

Letters From My Father
Week 25
2 Timothy 2:8-13
“The Overcomers”

Introduction

I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world. **John 16:33**

From the first century to the third century (and beyond) the Church of Jesus Christ was severely persecuted by the Roman government. These Believers were rounded up by the thousands (with some estimates being much higher) and mercilessly slaughtered simply for their faith. They had committed no crimes, in fact, they were peace loving people, faithfully following the teachings of Christ. So why were they martyred so ruthlessly? Because the devil was running a full court press in order to keep the gospel from being spread throughout the world. But praise be to God, all of Satan's brutality could not keep our faith from being spread. In fact, the blood of the martyrs became the very thing to “water” the church, so that it could grow and flourish. Talk about a plan that backfired! The devil's schemes literally blew up in his face. Our God cannot be overcome.

These times of intense suffering for the church intensified under the Roman Emperor Nero and continued until the reign of Constantine, who issued the Edict of Milan (313 A.D.), which commanded that “*Christianity be tolerated*” in Rome. While the persecutions lasted, the church was forced to meet in the catacombs beneath the city. These elaborate tunnels were originally carved out as a place to bury the dead, for the Romans were very superstitious about death. Not only this, but the cemeteries around the city were unsanitary and unhealthy. So as a solution, to these problems the catacombs of Rome came into existence.

Now I want you to imagine being a Believer in those days. These faithful Christians would gather in these dark underground burial chambers, bringing lamps and candles as their only source of illumination to worship The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These dreadful places became their “churches” so that they could peacefully worship in hopes of being spared from persecution. When these catacombs were rediscovered hundreds of years later, many Christian symbols such as the fish, as well as, scriptures and blessings were found written on the walls. One message that was repeatedly inscribed there contained the words of Paul in **2 Timothy**.

...*But the Word of God is not bound.*

2 Timothy 2:9b

I would like for you to imagine today, if we were forced to meet in underground chambers, under the penalty of death for our faith, how many do you think would be gathered here today? Would you be here? The one thing that all true Believers have in common is that they will always overcome the world. Our God will see to that. In fact, overcoming is the identifying characteristic of those who have been genuinely born again of The Spirit of God. Over and over again, Jesus speaks of those who will overcome, just as He overcame.

Because lawlessness will multiply, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Matthew 24:12-13

So, with this in mind, let us examine Paul's charge to Timothy to endure all things for the cause of Christ. For we shall overcome just as He has overcome. Jesus is *The Overcoming Savior*. He has given us *The Overcoming Scripture*, and those who place their faith in Him are promised to be *The Overcoming Saints of God*. For we have not been given the Spirit of cowardice, but of power, love and sound judgment (**2 Timothy 1:7**). And we shall overcome!

The Overcoming Savior (vs. 8)

Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead and descended from David, according to my gospel... **2 Timothy 2:8**

When your back is against the wall, when you are thinking of just giving up and running away, two powerful words will always bring you back to the reason we must stand and fight: ***“Remember Jesus.”*** Every time I think I can’t handle the ministry, whether due to the pressure or the overwhelming sense of inadequacy, I remember Jesus. I remember what He did... for me. Then I remember that I am not in this alone! And I recall this passage of Scripture that I learned as a child:

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. **Psalms 23:4 (KJV)**

So, no matter what you are facing in this world today, my friends, ***Remember Jesus!*** He has never failed, and He never will. Paul reminded Timothy of this truth by saying, ***“Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead...”*** For our Savior has overcome *everything* that we truly fear; death, the grave, and even hell itself. He has finished the hard part. We simply need to be reminded of this fact now and again. When the odds are stacked against you and failure seems imminent... ***Remember Jesus.***

Paul reminded Timothy that Jesus was “descended from David”. Many scholars have debated Paul’s reasoning for including this particular fact. After all, Timothy’s mother and grandmother were Jewish, but his father was Greek. So why would Paul point out Christ’s heritage, when there were so many other attributes to choose from? I personally believe that he was reminding his young son in the faith, that although Christ was God, he was also human just as we are. He was tempted in all things, persecuted and despised, and yet, not only did He never sin, He never backed down from the task which His Father had appointed unto Him. Jesus finished His work, He became as one of us, and He overcame.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed His glory, the glory as The One and Only Son from The Father, full of grace and truth. **John 1:14**

