

## Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

### How to Recognize an Overcomer, Part 2

Scripture: 1 John 5:1-5

Code: 62-37

Well let's open our Bibles then to the fifth chapter of 1 John and return for part 2 of our look at the opening five verses under the title, "The Overcoming Life," or on being an overcomer. We're in the last chapter of this remarkable epistle. In the opening five verses we are introduced to a concept that is rich and glorious for all of us who are Christ's. It is the concept of being an overcomer. Let me read the text, verses 1 to 5.

"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. And whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever or whoever is born of God overcomes the world, and this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith. And who is the one who overcomes the world? But he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

Three times in those last two verses we are introduced to the idea of being an overcomer, overcoming. Just another way to say triumphing, winning, defeating an opponent. We are by definition overcomers and we looked at that a little bit last time. By way of review simply to remind you that it means we are winners.

There's a wonderful little verse tucked in the second chapter of 2 Corinthians that says, "Thanks be to God who always leads us in His triumph in Christ." Thanks be to God who always leads us in His triumph in Christ. Us being believers. God always leads us in triumph because being in Christ we enter into His triumph. In the language of Paul, as we noted last time, we are more than conquerors, super-conquerors, hyper-conquerors. The Greek is *huper nike* from which we get Nike. We are super conquerors. In the language of John we are overcomers, those who overcome. We are triumphant. And we talked about that a little bit last week. Once a person is regenerated, once they have become a believer in Jesus Christ and been born again and justified and adopted into the family of God, once they have been delivered from sin and death and hell, once they have been converted, adopted and sanctified, Christians are invincible in the ultimate sense. This, of course, means that our salvation is eternal. We are eternally secure. We will persevere to the very end. Nothing can remove us from the Savior's grasp. We sin, we fail, we struggle but we never ever lose any battle ultimately, finally,

with the world, with the flesh, or with the devil. Our faith, our salvation are indestructible.

You say, "Well, I know about people who were in the church, they confessed Christ, professed Christ, did everything that all of us were doing and then they departed. What about them?" And we are reminded again of 1 John, a very important portion, chapter 2 verse 19, "They went out from us but they were not really of us. If they had been of us they would have remained with us but they went out in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us." Down in to verse 27, "As for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you and you have no need for anyone to teach you, but as His anointing teaches you about all things and is true and is not a lie and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." True believers remain, that's what abide means. Those who don't remain, those who depart only manifest the fact that they never were really of us to start with. Your faith, the faith by which you were saved, faith given to you by God is permanent faith, it is indestructible, it is unconquerable faith. That is its nature. It is not because you are unconquerable, it is because the faith which God in mercy and grace granted you is permanent faith.

Our text then is focused on the fact that no matter what may come our way, we are overcomers. "Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world." And therefore we triumph in the power of Christ. This is such an encouraging reality. There is never going to be anything that will come against us that can steal our eternal life.

Now we talked about this definition, first of all, of overcomer, one who conquers, one who defeats, one who is unconquerable. And we mentioned to you last week that that is not something that the ancient world believed belonged to human beings. They were fairly realistic. And they realized that no matter how good a person might be, no matter how right they may try to live, no matter how they may direct their lives, they were not invincible. If there was such a thing as a mortal who had some great powers by which he could triumph in unusual ways, he was almost considered a god. In ancient Greek times, if you read ancient Greek literature, I used to read a lot of it, particularly when I was a student because it fascinated me to understand how they viewed the spiritual and supernatural world, you find that it was the gods who were powerful, it was the gods who were unconquerable and invincible and human beings were just failures. They might win here or there, along the way, but ultimately it was real to portray humans as those who failed eventually.

Some of the fascinating legends that grew up around certain human beings that triumphed have so fancified their lives that we can't even get to the real core of what they were. Because it was so rare they literally sort of made sort of semi-gods out of people. One story that always fascinated me was a story about Ariadne who was the daughter of the king of Crete. Now the king of Greece had a son named Theseus and Theseus, the son of the king of Greece and Ariadne, the daughter of the king of

Crete, kind of had a thing going together and they cared greatly for each other. Theseus wanted to do something to demonstrate his great prowess to finally win the hand of Ariadne. There was, according to the legends about this real person named Theseus, a cave somewhere in which a Minotaur was living. Do you have any remembrance about Minotaur in some of your studies when you were a student? That is a monster with a bull's body and a human head. And the Minotaur lived in this cave and anybody who got near the cave was killed and the Minotaur had a regular agenda of coming out of the cave and eating seven Athenians and seven maidens regularly. And so they wanted to get rid of the Minotaur and Theseus wanting to prove his prowess to win the heart of Ariadne determined to go in and find the monster and slay him. Now what made it difficult was the cave in which he lived was a labyrinth from which no one who ever went in had ever escaped because once you got in you couldn't find your way out and eventually you gave up and were consumed, if not sooner, by the beast.

