our own desires. Money which is under God's control will be used to support His servants, to give to the poor, and in every way to see that the purposes of God are

furthered in this world. Money can be a very important tool for those who know how to use it for God's Kingdom, but the scripture warns us that the power of money is extremely deceitful, so deceitful in fact that we must exercise extreme caution and care in dealing with it. "No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life" (II Tim 2:4).

All of God's children should make sure that their finances are completely under the authority of God, and that they are willing to obey Him whatever it may cost. Peter at one time said to Jesus, "See, we have left all, and followed You" (Lk 18:28). And Jesus replied to him: "Assuredly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers, or wife, or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come everlasting life" (Lk 18:29,30). In this "present time," that "more" might mean spiritual blessings. It might mean that we never possess many earthly things for ourselves, but on the day that Jesus returns, we will be greatly rewarded. I beg you brethren and readers, do not put the world and the things in it first. Put them all aside. Don't become entangled in the things of this life. Let us seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and trust that He will add to us the things which are needful to continue living in this present world (Mt 6:33).