Yes, ***Remember Jesus***, who came and lived as one of us and suffered because of our sin. Because the honest truth of it is this; no matter what any of us will have to endure in this life, none of us will ever endure what *He* did. Christ took upon Himself the sin of the whole world on that cross. He was abandoned by everyone He loved including His own Father! God turned His back upon His Son so that He would endure not only our death wages for sin, but our separation from God as well. Jesus endured it all, and yet, He overcame! He did that so that we could be forever enjoined with Him and restored to everlasting fellowship with God. If He can endure all that for us, then we can endure temptation and persecution for Him, for He is *with* us. He is *in* us!

Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. **Romans 12:1**

Simply put: Remember that Jesus died for you, and then rose from the dead to defeat all that we have to fear. So the very least that we can do is to live for Him, as living sacrifices, come what may. He is the ultimate overcomer! He died and rose again, so that we too could overcome. This is what Paul referred to as *“my gospel”*. It is our gospel today, as well.

The Overcoming Scripture (vs. 9)

...for which I suffer to the point of being bound like a criminal. But the word of God is not bound. **2 Timothy 2:9**

As Paul was languishing in Mamertine Prison, he knew one immutable truth; this world can imprison all the Christians that it wishes, but they will never silence The Word of God.

The grass withers, the flowers fade, but The Word of our God remains forever. **Isaiah 40:8**

Many wicked men have tried, and failed, to eliminate The Word of God from this world. Their efforts have only caused it to flourish all the more. I am reminded of the French philosopher Voltaire, who mocked Christianity and the Church for his entire adult life. His life's goal became to rid the world of the Christian religion, along with its manual, The Holy Bible. This vile man died with a curse for Christ upon his lips, having done everything that he could to rid the world of God's Word. Upon his death, the Geneva Bible society purchased one of his homes and used it to print and store copies of *The Bible*.

Is it any wonder that the persecuted church inscribed upon the walls in the catacombs of Rome, "*The Word of God is not bound!*" The Greek that Paul used, which is translated "bound" in the CSB is "*deo*", and it literally means "*to fasten with chains*". The implication is plain; this world can bind the servants of God, but God's Word cannot be imprisoned, nor restrained. The Word will overcome.

Men and women of God have been persecuted for centuries. As a matter of course, most of the men who penned the Holy Scriptures were summarily executed for their trouble, and yet, the words they wrote have endured in posterity. For these writings were inspired by One Who is far greater than mortal men.

Above all, you know this: No prophecy of Scripture comes from the prophet's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were carried along by The Holy Spirit. **2 Peter 1:20-21**

It is for this reason that it is imperative that we teach and preach The Word with both consistency and zeal, for it is from The Scriptures that we find the very words of life. It is within the Scriptures that we learn the commands of our Savior.

I never cease to be amazed at how many people these days claim to be followers of Christ, and yet discount many of the passages found within God's Word. They claim to be "enlightened" to the point that they are able to discern which texts to believe and which ones which they can readily dispose when it suits them. This is folly. The Scriptures are described as "*verbal and plenary*", meaning that they are God-breathed and complete. To take away or add to God's Word is blasphemous and quite frankly dangerous. God means what He says, and His Word will endure. As Paul wrote to the Church of Rome:

...Let God be true, even though everyone is a liar, as it is written: That you may be justified in Your words and triumph when you judge. **Romans 3:4b**

Paul wanted Timothy (and us) to know that the message we bring can never be hopeless. For God Himself will see to it that His Word shall overcome the darkness.

For just as the rain and snow fall from heaven and do not return there without saturating the earth and making it germinate and sprout, and providing seed to sow and food to eat, so My Word that comes from My mouth will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I sent it to do. **Isaiah 55:10-11**

The Overcoming Saints (vs. 10-13)

This is why I endure all things for the elect: so that they also may obtain salvation, which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. This saying is trustworthy:

For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him;

if we endure, we will also reign with Him;

if we deny Him, He will also deny us;

if we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny himself.