Well Ariadne wanted to assist her lover in his effort to convince her father of her worthiness for her hand and so she smuggled him a sword. He was supposed to be able to prove his prowess by going with nothing but his bare hands but she smuggled him a sword. And then she did a very smart thing, she tied a long scarlet cord to his foot so that he could find his way back out after he slew the beast...which he did. And he came out and won the girl. And you know how the story ends, they all lived happily ever after.

Well that's not true, but around this character Theseus because he had a certain power and prowess, grew this typical kind of legend. Pure fantasy for sure, but not really a bad illustration of the believer who goes into the labyrinth of the enemy and slays the enemy with the sword of the Spirit and finds his way out because of the scarlet cord of the blood of Christ. That's a stretch but you get the picture. Basically the Greeks didn't believe that that was the normal way in which human conducted life and if somebody did that, they were turned into a legendary figure. That's the point.

What does Scripture say we have overcome? We went in to that last time. We talked about the definition of an overcomer and the things that we've overcome. And we talked about Satan. The Bible is very clear, we've overcome the evil one. Death, we have triumphed over death and the grave. We have triumphed over sin. We have triumphed over the Law in the sense of the sentence of the Law. We have triumphed therefore over judgment. And we have triumphed over ignorance. We are the overcomers. We have triumphed. And then, of course, most notably in the text we have overcome the world and that is said three times, twice in verse 4 and once in verse 5. The world being the invisible system of evil that opposes God and is ruled by Satan. In fact, the Greek says, "We continually are overcoming the world." This is simply saying that once you've come to Christ, you will always triumph, your faith will be sustained. You're like Job, you might lose everything you possess, all your children, all your possessions, all your fortune, all your wealth, your health. You might lose it all but never will you deny your God. Never will you lose your faith and trust in Him. You might waver with certain doubts, never will you deny your Lord because the faith that God gave you is

a faith that triumphs over everything. We are then the overcomers.

Now how do you know these overcomers? So we go from a definition to a description and we got into this a little bit last time. And here John does what he's been doing all along in this epistle, he takes us back through the same test by which you know you're an overcomer. The text by which you know you're a Christian. And we go back down to verse 13 again in chapter 5, kind of the key verse of the whole book, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you may know that you have eternal life."

How do you know you have eternal life? How do you know you're an overcomer? Well in these opening verses, we know that overcomers by three marks, the same things John has been talking about. Number one, faith...faith. Verse 1, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Verse 4, the end of the verse, "This is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith." Then again in verse 5, "Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." Three times, verse 1, verse 4, verse 5, it says it is our faith that overcomes. You look at an overcomer and you can tell an overcomer because they believe in Jesus as the Son of God. That is, they believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ. They have an ongoing sustained faith in the gospel of the Son of God. The one who believes is the one who is an overcomer.

It was years ago, you remember, when I wrote the book on the Lordship of Christ called *The Gospel According to Jesus?* That I point out in that book that there are people who believe that there are those who are on their way to heaven even though they do not believe. And later on a book came out in which a new term was coined, "Unbelieving believers are going to heaven." That is people who once believed, don't now believe anymore but the once believing was good enough and even if they don't believe anymore they're still on their way to heaven, they are simply unbelieving believers. Then I wrote another book to deal with that ridiculous idea. You can tell who an overcomer is because their faith is sustained. They don't go from being believers to being unbelievers because the very faith that they possess is a gift from God, empowered by the Holy Spirit and sustained by Him as well. All of the overcomers are characterized by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God and that means they embrace all that is true about Him.

Now let's go to the second test to determine an overcomer. That was just the review. The second test is very familiar to us again in John's epistle, it is love. We go from believing in right doctrine, sort of the doctrinal test, to the moral or ethical test and the second of John's three tests presented here to verify overcomers is love. Go back to verse 1. "Whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." Verse 2, "By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God." We'll stop at that point.

You can tell an overcomer very simply. He or she loves God and loves whom God loves, the children born of Him. New birth, regeneration not only brings us into a faith relationship with God, it brings us into a love relationship with God and God's own people. We enter into a love relationship with the Father and with His beloved children.

Back to verse 1, "Whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him." You can tell who is an overcomer, they love God and they love those that are God's. This has been part of John's emphasis all the way through. Go back to chapter 2 for a moment and verse 5. We've been saying all along he cycles back to the same things. Chapter 2 verse 5, "Whoever keeps His Word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected." And when you see the love of God matured in someone, "By this we know that we are in Him." How do you know when you're a Christian? Because you love God and you love those whom God loves.

Verse 11...or verse 10 and 11, "The one who loves his brother abides in the light. There's no cause for stumbling in him. The one who hates his brother is in darkness, walks in darkness, doesn't know where he's going because the darkness has blinded his eyes." If you don't love other believers, you're not in the light. If you're in the light, you love your brother. Chapter 3 and verse 10, again John winds his way back through the same truth. "By this...he's going to give you the test here...by this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious, anyone who doesn't practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." It's about loving your brother. Verse 17 adds, "Whoever has the world's good and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue but in deed and truth, we shall know by this that we're of the truth and assure our heart before Him." And so we come back to the same principle there.

