

NON-OVERCOMMERS & THE TWO WITNESS MINISTRY

Last week I shared about the ministry of judgment God is preparing for a particular group of people. I want to recap some of what I said, and also, add a few more thoughts because some of last weeks session didn't get recorded. But before we begin, I want to deal with a false religious concept which keeps cropping up, which comes from the Church System. I've touched on this before, but I'm not sure those who are listening get it yet. So I'm going to focus on it for a few minutes.

The view of salvation, which has been put forth by the *entire* Protestant Church System for the last 500 years is this: Either you are saved and you get everything Heaven has to offer, or you are lost and you get the worst Hell has to offer. *That's it.* There is nothing in between. There are no degrees or levels of either the glory and rewards of Heaven, or the torments and horrors of Hell. Yet this whole concept is *totally* unScriptural. It's simply a "religious tradition" of men. Take for instance, some of the statements Jesus made concerning those of Israel who rejected the gospel He or the disciples preached. When He sent the disciples out to preach, He said:

*And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, **It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city.***

Matthew 10:14-15

How can it be "more tolerable" for some than for others in the day of judgment? If the wicked all partake of the same *exact* level or degree of torment and punishment, how can it be more tolerable for some than others? Later, Jesus goes to the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida. While there, He performed mighty miracles, yet the people of those cities refused to believe. Consider what the Lord says regarding these people:

*Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, **It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.***

Matthew 11:21-22

Again, how can it be "more tolerable" for the cities of Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida? The answer is very simple. The punishment of the wicked will be *in proportion* to the "light" they have rejected. The light presented to cities like Sodom and Gamorrha, or Tyre and Sidon, pales in comparison to the light that was presented to the cities of Chorazin and Bethsaida, and the villages the disciples traveled through. This is why Jesus said:

*And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, **shall be beaten with many stripes.** But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, **shall be beaten with few stripes.** For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.*

Luke 12:47-48

I don't think we really meditate on these kinds of statements because they go against everything we have been taught. Here we have two "servants" of the Lord who are beaten with stripes for disobedience. It doesn't say they went to Hell. It says they were punished with stripes. The one who knew the Lord's will, yet did things worthy of punishment will be beaten with *many* stripes. But the one who doesn't know the Lord's will, and does things worthy of punishment, will be beaten with *few* stripes. Again, the principle Jesus is teaching here is crystal clear: the punishment received is *in direct proportion* to the light we have been given.

*And some of the Pharisees which were with him heard these words, and said unto him, Are we blind also? Jesus said unto them, **If ye were blind, ye should have no sin: but now ye say, We see; therefore your sin remaineth.***

John 9:40-41

If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.

John 15:22-24

Again, do we really stop and think about these kinds of statements? Jesus said very plainly that if the rulers of Israel had been ignorant and acknowledged that they were ignorant, they would have had *no sin*. He also said if He had not come and *demonstrated the light* to them, they would have had no sin. Now when Jesus says they would have had no sin, He meant what he said! If you have a problem with this concept, don't blame me because I'm not the one who said these things. Jesus said them. What Jesus is explaining is a kingdom principle. All men—saints and sinners alike—are judged according to the light they have been given. That's why Jesus spoke of degrees or levels of punishment. The idea He is trying to convey is the proportional punishment. And the reason he is teaching this is because there is no *injustice* in the nature of God. He is not going to give us all the same exact punishment because we don't all deserve the same exact punishment. We are all going to get exactly what we deserve, based upon the light we were give and how we responded to that light. This is the justice of God. This is why Paul could make the following statement to pagan, idol-worshipping Gentiles:

*Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. **And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:***

Acts 17:29-30

Can we really accept what Paul said here? Can we really believe that before the New Testament gospel was presented to the pagan world, God "winked" at their ignorance, which resulted in idol worship? I guarantee you the entire Fundamentalist, Charismatic and Evangelical world *flatly rejects* what Paul said, and they are quite eager to cast all these multitudes of ignorant gentiles into eternal torment. They will never accept the truth that before the gospel was presented to them, God "winked" at the ignorance of the gentiles.

