

CHAPTER 4

Called to Conquer

In the last chapter, we left John in mid-turn. John had turned around to see the voice that had spoken to him. Every time we come together, God wants to turn us to be in line with His Word so that our lives are reflecting what He is saying. John says he turned to see the voice and, having turned, he saw seven golden lampstands. He turned to see Jesus, but he saw the Church because one of the things that this book will teach us is that, although Jesus is still speaking, His communication now comes through the Church. Later on we are going to see John turn to see a Lion, but he sees a Lamb, and just as the Lamb is the Lion, so Christ is the Church. We are the Christ of God in the world, and it is through us that God now speaks. John sees, in the midst of the Church, this awesome revelation of the wonderful Son of God.

The Importance of What We See

What we hear is important. But more important is what we see. What you see actually motivates how you live. What you see is that which draws you on. Abraham saw a city. It is what he saw in the vision that became the great motivation of his life, and what we see determines how we live. If you have seen a world in disaster, a church in collapse, and opposition gathering like the dark storm clouds of a coming calamity, then you will live on the defensive. But if you have seen the glory of the Lamb, if you have seen His radiance filling the earth, if you have seen His Kingdom coming and the nations of this world becoming the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ, then you will live in triumph. You will live an overcoming life because what you have seen in the Spirit is more real to you than what you see in the natural.

I do not know about you, but I have seen something. I have seen something of the purpose of God. I have seen something of the splendor of Jesus. I have seen something of the triumph of His Kingdom. I have seen something of the glory of His Church. I cannot entertain a thought of disappointment. I am not just an optimist, although I guess if I had to come down on either side, that is the side I would fall on. I think I am a realist. I think I am a Biblicist. I think I have seen some reality in the things of God. I think I have seen the Lord. One glimpse of Him would answer all your problems. If people encountered the Christ that we meet in the Book of Revelation, the queue for the counseling room would vanish overnight.

When I am speaking to some people, I sometimes feel like saying, "If you had seen what I have seen you would not be like you are." If you have seen Jesus, you can never be the same again. This is what happened to John: "I heard, I turned, I saw, I

fell! I fell at His feet as though I were dead." When is the last time you saw Jesus in such a way that it had that impact on your life? When is the last time you were so overawed by the presence of Jesus that your legs turned to jelly and you fell in a heap at His feet? That is where He needs to get us because that is where the victory begins. It is not in us flexing our muscles or rattling our sabers. It is in us falling at the feet of Jesus. This is what happens when John encounters Christ. He hears the word, he lines his life up with the word, and in lining his life up, he sees the glory of Jesus and, in seeing the glory of Jesus, he falls like a dead man at His feet. That is where victory is discovered. That is where overcoming abounds—not in our histrionics but in bringing our lives in absolute and total submission to the lordship of Jesus Christ. When John goes up into Heaven, he is going to discover that he is not alone because all the elders fall down before the Lamb and worship Him. It is the place of utter submission. I am like a dead man at the feet of Jesus. If Jesus had a church full of dead men and dead women, this church would win the world very quickly.

He Strengthens Our Frailty

Here is John dead and at the feet of Jesus, and Jesus does three very important things for John. These are three very important things He will do for us if we bring ourselves in total submission to His lordship. You see, this Kingdom into which we have come, this Kingdom about which the whole Book of Revelation speaks, is a very strange place. It is not like anywhere else in the universe. It is a peculiar Kingdom because in this Kingdom if you want to find your life you have to lose it. In this Kingdom, if you want to be great you have to become the servant of all. What a strange place! I do not know anywhere else like it on the planet, or in the

Heavens. John discovers his strength when he falls like a dead man at the feet of Jesus. This is the message to the churches—death is not the end, it is often the beginning.