Look at chapter 4 verse 7, "Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who doesn't love, doesn't know God for God is love." Down to verse 12, "No one has beheld God at any time, if we love one another God abides in us and His love is perfected in us." Verse 21, "This commandment we have from Him that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

How do you know you're an overcomer? How do you know you're a Christian? First of all, because you continue to believe. You may have moments of doubt, they're never final, they're never fatal because you have been given eternal life, sustained in the perseverance of the saints by a faith that is indestructible. How do you know you're an overcomer? Because you love God and you love God manifestly, that is to say you love God in a visible expression as you live your life and you also love those whom God loves.

Now we're not just talking about sentiment here. Loving God is not a matter of sentimentality. Loving God is a matter of desiring to honor and to please Him. Isn't that what we do when we love someone? The greater your love for someone, the greater the compulsion of your heart to do good for them, to honor them, to show respect and regard and to provide all that they need and more, to seek their pleasure, to do their will. And so those who love God are caught up, consumed with pursuing what honors the one they love. And then they also love those whom He loves, the children of God. It all comes down to how you treat other believers then. It's the practicality of living your life for fellow believers. That's how you can tell a Christian. If they seek friendships outside the family of God, if they have no compassion toward those in the family of God, if they don't literally hunger and thirst for spiritual fellowship with those who are God's, there's no life in them, there's no light in them. They walk in darkness.

We know we love God when we love the ones He loves. If it's a chore for you to show up here and if it's just your goal when you get here to try to escape the place without having to encounter anybody, and you're only here because your wife drags you here, that's a pretty good indication that whatever you may think, you don't love God or you'd be coming into this place every time you had an opportunity so that you could join with the people who are His people whom you also love in a collective offering of praise to Him and hear the one who love speak His Word to you.

I can tell when a student comes to the college whether or not they love God by how they treat the opportunity to study His Word, by how interested they are in being involved in a church, by how they approach chapel, Bible study, by how they treat fellow students. We're not talking again just about sentimentality here, we're talking about the kind of love that is the only love the New Testament really exalts and that is *agapa* love, the love of the will, the love that says if you see somebody with a need you meet it, the love that is sacrificial, the love that is not necessarily dependent upon attractiveness. But the love that is simply demonstrated on every front where there is a need, the love that enjoys fellowship, the love that is eager to make whatever sacrifice is necessary for the good of another. It's how you...it's how you approach God and how you approach His people that demonstrates whether you really love them. If you love God, you long more than anything else to be in His presence, to hear Him speak, to praise Him and worship Him. And if you love His people, you long to be with them and to be the source of their needs being met as much as you can. You pray for them. You nurture them. You counsel them. You speak to them kindly. You exhort them. You encourage them. You confront them. Do whatever you need to do, all those one-anothers of the New Testament for their spiritual benefit because you care.

There's a third characteristic that marks those who are overcomers, not just faith and love but obedience...but obedience. Look at verse 3 here, it really comes at the end of verse 2. "We know that we love the children of God when we love God...and here it comes...and observe His

commandments. For this is the love of God that we keep His commandments are His commandments are not burdensome."

Now let's put this together. We believe in God. We believe in Christ who is God. And that faith produces love and that love produces obedience. If I believe that Christ is who He is. I believe Christ is exactly who the New Testament says He is. If I believe God is who the Scripture reveals Him to be, then He is going to draw out of my heart all my love and all my praise and all my adoration and all my interest and all my attention. And I'm going to be consumed with Him as the priority of my life. And as a second priority I'm going to be consumed with the people He loves because whoever He loves I love. It's just how it works. And if I truly love Him that way, the expression of that love is going to come in keeping His commandments, and considering His commandments as not burdensome...not burdensome. If you love somebody, and they ask you to do something, you can't do it fast enough, right? True love always issues in obedience, always rushes to the will of the person who asks, always longs to meet the need.

The genuine proof of faith is loving obedience, sustained loving obedience. And the only way that you can really demonstrate that you love God is to obey Him, that's the only way. That is to seek His honor and His glory, to show Him respect and worship, to reverence Him. If you believe as a true Christian that God is God and Christ is God and Christ is Lord and God is sovereign, you're going to find God the object of all your affections and you're going to love God and you're going to love Him so truly that it's going to show up in your desire to obey Him and His Laws will never be burdensome to you anymore than it's burdensome to do what someone you love profoundly in this life asks you to do. You keep His commandments.