The same perfect justice that distributes proportional punishment, will also distribute proportional rewards—and this is the point I want to get to. The Scripture states very clearly that there will be *different levels* of authority,

service, glory, honor and responsibility in the kingdom. It declares emphatically, over and over again, that every person (including believers) will be rewarded according to their works. Yet blind religious leaders continue to teach, either directly or by implication, that all Christians will receive the same positions of authority, the same degree of glory and the same rewards "in heaven," based upon our profession of Christ.

This mind-set has been ingrained so deeply in the hearts of most of God's people, without realizing it, they reject the clear teaching of the Scripture with regards to the fact that some believers will be greater in the kingdom than others. It causes us to reject the idea that the saints who have paid a greater price to be faithful to Jesus *deserve* more honor and glory. Another thing this false mind-set produces in us is the idea that all *true* Christians are "overcommers", and therefore, only the overcomer will be saved. We need to consider very carefully what the Scripture actually states, so we will lay all these false ideas to rest once and for all.

The Word of God teaches very clearly that there are different types of believers. Some believers will gain complete victory over Satan, sin and self, while others will only gain a partial victory over these things. The ones who get a complete victory are overcommers. They are the ones who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth (Rev. 14:4). They are the 144,000 who stand with Him on Mt. Zion (Rev. 14:1). The rest of God's people fall into various *non-overcomming* classes, but they are still saved.

Let me say very clearly, the idea that Christians are automatically overcommers just because they are Christians is unbiblical. That fact that it is unbiblical is clearly revealed by the first 3 chapters of revelation. In these chapters, Jesus sends a message to each of the seven churches in Asia Minor, by the hand of John. That message was the call to "overcome". The people in these fellowships were not unbelievers or pagans. Nor were they cultural Christians or pseudo-Christians. They were *God's* people; they were *believers*; they were *in Christ*; they *had faith*. However, they still had to overcome certain things, which means at that point they were *not* yet overcommers. At that point, they were Christians who were being called to *become* overcommers.

What happens to those who don't become overcommers? What happens to those who don't get the complete victory over Satan, sin and self? Are we to assume they will be lost? Some people say "yes" The other week Seattle Paul and I got into a little discussion regarding this issue and I found out he is one of those who thinks all non-overcommers will be eternally lost. He said very frankly that overcomming is not an option; that we must overcome to inherit eternal life. But is this what the Scripture actually teaches? Let's see.

*Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but **he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire**.*

I. Corinthians 3:12-15

I think we can say with confidence that the person who's works are burned up, who has lost all his reward, and who must be saved by fire, is *not* an overcomer. Paul clearly says it's possible to lose everything, and yet be *saved* by fire. This is certainly not a picture of an overcomer! Moreover, any one who suggests this type of person is not really saved in the end, or that because he does end up saved he must somehow be an overcomer, is intentionally avoiding the obvious meaning of Paul's words.

*Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, **The Lord knoweth them that are his**. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in **a great house** there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and **some to honour, and some to dishonour**. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.*

II. Timothy 2:19-21

Again, I think it's fair to say that the person who does not purge himself from the "wood" and the "earth", and thus ends up a vessel of "dishonor", is *not* an overcomer. Yet this vessel is still saved because he remains part of the "great house"—which is clearly a reference to *God's* house. Both kinds of vessels are believers. Both are in God's great house. One is an overcomer; one is not.

*It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, **To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.***

I. Corinthians 5:1-5

Here is a case of a believer who was walking in open, blatant, sexual sin. If we were faced with this situation today, the first response of many of us would be to say this guy is not, and never was, a genuine believer. And we would be quick to assign him his well-deserved place in Hell.