2 Timothy 2:10-13

Paul states he remained faithful to his calling, because of **“the elect so that they also may obtain salvation.”** The CSB is a very good translation of the original Greek. Paul refused to back down because of all the future generations that would come to faith in Christ, because of the faithful witness of those who were willing to lay down their lives for the cause of Christ. Today, we owe them all a great debt, for they did not shrink back from their calling in the face of intense opposition. We are the “elect” of which Paul spoke, those who were destined to come to faith due to the faithful witness of the saints from ages past. It was the thought of us, that kept Paul and others like him on course to the very end.

At the end of this passage, Paul quotes what many *Bible* scholars believe to be a hymn of the early persecuted church. Imagine, if you will, hiding out in the catacombs of Rome, knowing that your faith in Christ could lead to your arrest, torture, imprisonment, and possibly even death, and these are the words that you would sing together in the glow of candlelight in those tunnels below the city. This gives a whole new meaning to the word dedication, does it not?

So let us take this hymn of the martyrs line by line and see what they sang in the face of such endless persecution. First; **“For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him.”** While it is possible that this is speaking of our being crucified with Christ, and yet we live (**Galatians 2:20**), meaning that we are dead to self and alive in Christ Jesus, it is more likely, considering the context of the passage, speaking of actual martyrdom. Christ has defeated death, once and for all. And to be in Christ is to be immune to the finality of death. Because He died and rose, those who believe in Him shall never be forgotten. We shall live with Him for eternity. Therefore, even if we die, we live. Those who are in Christ have already overcome death.

Second; **“If we endure, we will also reign with Him.”** This is a message for all who are thinking of abandoning the faith. The mark of a true Believer is that we endure to the very end (**Matthew 24:13**). Those who are genuinely saved will overcome their trials, testings, and temptations. This is how we will know who has truly been born again of The Spirit. Those who abandon the faith never possessed saving faith. And those who have saving faith shall reign with Christ in the kingdom of God.

And they sang a new song: You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slaughtered, and You purchased people for God by your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign upon the earth. Revelation 5:9-10

While the first two verses of the hymn are positive, the last two are negative. They speak of those who do not have a genuine saving faith. **“If we deny Him, He will also deny us...”** Many have tried to “spin”, if you will, these last two verses to imply that no matter what we do, Christ will remain faithful to us. While this is true of the genuine Believer, it is not true of those who make a false profession of salvation. To deny Christ is to deny the faith, and to deny the faith, for whatever reason, is proof positive that one does not possess saving faith.

Therefore I want you to know that no one speaking by The Spirit of God says, “Jesus is cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is LORD,” except by The Holy Spirit.

1 Corinthians 12:3

A genuine Believer will not and cannot deny his LORD. Simple as that.

The last line of the ancient hymn states, **"If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for he cannot deny Himself."** Again, many have made the claim that this means, when we "mess up" Christ remains faithful to us. This is, as I stated before, absolutely true *for the Believer*. But the ancient hymn is not speaking of Believers in this context. The word in the Greek translated "faithless" (*Apisteo*) is a word used for nonbelievers. So what does it mean, that if we are nonbelievers, then Christ will remain faithful (*pistos*) meaning "trustworthy" or "believable", as it were? It means that, neither mine, nor your UN-belief will change the nature of Who He is. He doesn't need our endorsement to be God. **Jesus Christ is God!** His promises will be kept, and His purposes fulfilled, whether we believe in them or not! His authority and power are not contingent upon our belief. He is The Alpha and The Omega, The Beginning and The End.

...so that at the Name of Jesus every knee will bow — in heaven and on earth and under the earth — and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is LORD to the glory of God The Father. **Philippians 2:10-11**

So, if you wish to have everlasting life, my friend, I sincerely suggest that you place your faith in Christ and Christ alone. For He is our *Overcoming Savior*, He has given us His *Overcoming Word*, and those who are in Him shall be His *Overcoming Saints*.

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved. **Acts 4:12**

This is the gospel, the undisputed truth. Christ Jesus is the only way by which we will overcome. Believe it... or not.

Truth!!!