The end of verse 2, "Observe His commandments," that's *poieoin* the Greek. It means to continue to do them, it's action. Continue to do them. A different word is immediately used in verse 3, "We keep His commandments," a different word from *tereo*. We don't just do them, this word means regard them, we protect them. And that is to say we've gone from action to attitude, we...we not only do what God commands us to do but we guard what He commands us to do as a sacred treasure. We're eager to do that. We don't find that burdensome at all, and that's what Jesus had in mind when He said, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for My yoke is easy and my burden is light and you'll find rest for your souls." If you hook up with Me, if you take My yoke it's not going to be burdensome like the yoke of the Law that you've been under with the Pharisees.

In John 14:15 Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Verse 21 of John 14, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." Boy, what a promise.

So you say you're an overcomer. You say you're a Christian. The verification of that in your own heart, as well as to those around you, is your sustained faith in the truth, but there's got to be more than that, more than saying you believe, the devils believe and tremble, sustained love for God and others and a sustained love that manifests itself in a sustained obedience and an obedience that is not burdensome. So you have not only action of obedience, but you have an attitude of obedience. Or perhaps a better way to say it would be the desire of obedience. Deuteronomy 13:4 says, "You shall follow the Lord your God and fear Him and you shall obey His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him and cling to Him." Now if you're a true Christian, if you're an overcomer, that's what you do. Ecclesiastes 12:13, the conclusion, "When all has been heard is fear God and obey His commandments." First Samuel 15:22, "To obey is better than sacrifice."

Now what kind of obedience are we talking about here? What we're talking about as we've already noted, an obedience that is not burdensome, that is to say it's not a legal kind of obedience that's pressed upon us and we cave in and grit our teeth and do it against our will. Listen to Romans 6:17, "Thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart." What a great statement. You became obedient from the heart. We're talking about a heart obedience. It's because that's what's in you. That's what you want to do. First Peter 5:2, "Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion but voluntarily." That's the kind of obedience the Lord wants from His shepherds and everybody else. Do it because you want to do it, not because you're forced to do it. In fact, this obedience is not only motivated from the heart apart from compulsion, done willingly. But it should be done cheerfully. For example, remember 2 Corinthians 9:7, "Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart, no grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." God loves somebody who obeys His command to give and does it cheerfully. And that word, of course, means with hilarity, happily, joyfully.

Disobedience to God is wrong. Disobedience to God is a betrayal of somebody who is not a true Christian. But so is external, unwilling, partial, inconsistent and grudging obedience. Those who know God, those who are overcomers have a loving obedience and it is not burdensome.

You hear this repeatedly as the testimony of the great psalmist, David, in that magnificent treatise on the Word of God, Psalm 119. And I will only read you a couple of sample verses. Listen to 119:14, "I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies as much as in all riches." What a statement! I am as happy with Your commandments as I am with all the riches. Verse 16, "I shall delight in Thy statutes." Verse 24, "Thy testimonies are my delight." Verse 97, "O how I love Thy Law. I love Thy Law." Verse 103, "How sweet are Thy words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth." Back to verse 54, this is amazing, "Thy statutes are my songs."



Our society doesn't love the Word of God. Just one representation of the Word of God, the Ten Commandments, sitting in stone in a public place and this society from the ACLU all the way up to the Federal Courts wants to get rid of it. They hate God's Law. It is a burden they refuse to bear publicly. For us, Your Law is our song. That 54<sup>th</sup> verse, isn't that an interesting verse? We could come together in church and the Law of God becomes our song. Compare that with the song of the world. Most of the world's songs, most of the popular songs in the world are about violations of God's Law. Warren Wiersbe many years ago said this, "Imagine turning God's laws into songs. Suppose a local symphony presented an evening of the traffic codes set to music. Most of us do not consider laws a source of joyful song. But this is exactly the way the psalmist looked at God's Law. Because he loved the Lord, he loved His Law."

You have laws in your home. You don't hear your kids sitting in their room writing tunes on their guitar, "O how I love to obey my mom and clean my room," that is against the nature. That's against your nature. You don't hear people write songs about, "O how I love the IRS, yeah, yeah, yeah." What is it about...what is it about God's Law that makes us sing? It is the delight that we have in obeying it, isn't it? Cause we love Him. His commandments are not burdensome, they are joyful. Loving is a duty. It is an act of the will. But it is not oppressive. That's what burdensome means. It is not crushing. His yoke is easy and his burden is light. Why is it so delightful to do it? Because His Law is a reflection of Him, because to obey His Law pleases Him and we love Him and seek to please Him. Because He never gives us laws that obeyed are not for our benefit and because we function in a relationship with God that is not a relationship of fear but a relationship of love.

Now, so much for the definition and the description of overcomers here. Let's...let's do something to wrap this up that takes us to another passage of Scripture. I want to talk, thirdly, about the delights of overcomers. Now that we know we are overcomers, and we know who the overcomers are, John, by the way, isn't finished with that subject, we just have to go to the book of Revelation to pick up the rest of it. So turn to Revelation. And what we find here is the delights that are provided for overcomers, the blessings, the special gifts that God gives overcomers. And it's in chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation that you have the seven letters to the seven churches. And, of course, you have sort of summed up in these seven letters promises to the church in general.