But look at what Paul said, and even more importantly, what he didn't say. He didn't say: "Well, this man's actions prove that he is not a genuine believer". He didn't say: "Well, since this guy won't repent of his wickedness, deliver his soul to the flames". What Paul said was, deliver him to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his "*spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*". Again, I think it's fair to say that the person who only manages to have his "spirit" saved in the Day of the Lord is not exactly an overcomer!

*Be ye therefore ready also: **for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not**. Then Peter said unto him, Lord, speakest thou this parable unto us, or even to all? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, **whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing**. Of a truth I say unto you, that **he will make him ruler over all that he hath**. But and if that servant say in his heart, **My lord delayeth his coming**; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the*

unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

Luke 12:40-48

In this teaching, there are two classes of servants (of the Lord). One kind becomes so evil he is cut off from Christ and is appointed his portion with the *unsaved*. That means he is lost. The other kind of servant is not lost, but he is disobedient and needs to be punished. The level of punishment this kind of servant will experience is in direct proportion to the light he was given regarding the will of his Lord. Obviously the servant that's cut off and placed with the unbelievers is not an overcomer. But neither are the servants who must be beaten with stripes!

Once again, the Scripture states very clearly that there will be *different levels* of authority, service, glory, honor and responsibility in the kingdom. It declares emphatically, over and over again, that every person (including believers) will be rewarded according to their works. Yet blind preachers and theologians continue to teach, either directly or by implication, that all Christians will receive the same positions of authority, the same degree of glory and the same rewards "in heaven," based upon our profession of Christ. And once again, we need to consider very carefully what the Scripture actually says about these things.

*He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, **some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.***

Matthew 13:22-23

In Matthew, Jesus is teaching there are different groups of believers in the Kingdom of God. All three groups are genuine believers. They all are the "good ground". They all "bear fruit"—but they bear different levels of fruit. Some thirty, some sixty, and some one-hundred fold. What kind of fruit is Jesus referring to? Is it not the "fruit of the Spirit?" And what exactly is the fruit of the Spirit? Is it not the character and nature of God? Is it not the "image" of Jesus? So here Jesus tells us very clearly that we can come forth in varying degrees of His likeness and image. We can produce different degrees of the nature of God. We do not automatically bring forth 100-fold fruit just because we believe in Jesus. We are not automatically transformed into the "fulness" of His image just because we have accepted Him as our Savior.

Well, what's the difference between the person who brings forth 100-fold fruit and the one who only brings forth 30-fold fruit? The difference is in the *degree of overcoming* that is done by the two kinds of people. The ones who bring forth 100-fold fruit overcome *everything* that hinders the production of that level of fruit. The ones who only bring forth 30-fold fruit couldn't overcome everything that hinders spiritual growth. They could overcome some things, but not everything. They overcame enough things that they were able to produce 30-fold fruit.

Pretty clear isn't it?

*Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, **he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven:** but whosoever shall do and teach them, **the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.***

Matthew 5:19

In this passage Jesus stated quite frankly that in His kingdom some will be called "great," while others would be called the "least." Again, the contrast is not between the saved and the lost. *Both* the greatest and the least, like the vessels of honor and dishonor, will be in the Lord's kingdom. Would it be unreasonable to assume that if there are those who will be the greatest and those who will be the least in the coming kingdom, that there will be others who fall somewhere *in between*?

*And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even **the garment spotted by the flesh.***

Jude 1:22-23

*Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which **have not defiled their garments;** and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.*

Revelation 3:4

*Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and **keepeth his garments,** lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.*

Revelation 16:15

Here is another division of Christians. Again, this is not a description of the saved and the lost. These are all God's people. This time the divisions is between those who *keep their garments clean* and those who *defile them* by yielding to the desires of the flesh. Of those who keep their garments clean, Jesus said, "they shall walk with me in white for they are worthy." What will it mean to walk with Jesus in white? Opinions vary. Whatever it means, one thing is certain: those who defile their garments *will* not walk with Jesus in white, or with those saints who are walking with Him in white.