It says that he fell at the feet of Jesus like a dead man, and then, “He placed His right hand on me” (Rev. 1:17). Jesus, by this act of immense grace, strengthens John in his frailty. John’s strength has gone. This strong man who stood against the Roman Empire, who had resisted the authority of Caesar, who had refused to compromise with all the pressures of Asia upon him, sees Jesus and is dead. But Jesus reaches out His right hand. It is significant that He reaches out *this* hand because it is in this hand that He holds seven stars, which are, He tells us, the seven angels of the churches. I think this refers to those who are His servants and who minister. And I think part of the confirmation—that is what it is—is that this is the hand with which He touches John and imparts strength to His feeble servant. When we come to the end of ourselves, when we come to the abandoning of our own strength, it is Jesus who strengthens our frailty.

He Stills Our Fears

Not only does He strengthen our frailty, but He stills our fears. For He speaks to John and says, “Do not be afraid” (Rev. 1:17). I find it encouraging that this outstanding apostle of God knew what it was to be afraid. We sometimes want to project a macho image of ourselves, as if fear could not affect us. But the truth is that we are often afraid. There is nothing wrong with being afraid; it is part of what God has built into you. Fear gets the adrenalin going so that you either fight or flee. That is what fear does for you. That is what it is supposed to do. Fear throws us on the Lord. When Paul went to Corinth he said to the Corinthians that he came with “fear, and with much trembling”

(1 Cor. 2:3). He is not speaking about being under an anointing that caused physical trembling. He is scared. But he finds his strength in the Lord. God comes to this blessed apostle and says to him, "Do not be afraid." He stills our fears. When we have encountered Christ like this, there is nothing to scare us. When we have encountered Jesus like this, fear flees. The great hymn writers of old wrote songs of such great revelation and anthems of praise and worship that we have sadly assigned to yesteryear, and in doing so, we have thrown away some of our heritage that we need to rediscover. We need to rediscover the hymns of our fathers because they are full of truth much more than some of the ditties we sing today. One of these great writers wrote this: "Fear Him, ye saints, and then ye will nothing else fear." I like that. There is a dragon out there. There is a beast out there. There is a false prophet out there. There is a seductive harlot out there, but Jesus says to us, "Do not be afraid." He strengthens our weakness and he stills our fear.

He looks at John lying at His feet like a dead man, and as if to say, "I have been there. I know what it is like," He says, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!" (Rev. 1:18). We are called to share in the strength and the security of His resurrection. If I know I am raised with Christ, then death no longer holds fear for me. It was by His death that Jesus destroyed him who has the power of death and released those who through fear of death were all their lives subject to bondage (Heb. 2:14-15). You do not have to be afraid of dying. The fear of death has left me. I am not looking forward to it. I would rather not be around when it happens! The pain that sometimes accompanies it does not fill me with delight. Death is still an enemy—but it is a toothless enemy. It is a clawless enemy. It is an unmasked fiend who, behind the wretched grimace, is just a clown who has been

brought into the service of King Jesus. His job now only consists of opening the door for you into the presence of the Savior. He is a doorkeeper. That's all he is. We do not have anything to fear. Jesus wants us to know this.

He Secures Our Future

Jesus says, "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and hades" (Rev. 1:17-18). Do you know why He has the keys of death and hell? He overcame him who once held them. When satan came around after Jesus beat him on the cross, he felt in every pocket. Maybe he searched under every cushion. And Jesus shouted, "I've got the keys! I've got the keys!" Do you know your future is secure because He has got the keys? You can overcome because He has got the keys. Satan does not have the key to your future. Satan does not have the key to your prison. If you feel you are in prison, get up and try the door. It's open! Jesus has the keys, and it is Jesus who is going to unlock everything from now on. Nothing is going to happen in the Book of Revelation from this moment onwards unless Jesus unlocks it and allows it to come forth. Satan has no strategy. All satan has is reactions. But the Lamb sets the agenda. The Lamb opens the seals. The Lamb unlocks the doors. The Lamb sets in motion His eternal purposes. This is the Christ who is our Lord. This is the Jesus who has conquered all things and now calls to us, "Overcome, overcome! Because I am alive, you are alive. Because I have won, you win. There are troubles but I have overcome the world and I invite you to join Me in My victory." That is why the Scripture says He always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ (2 Cor. 2:14). That is why Paul tells us we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us

(Rom. 8:37). We are called to win. There is no room in the Church of Jesus Christ for a ghetto mentality. There is no room for “pastor’s last stand.” We do not have to hold the fort. We have to invade the enemy’s territory!