And at the end of each of these seven letters there is a promise and there is a promise to the overcomers. Now churches are not just composed of overcomers. We would like to think that they're mostly overcomers, that maybe 95 percent of the people in the church and certainly in this church are overcomers. And we would have to admit that in some churches that call themselves Christians it might be one percent of people who are really Christians, really overcomers. But in any church in any circumstance, whoever the overcomers are they are given promises. These letters are written to seven churches and in these seven churches there were true believers and the promises to these true believers in these churches are expanded and extended to all believers throughout all time since

the promises were given. They are then the universal delights that the Lord gives overcomers.

Let's look at the first church which was the church at Ephesus in the opening seven verses of Revelation 2. And you go down to verse 7, in the church at Ephesus, you remember, there was a serious problem, they had left their first love, right? They had grown cold. And obviously there were people in that church who were not true Christians, but others were. In the middle of verse 7, "To him who overcomes," to the overcomers there, the ones who have sustained faith, manifest love and obedience, "I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God."

What is that? What's that promise? Well you remember when Adam sinned, God drove man from the Garden. He drove him from the paradise called Eden, sent him out from His presence and didn't permit him to eat of the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life caused someone to live forever and once man had fallen into sin, God did not want him to live forever in that condition. The Tree of Life then symbolized eternal life. The paradise of God symbolizes heaven. So what you have here is the promise that all overcomers will live forever eating the Tree of Life in the paradise of God.

Eden was quite an amazing paradise, of course, we know that. There was a magnificent watering system from four rivers going in all directions in the paradise of God, watering that incredible garden. But the heavenly paradise is even greater. Turn to Revelation 22 and if we look ahead into heaven, verse 1, John has a vision of heaven, "And He showed me a river of the water of life clear as crystal coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb." In this paradise there's also a river, as there was in Eden that split into four. In the final paradise there's a river of the water of life clear as crystal coming from the throne of God and the Lamb. In the middle of its street this river goes right down the main street of heaven, the eternal capital city of the New Jerusalem. And on either side of the river was the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life going all the way down, beautiful symmetry on either side of the river, with twelve kinds of fruit yielding its fruit every month and the leaves of the tree were for the healing...better way to translate that, for the therapy, the well-being, or the enjoyment of the people. When you get to heaven there's going to be Tree of Life. I don't know exactly what that means. People always say, "Well are we going to have a digestive system in heaven?" I don't know about that, I doubt that seriously because we are eternal and because there will be no corruption and no decay, we will have nothing in our glorified bodies that would cause anything to be decaying or to be processed in that direction. So that's not going to be a part of heaven. But there are going to be in heaven elements of heaven which symbolize the eternity of our life there and the joy of that place.

So the first delight for an overcomer is eternal enjoyment of God's presence in the paradise called heaven. There where God lives from His throne will come the river, on both sides the symbols of eternal life which we will all enjoy forever in the paradise of God.

And then the second letter of the seven letters is written to the church at Smyrna and to the true believers in that church, verse 11, "He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death. What's the first death? Physical death...physical death. The fruit of unbelief, the fruit of rejection, the fruit of sin. God, you remember, said to Adam, "Eat that tree, the fruit of that tree and you'll die." The first death is physical. But the second death is far worse, it is spiritual and eternal. "But the man or the woman who is an overcomer dies physically to never die again forever." The overcomer dies only that he may or she may live forever. We will die physically, we will not die spiritually, we will not die eternally. That is His promise to the overcomers.

In Revelation 20, again at the end of the book, verse 6, "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection. Over these the second death has no power." And we participate in the first resurrection. What is the first resurrection? The resurrection of the just. It has several parts. Christ, the firstfruits who was risen from the dead, the church at the Rapture and then the Old Testament saints at the end of the Tribulation, all three of those, the resurrection of Christ, the resurrection of the church, the resurrection of Tribulation saints and Israel, that constitutes the first resurrection, the resurrection unto life, Jesus called it. The second resurrection is the resurrection of all the ungodly of all the ages at the Great White Throne at the end of the Millennial Kingdom and all of them are given bodies suited for hell and cast forever in the Lake of Fire. Those who are part of the first resurrection will never experience the second death. What have we been promised? We have been promised heaven, the paradise of God, eternal life and never to die again.

The third promise to the overcomers is in chapter 2 verse 17. And this is given at the end of the letter to the church at Pergamum or Pergamos, this is the postal route, by the way, through Asia Minor. Each of these towns was on the postal route, actual towns with real churches, but certainly they symbolize these great truths for all believers. Verse 17, "To him who overcomes," here we come back to the overcomer again. Who are the overcomers? Those who continue to believe, manifest love and obedience. "To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna and I will give him a white stone and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it."