One of the greatest needs today is for God's people to realize that we are many different places in God's kingdom, and that we are making our place in one of those places right now by how we live today. We have to break free of the mind-set that causes us to assume all believers will eventually end up with the same rewards and glory, as long as they 'make it' to heaven.

Not only is it possible to come forth in varying degrees of Christ's likeness, in different levels of glory, and in different states of spiritual maturity, it is also possible to come forth in various proximities of closeness to the Lord. The life and ministry of Jesus revealed that not all those who followed Him shared the same degree of closeness to Him. Neither did they all share the same knowledge of Him. On what grounds are we assuming that things will be any different in the Kingdom age? The Lord had a number of groups following Him, some closer than others. Those furthest from Him were the multitudes who followed Him merely because they wanted something *from* Him, which was healing for their various physical diseases.

A little closer to Him was a large group of disciples that followed Him for a season, most of whom turned back because they could not handle what He said about eating His flesh and drinking His blood [John 6:66]. A little closer to Him was an inner circle of twelve disciples who lived and walked with Him throughout His entire ministry. These twelve men had a much more intimate relationship with the Master. To them Jesus explained the meaning of His parables and teachings and His mission. To them He revealed that He was Israel's Messiah.

Among that inner circle of twelve there existed an even smaller circle of three disciples: Peter, James and John. These men were shown things that the rest of the twelve were not. They were with Jesus at the mountain of transfiguration and saw Him display His future glory. They saw Him talking to Elijah and Moses and heard the Father speak out of heaven to them. Finally, among the three, there was one (John) who laid his head on the bosom of Jesus at the last supper, and who stood by Him at His crucifixion. John refers to himself as "the disciple whom Jesus loved" four times in his Gospel, thus leaving us with the distinct impression that out of the multitudes who followed Jesus, he had the closest relationship of all with Him.

So let's reject once and for all this nonsense that all Christians are automatically overcomers, and that only the overcomers are saved, and that we are all going to get the same rewards and glory in heaven, based simply upon our profession of faith down here on the earth. Once we get free of this false mind-set, we are better prepared to really understand what John is saying in Revelation chapter eleven.

*And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and **measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.** But the court which is without the temple leave out, and **measure it not**; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months. **And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.***

Revelation 11:1-3

First of all these words are telling us things that are taking place in the spirit realm. And the things that are taking place in the spirit realm have a direct relation to the earthly temples of Israel, which were patterned after the Tabernacle of Moses. There was a difference between the "temple" proper and the outer court. The "temple" was the structure which housed the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. The Outer Court, though considered part of the temple, was not part of the actual structure that made up the temple.

This earthly division is carried over in the vision shown to John. God tells the angel to measure "the temple" (ie: the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies), and the "alter" (ie: the Golden Alter of Incense), and those who worship at that altar. But the angel is told not to measure the Outer Court, for it will be given over to the gentiles. Thus we understand that even though those who are walking in an Outer Court experience of basic salvation are part of the temple of God, they will not be measured because they will not be part of what God is doing in the final hours of this age.

The focus of the angels measuring line is the Golden Alter of Incense and those who are worshiping at this particular piece of furniture. Worshiping at the Golden Alter represents walking in the High Calling. It represents going on to perfection. It represents entering the Feast of Tabernacles. It represents a life of sacrifice: sacrificial worship, sacrificial prayer and intercession, sacrificial ministry, and in general, a walk of complete death to self.

But even among those who are walking in the Golden Alter experience, even among those who are walking in the deep things of God, even among those who are walking in the High Calling, even among God's overcomers, there are different places in Christ and different calls of ministry. For immediately after the angel measures those who are worshipping at the Golden Alter, the Lord says: "*And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.*".

In other words, not everyone who is walking in the Golden Alter *experience* will be part of the Two Witness company, or else there would be no need to measure them. The Lord would have just taken *everyone* who was at that Alter and made them *all* the two witness company. But that's not what he did. From that group of people who are worshipping at the Golden Alter, an even *smaller group* are taken and *they* become the two witnesses. The angel comes and measures everyone who is walking in the Golden Alter experience. But only those who meet the requirements (measure up) are chosen and given power to fulfil the two witness ministry.