The Messages to the Churches

Jesus enables us to overcome. And every message that Jesus sends to the churches in chapters 2 and 3 is a call to overcome. It is interesting, and in some ways it is a bit of an embarrassing encouragement, to discover that those early churches had problems, difficulties, and errors. Jesus confronts them not just to blow them out but to bring them in line with His revealed purpose. As He calls them to overcome, it is interesting to note that some dispensationalists will tell us that these seven churches are a picture of the history of the church. It starts in the past with the Ephesian church, which was orthodox and did not have great error. Although it had lost its first love, it was orthodox, it was a good church. The last church, in the last dispensation before Jesus comes again, is Laodicea, a lukewarm church that God wants to spit out of His mouth. Dispensationalism always carries with it a sense of failure. It traces dispensations down through history and every one ends in failure. Even the Church is going to end in failure. I cannot embrace any concept that speaks of this people for whom Jesus died, this Church that He purchased at such inestimable cost, as ultimately failing and disappointing Him.

Now, I am not claiming right now that the Church is perfect. We are all aware that it is not. We know about our own churches—fulfilling as they may be, none of us would proclaim, “This is the pattern for everything that has to happen from now on.” But we are trying to get there, and by God’s grace we will succeed. One of

the things it is important to understand is that although He addresses each church individually, every church is included in the letter. He does not end the letters by saying, "Let him who has an ear to hear, hear what the Spirit is saying to Ephesus." It says, "Let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches." That is why I often say that if you are in a meeting and there is a prophetic word that comes to an individual and some of it, somehow, in the Spirit of God, wings its way into your heart, then that was for you. Imagine I am a believer in Pergamum and I'm reading the letter that went to Ephesus and something rings in my heart because it is for me. It is what the Spirit is saying to the churches. What is more, there does seem to be a recapitulation of spiritual history in these letters: there is no looking forward to degenerating faith but a recounting of progressive purposes.

Ephesus—Paradise Restored

The overcomers in Ephesus are promised access to the tree of life. God has begun His restoration purpose way back in the garden. Here is His purpose: paradise restored. You have been excluded from the garden. Sin has separated you from the tree of life—but if you overcome, you will have access to the tree of life. Paradise is restored.

Smyrna—Pardon Secured

To Smyrna He says that he who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death. The second death is not dying physically but dying spiritually. It is being cast eternally from the presence of God. It works like this. If you are born once you will die twice. You will die physically, but you will die eternally in a separation from God. If you are born twice you only die once. Those who overcome will not be hurt by the second death. In fact, Jesus says, "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you

the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). So the death that came on Adam when he sinned has now been removed, and Smyrna speaks to us of pardon secured.

Pergamum—Provision Supplied

The church in Pergamum is on a pilgrimage. It is as though they are going through the wilderness now toward their final destination. To him that overcomes God promises hidden manna, just as Israel fed on manna in the wilderness. God promises to provide everything that we need. Pergamum and the overcomers there are promised that their provision will be supplied, that God will give them all that they need to sustain them in their pilgrimage until they come to the land of promise.

Thyatira—Power Delegated

To Thyatira He says that He will give them authority over the nations if they overcome. Just as Israel came out of the wilderness into the land and overcame all the nations that dwelt there, so the Church in the world is to overcome all the nations and bring in the Kingdom of God. His power will be delegated to those who overcome.

Sardis—Priesthood Established

To Sardis He says that those who overcome will be given white garments. They are going to be dressed like priests, for in God's ongoing purpose He will establish the priesthood of His people dressed in white that they might minister to Him, their names written in His book. It is interesting that when Nehemiah came back to rebuild the walls and the people sought to discover who were priests and who were Levites, there was some confusion after 70 years of neglect and of forgetfulness. One family came forward and said they were priests, but they could not find

their names in the book. Because their names were not in the book they were considered as unclean. But if your name is in the book, then you are clean. You have a white robe, and He establishes you in His priesthood to minister before Him forever.