This is most interesting. Jesus writing to the church here in Pergamos, acknowledges that there are some who hold fast My name and did not deny the faith, in verse 13, there are obviously others who have not held fast and have denied the faith. But to those who overcome, first I will give you the hidden manna. Let me talk about that for a moment. A pot of manna, you remember what manna was, it was the bread that God provided for Israel in the wilderness wanderings and you remember it

was the direct provision of God. He literally had the manna there every morning when they came out to pick up and eat it that day, and the next morning there was more, and the next, and the next, except on the Sabbath and the pot of manna was kept in the Ark of the Covenant and placed in the tabernacle and the temple as a memorial to the feeding of God's people in the wilderness.

When you read here about the hidden manna, what does this mean? I think it is referring to all that is ours in Christ. Do you remember when Jesus in John 6 was talking, He said, "You remember Moses in the wilderness and Moses fed you in the wilderness," but Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. I am the bread of life. I am the true manna that comes down from heaven." John 6:31 is worth reading in this regard. "Our father, said the Jews, ate the manna in the wilderness. As it is written He gave them bread out of heaven to eat. Jesus therefore said to them, Truly, truly I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven, for the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world." And then verse 35, "I am the bread of life." And so here our Lord Himself says to the overcomer, "I will give of the hidden manna."

What can that mean? I think it means that when we get to heaven you're going to receive, as it were, Christ Himself. We're going to enter in to a dimension, into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself that can only be hoped for and frantically imagined in this life. We are going to enter into the richness of the fullness of the one who is our very life, the fullness of blessing in the eternal presence of Jesus. Why hidden? Because now He's hidden, isn't He? He's hidden from us, whom having not seen we love. But some day the manna, the bread of life will no longer be hidden.

Some of the old Hebrew legends, kind of interesting, said that when the temple was destroyed, the Solomonic temple, either Jeremiah, this is legend, but either Jeremiah, the rabbi said, or an angel buried the Ark in the earth, along with the pot of manna until Messiah's time. And the rabbi said when the Messiah comes, He will unearth the Ark and He will again feed His people. Well it wasn't far off. This time in our lives we have received our Christ and we commune with our Christ but in terms of His fullness, He is hidden. But some day will be fully revealed to us in all His glory as the true bread.

Then He says in verse 17, "I will give him a white stone." Literally a diamond. I'll give an overcomer a diamond. The little bit of reading I've done in ancient times about the athletic events of that time, we often think about them receiving a sort of a wreath around their heads made of leaves. But there was often more than that. The winners of great events were often given a diamond as their prize and that white stone, or that diamond, according to some historians, acted as a pass to get them into a celebration that was restricted only to the winners. It was the post-Olympic event that you wanted to be at because only winners were there and you had to have the crystal gem to be admitted to the door. It was the symbol of your victory and your entrance into the great celebration of overcomers. And that may well be what our Lord is referring to here. I'm going to make sure that you as a winner, you as a victor have that diamond that admits you to the eternal celebration.

Do you notice again it was what we were saying this morning that all of these things that come to the overcomer relate to the next life, right? It's about heaven. It's about eternal life. It's about the presence of God. It's about the presence of Christ. It's about participating into celebration there. Oh, and by the way, that's not all. Verse 17 also says you'll get a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it. Can't tell you how many times I've been asked what that name is. How in the world am I going to know a name that no one knows? Don't ask me what that name means? I don't know what that name is. Why would I speculate? I'll know when I see it. It's a name written on the stone on this crystal diamond which no one knows but the one who receives it. It might be the name of Christ, it might be my own name. But for now, I don't know what it is. But you know what this tells me? That it's something very particular for me. Nobody is going to know it but the one who receives it. And I don't know how you think about heaven but it's easy to think about heaven as just all of us sort of herded into the place in this non-descript mass of perfect beings with nobody sticking out. That isn't it at all. Here Christ says there will be for each of you on your diamond a personal name that shows that I know you. I tend to think it's whatever name He chooses to give us that we will literally bear forever. We will not be a mass of indistinguishable perfect people, we will be individuals with our own diamond-studded intimate identification, receiving personal attention and personal intimate knowledge with the Christ Himself.

The fourth letter in chapter 2 verses 26 to 28 was to the church at Thyatira. And go down to verse 26, "And he who overcomes and keeps My deeds until the end, overcomers do that, to him I will give authority over the nations." Wow! "And he shall rule them with a rod of iron as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father."

This is interesting. We're going to be given authority over the nations. Christ is going to share His authority with faithful overcomers. You say, "Well that's not going to be heaven." No, I think that's going to be in the Millennial Kingdom on earth. We literally are going to rule with Christ in delegated authority as He rules with a rod of iron," that means striking down evil wherever it appears in the Millennial Kingdom, smashing iniquity whenever it occurs. We're going to be a part of that. It's Matthew 25:21 and 23 where Jesus said, "I will make you ruler over many things if you're faithful over little."