As I said last week, this ministry will *not* be a ministry of reconciliation, so these people won't be trying to evangelize people. It will *not* be a ministry of revival, so they will not be trying to restore the Church. It will be a ministry of *judgment*. They will be endowed with supernatural power that is *destructive* in nature. But in order to be part of this ministry, we must partake of a special kind of preparation. Not everyone who follows the Lord, not even everyone who worships at the Golden Alter, will be willing to accept this preparation.

First of all, those who desire be part of this ministry must be completely broken and utterly humbled, for it says of them that they are "clothed in sackcloth". Sackcloth in the Scripture is a symbol of *mourning* and *humility*. In order to measure up to the standard God is requiring, we will have to be broken again and again and again, through great suffering, until we have been completely humbled in truth, until all arrogance and self righteousness has been burned out of us, until every ounce of our human hardness is melted, and every bit of our human pride is crushed. Being clothed in sackcloth means that we will not enjoy the power we are given. It means we will not delight in the fact that millions of people will perish as a result of our ministry. We must be completely dead so only the judgement and wrath of God is being manifested.

A second level of preparation is emotional, for we will be required to do and say things that will be viewed by both the world and the church as totally *unChristian*. We will be required to do and say things that are negative and destructive. And we will be required to do these things not just to the sinners in the world, but also to the sinners 'in Zion' (other Christians). Moreover, we will be required to bring judgement on our own family members. The world and the Church will look at these things and they will say of us: "*These people are serving Satan because God would never tell them to do or say such awful, destructive things*". But it will be God.

God is going to judge this world, and the beast, and the great whore who rides that beast. That judgment is going to come in the form of "plagues" and many of these plagues will come from the ministry of the two witnesses. Anyone who has not separated themselves from these things will partake of those judgments, and that includes "Christians". In many cases it will also include some of our own family members. Therefore, we must be prepared emotionally for the day when we are required to do what the Levites of old did, when God used them to judge *their* brethren, and in some cases members of their own families.

Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.'" The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day."

Exodus 32:27-29 NIV

A third level of preparation has to do with the willingness to die.

*And when **they shall have finished their testimony**, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, **and kill them.***

Revelation 11:7

When the testimony of this group is finished, they will experience martyrdom. John said the beast that ascends from the bottomless pit will overcome them physically and kill them. So *before* they are given this power, they will have had to come to the place where they considered their life over. No more waiting for children or grandchildren to be born. No more deciding which college the kids will go to. No more looking to buy a house or start a new career. No more putting money away for retirement or a that big vacation in our old age. No more plans but God's plan—which is physical death at the hands of an enraged church and world, after walking in a negative, destructive ministry for 3½ years.

Right now the angel is measuring those of us who are walking in the Golden Alter experience. He is seeing who is willing to go through the additional training that will be necessary to be part of that company of saints. If you can hear the call, it will mean the absolute end of your life. It will mean the end of all your fleshly dreams and hopes and plans. You will have to make a willing, conscience decision to let your life end in truth, not just in talk. You will have to embrace a ministry that is negative and destructive, including to your own friends and family. You will have to get to the place where you will willingly endure the wrath of the world and a deceived church.

I pray there are some in this room tonight who will answer that call.

For those who can't willingly answer it, don't be ashamed. God knows our frame. He knows this kind of thing is too much for the average Christian, and even for many above average Christians, to willingly embrace. However, whether you can answer the call or not, we all need to be aware of the fact that our lives are about to end. The end of this age is upon us and life as we know it is about to end. So let's make sure we are building our lives on things eternal, and not on things temporal. Let's make sure that in the coming days our life is in Christ, and not in our family, or our job, or our home, or our retirement fund, or our hobbies and pleasures, lest we be found naked and empty in the Day of the Lord.