Philadelphia—Permanence Promised

To Philadelphia He says that those who overcome will become pillars in the temple. He is building the temple now. We have left the tabernacle behind. We are building a temple for the glory of God, one in which He will dwell and manifest His presence and speak to the nations. You and I will be pillars in His temple. We will be unmovable, unshakable. We will have a sense of permanence in the purposes of God. James and John were pillars in the church.

When Solomon built the temple, he put in two bronze pillars. They had nothing to do with the structure. They did not hold it up. They did not support anything. They just stood at the entrance of the temple, two huge bronze pillars. He gave them names. One was called Jakin and the other was called Boaz. Jakin means "He establishes." Boaz means "in Him is strength." You and I are pillars established and strengthened by God in the house of the Lord. This is the promise to all those who overcome.

Laodicea—Partnership Offered

To Laodicea, there is a strange promise to this lukewarm, failing, deceived church; deceived not by some satanic infiltration but in their own thinking, in their own boasting and pride. He tells them that if they overcome, they will sit down with Him on His throne just as He overcame and sat down with the Father on His throne. So He takes us from the garden to the throne, through the wilderness to the temple. He takes us through the

priesthood and says that all this is for those who will overcome. Of course, the good news is this: you can overcome.

Born to Overcome

Let me show you an interesting short passage in chapter 17 of Revelation,

“The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because He is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with Him will be His called, chosen and faithful followers” (Revelation 17:12-14).

It's great isn't it? There are so many people majoring on the beast, the ten kings, the horns, the war, the invasion, the terror—and with one almost-throwaway line, John casts it aside like so much rubbish. The Lamb will overcome them. We are not told how He does it. We are not told what His strategy is. We are not given the details of the war. We are not in the cabinet meeting to hear the discussion as to exactly how they are going to stand against this terrible invasion, this great axis of evil. He just says that the Lamb will overcome. Why? Because He is King of kings and Lord of lords! And do you know what? He still is—and He is *our* King and *our* Lord, and He always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ Jesus. He is the overcomer. To the Laodiceans He says that he who overcomes will sit with Him on His throne just as He overcame.

We do not have to work at overcoming. We just have to line ourselves up with Jesus. We just have to be able to say with Paul,

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"
(Galatians 2:20).

You and I were born again to overcome. Jesus never invested in a loser. He took multitudes of losers, but He turned them into winners. He took multitudes of those who were defeated and transformed them into conquerors. He is saying to a people who were facing far more tribulation than you and I will probably meet in a lifetime, He is writing to people who are under the threat of imprisonment, to people who are under the threat of persecution, who are under the threat of death, and He is saying to them, "You can overcome! You can overcome!" We can win, and the reason, the guarantee, the certainty of our overcoming is that He has overcome. His resurrection is the guarantee of our victory.

Speaking of the antichrist, John says, in his first letter, "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). By the way, the Book of Revelation never uses the word *antichrist*. It is not a word that you find there. John does use it in his letter, but he doesn't identify it as a person. He identifies it as a spirit. The spirit of antichrist is anything and everything that is opposed to Jesus. There is a spirit of antichrist out there. It shows itself in many ways. It shows itself in Islam and in Humanism. It shows itself in immoral behavior and in binding legalism. We do not have to ask where the spirit of antichrist is. It is everywhere Christ is not. It is everywhere you are not. There is a spirit of antichrist at work out there, but that doesn't have to frighten us. It doesn't have to cause us to

worry or bring anxiety because, as John tells us, the one who is in us is greater than the one in the world. We have overcome. We have all the equipment we need to overcome. We have all the power we need to overcome. We have all the authority we need to overcome. What is that equipment, that power, that authority? The one who is in you. Who is in you? Christ is in you, the hope of glory (Col. 1:27).