But there's more than that here because amazingly when it says, "I will give authority over the nations, or I will cause him to rule them," the word "rule" in verse 27 is *poimaino* which means to shepherd. So it's not going to be some abusive thing, it's going to be stern and it's going to be serious, and the threat of the rod of iron, the threat of judgment is going to be hanging over the head. But we're literally going to be His under-shepherds in the Millennial Kingdom. When we are taken up

in the Rapture we receive our rewards, we come back at the end of the Rapture, we come to earth, we reign with Christ for that thousand years and He delegates authority to us by which we shepherd the nation like shepherds shepherd sheep and they carried a rod, did they not? They used that rod on occasion to knock the sheep back into line for its own protection. We will be delegated that responsibility of shepherding under the authority of our great King over all the peoples in that Kingdom.

Then in verse 28 He adds, "And I'll give him the morning star." What is that? What is the morning star? Well look at Revelation 22:16. "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright...what?...morning star." What does this mean then? Back in chapter 2 verse 28, "I'll give him the morning star," the Father is saying I'll give them Christ. I'll give him Christ. Now I don't understand what all that can mean, but I understand that God already did that once, He gave His Son for me once, didn't He? As my sacrifice for sin. How much more glorious and wonderful added to that is the fact that He gives me His Son in eternity, in a sense, for my own personal Lord and King? Everything again relates to eternity. Everything relates to heaven with that one exception that we're going to rule in our heavenly form. So for us it's part of our heaven because when we come back to rule with Christ, we'll be in heavenly form, already having been raptured, already having been given our eternal glorified bodies. That will be a heavenly experience for us on earth. We will already have been in heaven during the time of the Tribulation, coming back to earth as heavenly beings. So that, even that is part of our heavenly experience.

And then in Revelation 3 we find a fifth letter to the church at Sardis and two features here down in verse 5. "He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments...white garments." Go back to verse 4. You have a few people in Sardis who haven't soiled their garments and they will walk with Me in white for they're worthy. White then becomes the symbol of purity, the symbol of worthiness, the symbol of righteousness. Oh sure, it encompasses festivity, it encompasses victory, it encompasses glory, but it really is the reflection of our real and true righteousness. We having been once covered by the righteousness of Christ, having been worthy only because He is worthy while we are unworthy, in our glorified condition become righteous and therefore become worthy and therefore wear garments of white.

And then He adds, and this is so important, "And I will not erase his name from the Book of Life. And I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." We not only receive worthiness, we receive security. Once you get to heaven you're never going to be anywhere else, I'll never blot his name out of the Book of Life. In John's day, cities had a registry. Kings in their kingdoms had a registry of citizens. When a person committed a crime of some magnitude, their name was removed,

it was blotted out of the city registry. They were outcasts. And Jesus is saying it may happen to you in your city in this world, it will never happen to you in the world to come in the city of heaven. Your name will never ever be erased.

Churches through the years have been persecuted. Christians have been excommunicated from all kinds of towns and cities and organizations. They have borne the fierce persecution of God-hating people. They have been blotted out, killed. Never in heaven...never in heaven. Savonarola, I saw his statue, we were in Italy last year, great preacher, he preached against Catholicism and the Pope sent a message to him. He said, "I separate thee from the Church Militant and Triumphant." The Pope excommunicated him. Church Militant is Church alive on earth, Church Triumphant, Church in heaven. Savonarola sent back a message, "From the Church Militant, yes. From the Church Triumphant, never." You can kill me, but you can't blot my name out of the Book. I will never do that, Christ says, I will never do that.

So what does it mean to be an overcomer? It means you receive heaven. That you receive eternal life, the paradise of God, that you have a personal identification by which Christ knows you as an individual, that you receive Christ in all His fullness, the manna no longer hidden, the bread of life no longer hidden. That literally you are given Christ as the Father's gift. It's just staggering realities, heavenly realities that you're going to walk in white because you're righteous and worthy of it. And your name will never ever ever be removed.

And then in the third chapter and the twelfth verse, in the letter to the church at Philadelphia verse 12 says, "He who overcomes I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God and he will not go out from it anymore and I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from My God and My new name." That's a lot.

First of all, He says overcomers are going to become pillars in the temple of My God. In ancient times if you ever visited the ancient world, the ancient Greek world, you know they built all these temples with pillars, right? You go to the ruins of Greece or the ruins of Asia Minor, Turkey, or wherever it is, even in Israel, and a lot of times you see what's left of the pillar, sometimes they're toppled over, but great temples, great edifices, great buildings, great houses, great civic places in the cities were built with pillars. And important people were honored by placing a pillar in one of the great temples. They would provide the money for the pillar and their name would be placed upon that pillar. Very often those pillars which you see now is stone, were overlaid with marble, and then overlaid with gold and the name of the person was there. And the idea was to make it as permanent out of stone, marble, gold as it could possibly be as a perpetual memorial or honor to a certain person. They were firmly set. They were secure. They lasted virtually for millennia. God says, "I'm

going to bring you up here and I'm going to give you a name, prominent name of honor in a pillar in My temple forever." What an amazing thought. And the further amazement is that none of us will have any pride about it because we'll be perfect and we will all possess perfect humility and yet we will understand that we, through the work of God in Christ, have been made worthy of such an honor. And He says, "He will not go out from it anymore."

Philadelphia, the city this letter was written to, was located near a large volcanic field constantly subject to earthquakes which often destroyed the city and people had to run in fear out of Philadelphia. Where you're going there aren't any earthquakes. You don't have to worry about the great temple and the pillars coming down on your head, not in heaven. No fear, no pillars are going to collapse, you're never going to have to run from an earthquake. You can come into the temple where your name is in the pillar and be safe.

Furthermore, not just a pillar. God is going to write on him, on the overcomer. Some of us are going to get our first tattoos. I'm going to...my first one is going to be from Him, I don't want any others when He's the only one that's going to be allowed to write on me. I'll write on him the name of My God. Why? Belongs to God. This is God's. It's a staggering truth. "And I'll write on him the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem. And I'll write on him My new name." Secured, loved, honored in inconceivable ways.

And finally, the seventh letter, verse 22, the letter to the church at Laodicea, a lukewarm nauseating church, but also had some overcomers in that congregation. And this is the pinnacle. I mean, up to now it just keep...it mounts, doesn't it? Eternal life, that's good. That's good, the paradise of God. Wow, that's great, I'm thrilled about that. That's so wonderful. It's even more wonderful to know that I'm not only going to be in heaven, I'm not only going to be in the paradise of God, but I'll never ever be hurt by the second death. I will have that eternal life without any fear that I would ever lose it. It's wonderful to know that I'm going to have the full fellowship with the bread of life, Jesus Christ, that I'm going to have a crystal diamond that admits me to the celebration with a personal name written on it that nobody knows but me. It's...it's the relationship with Christ in me, it's Christ's little nickname for me.

How wonderful on top of that to know that I'm even going to be able to come back to earth and be delegated authority to rule in His behalf. I'm going to be able to go around in white garments symbolizing a worthiness that I've never known except what was imputed to me. My name could never be erased from the Book of Life. God is going to know my name because His Son is going to confess my name before the Father and before the holy angels that He knows me and loves me and gave His life for me and I belong there. I'm going to have a pillar in the temple of God with my name



on it. I'm never going to have to run out of the place in fear. I'm going to have written on me the name of my God, the place of my dwelling and my own new name.

And all of that and then this, verse 21, "He who overcomes I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne." That's just too much. That is too much elevation, isn't it? I mean, at this point you want to say, "Come on, this is getting ridiculous. I'm not even worthy, just showing up is enough." I said this some time back, I don't think the big shock of heaven is going to be, "O look who's there!" I don't think the big shock of heaven is going to be, "O look who's not here." I think the big shock of heaven is going to be, "How did I get here? What am I doing in this place?" And then it all comes and you're taken all the way up to sit down with God on His throne as Jesus also overcame. Oh, don't put me in that category. I will. "And He sat on His Father's throne." You're going all the way up to snuggle down with the Son and the Father on the throne.

Well, that's what it means to be an overcomer. Those are the delights you have to look forward to. In light of that, we can endure anything in this life with that glorious hope. Amen?

Father, thank You for Your Word to us tonight. Precious, precious truth, overwhelming truth, thrilling truth, astonishing, embarrassing...embarrassing truth. We aren't worthy of this. What grace is this? What astonishing grace is this? Maybe we could understand taking us to heaven. Maybe we could understand eternal life in the paradise of God, but all the rest. And then sitting down on Your throne, it seems utterly presumptuous. We can't conceive of ourselves in that kind of holy perfection. We thank You for this promise and look forward to it with literally rapturous joy. We bless Your name and we praise You for the gift of salvation in Your Son, thank You, thank You. We love You, we believe in You, we long to obey You. We want to be the true and the pure overcomers for whom all these delights are now being prepared.

Father, I pray for those who are here who do not have that sustained faith, that compelling love, that manifest obedience. Awaken anybody who is living under a self-delusion about their true spiritual condition and bring them to the foot of the cross to embrace the sacrifice of Christ on their behalf. If anyone here, Lord, tonight and we're sure there are some, is not an overcomer, may You by Your grace awaken their heart to that reality and may they rush to cry out with penitence and faith, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner, and save me, for Jesus' sake," that they might become one of us who have overcome. Use us, Lord, while we're here that heaven might be all the more glorious when we get there. Thank You, in Your Son's name. Amen.

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