There is no excuse for failure here. There is no excuse for capitulation here. The apostle John states, "Everyone born of God overcomes the world" (1 John 5:4). That is a very bold statement, an amazing claim. Everyone born of God overcomes the world. We have to struggle sometimes with what we perceive is reality and what we believe is the Word of God. If you have ever sat down and counseled people, they will tell you this: "That is just the way I am." No, it is not! They are living a lie if they are living in failure, in fear, in depression. They are living a lie. That is not the truth. It is a deception. The truth is this: everyone born of God overcomes the world. That is the truth.

Now if my experience is not matching up to the truth, I have to change my experience, not the truth. I need to learn to know and confess who I am in Christ. I see Jesus not just to make me feel even smaller, but I see Jesus so that I can begin to understand who I am in Christ and begin to confess the truth. This is the truth: everyone born of God overcomes the world. Have I been born of God? Yes. I have been born of the Spirit. It happened to me many years ago. I remember the moment. It was a divine drama acted out in the quietness of my own room. It was an encounter with God that revolutionized my life from that moment on and has been more radically revolutionizing my life since. Something happened. I was born again. I was born of God.

I was born from above. Do you know what that means? I can overcome the world. This is not boasting. Or if it is, it is boasting in the Lord. It is confessing the truth. What did Joel say? Not only did He say, "Afterward, I will pour out My Spirit," He also said, "Let the weakling say, 'I am strong!'" (Joel 3:10). Why? Are you just psyching yourself up? Is it just hype? No, no—that is the truth. You may feel weak, but the reality is you are strong. If you just confess what you are, you are halfway to fulfilling what God has for you. "Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:4-5).

Who is it that overcomes the world? The super saint? The faith preacher? The apostles? No, he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God! I can do that. I can manage that! I do not have to do super-saint spiritual sit-ups. I can believe that Jesus is the Son of God. I do believe it. I believe it with all my heart. I believe it without question. I believe it without any hint of compromise. I believe with all the conviction and certainty of my heart that Jesus is the Son of God. He is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Well then, I can be blessed because Jesus says that it is on such a confession that He will build His church and the gates of hell shall not overcome it, shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:13-20). What does that mean? It means I am going to overcome the gates of hell. We are all overcomers, not because of something we have achieved but because of something we have believed and someone we have believed in.

In the twelfth chapter of Revelation we see the old serpent being cast down from Heaven. We see the dragon hurled to the ground. We see his tail sweeping away a third of the stars. He has

lost his place of authority. He has lost his place of influence. He has been cast down to the ground. He is the one who every time you believed you were a failure came along and confirmed it by speaking it into your spirit. He is the accuser of the brothers, but he has been cast down. He is the accuser of the brethren, but he has been hurled out of the Heavens. And, says John, they—that is, the brothers, the saints, the believers, the church—they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb. You see, it is not a magic formula, the blood of the Lamb. It is not something we recite, “The blood, the blood, the blood.” The blood of the Lamb just means we take a firm stand in our identification with Him who was crucified. His blood was shed for me.

They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. It is not that they stood in front of satan and said, “In August 1960 I gave my life to Jesus.” That is not the word of your testimony. The word of your testimony is this: “I am a child of God.” The word of your testimony is, in the words of an old hymn, “I have an interest in the bleeding lamb.” He died for me. You can accuse however much you like. You can write a list as long as a roll of wallpaper with all the things about me, with everything that you have found out, everything that you have discovered, everything that you have invented and made me believe. You can write a list as long as you like, but Jesus took hold of that list and He nailed it to the cross and it is gone.

Maybe, who knows, there are some of you reading this now who will seal your testimony with your blood. Do not be surprised. There are brothers and sisters, hundreds and thousands of them, who are doing that very thing today. Satan can kill us, but he cannot beat us. He can persecute us, but he cannot overcome

THE LION AND THE LAMB

us. Why? Because Jesus lives, I will live. Because Jesus has overcome, I will overcome. Because He has sat down on the throne, I will sit with Him on His throne. I am called to conquer. I am chosen to overcome, not because there is something special about me, but because of this one thing: He set His affection on me. He shed His blood for me. He has included me in His great salvation, and satan cannot touch me at all.