

Revelation 2

Sunday 6/23/2019

Why are so many people here today? What the heck, man? We have had three Sundays in a row of beautiful weather, and now you all want to show up. Okay, whatever, man. I will have God take care of that with you later on.

One thing I did learn for sure is be careful what you choose as a camp theme, because God will run you through it and exercise you through it. God forbid, our theme this year is "Overcome," and boy, He has been taking me through some doozies here lately, I will tell you that. Just a couple of weeks ago at work, the workload really turned up for us just because our boss decided to quit and go back to Seattle. Because of that, all of his major projects got passed right down to yours truly right here. So it has just been nuts. We have been looking for a house, all kinds of crazy things. The night before last, we did penance on ourselves and did a lock-in. It has just been wild, man. So next year, if you guys are one of the theme for camp, it is going to be something like "The Blessings of God in Your Life." It is going to be a lot more simple just to make sure that I am safe with whatever I preach on.

I. The Problem of Victimology

I have really enjoyed just hanging out with your kids, especially this last year. One of the things that we have been trying to do is step outside of these four walls and get into their world, find out the friends they are hanging out with, go to the activities out there that they are doing, and just make sure that there is a visible presence of the people that love them and care about them, and want to give them the Bible out there in the world with them. We want their friends to see who they are hanging out with and that this community is real. We are not just vying for their attention while they come to church; we want to be a part of their lives.

In the day and age that we live in, I have noticed one of the recurring themes that happens over and over again. You have probably seen this, but it is this new idea in this age that you can give up responsibility for your actions in this world by adopting a victim status. It is one of the sad things that I have noticed happening here lately.

You look at America and what made America great. It was not the prosperity that America had; it was a lot of the tough things that she came through. When America became a nation, she had to defeat the greatest nation in the world at that time, Great Britain. After that, America came through a Civil War. After that Civil War, America came through one of the worst depressions she had ever seen. What that developed was one of the greatest generations America had ever seen, and that is the World War II generation and the great heroes that came out of there.

Looking at that generation and what they had, and all the great things that they gave to the world, and the developments that she offered us, and looking at what we have now, it is kind of sad. I have never served in the military; I have never had that honor. Bob knows, and several of you know, that I wish I would have had that honor. But you look at just even what some of those men went through in World War II and Vietnam. It is crazy the amount of stress and the issues and the things that they saw, yet they came back home and for the most part led normal lives and

developed a country that the world had never seen before. The 50s and the 60s that followed them were some of the greatest times of prosperity the world had ever seen.

It is just weird how today we have these conflicts that we are going through. Like I said, I have never seen conflict; I have never seen battle. But yet some of the stuff that plagues our soldiers—suicide, PTSD, emotional issues—I am wondering, what happened? Is it worse now? Or were the people that were going through those issues better at the time? I think what it was, that diversity that America had to come up against, the lack of prosperity, the having to go out and get it, made them into something great. I think in the territories that we are living in now, that is something that we are lacking and that we are missing. Because of that, taking that victimology and not taking the responsibility, we have found ourselves where we are today.

II. The Call to Overcome in Revelation

Turn over to Revelation 2. This is where we are going to be talking for a little bit. I want to set the stage for you all. In Revelation 2, John is writing to the seven churches. Inspirationally, we can take these seven churches and we can apply them to us and to our church age. Since Jesus Christ left this world, there have been 2,000 years of history. You can actually break up that 2,000 years of history into seven different periods that lay out different issues that the New Testament church that you and I are a part of have gone through.

Let me show you a recurring theme that Jesus Christ keeps telling His church to do something. There is one main word that He keeps addressing them with. There is one charge that He keeps giving them. I want to see how quick you can pick up on it.

The first part I want you to look at here is Revelation 2:7. He says this to the church of Ephesus:

Revelation 2:7

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

That is the first one there: "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. Him that overcometh."

Come down here. That was Verse 7. Look at Revelation 2:11. This is to the church of Smyrna:

Revelation 2:11

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Are you starting to see that there? "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear. He that overcometh."

After that, jump down here to Revelation 2:17:

Revelation 2:17

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

You know what we are doing now. You can pick up the whole pattern that is going on here. Next verse over here, we have the church of Thyatira. He talks about knowing their works, how He sees the things that they are going through, but notwithstanding, once again, you know what He is going to say. Revelation 2:26:

Revelation 2:26

And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

The church of Sardis, Revelation 3:1, jump down here to Revelation 3:5:

Revelation 3:5

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

The church of Philadelphia. Come down here, Revelation 3:12:

Revelation 3:12

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.

And lastly, come over here to Revelation 3:21:

Revelation 3:21

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

Did you pick up that theme there? It is overcoming. It is a sad thing when you look at the last church age that shows up, and the Bible says about us, they are poor, wretched, miserable, blind, and naked, but the Bible says they see themselves as having riches and in need of nothing. The sad thing about this whole thing is that we are in this church that is called Laodicea, and it is the right to the people. We have given up the responsibilities of personal responsibility of sin, personal responsibilities of screwing things up in life, and we have turned it over and pushed the blame on someone else. The Bible says because of that, we have become weak.

Last night in softball, it is funny that Caleb Miller gave this devotion. I do not think he knew that I was preaching or what I was going to preach about, but he talked about how the greatest things that entertain us in life are those superhero stories. In those superhero stories, you oftentimes do not see a born plot line where the superhero grows up in a rich family, is always taken care of, and then one day he decides to put on a cape, and then he goes out there and everyone loves him.

No, there is always a progression to when that guy becomes a superhero. He starts out as some weak punk or something like that, gets bit by something—that is the Spiderman plot, so do not think it is, all right? Then all of a sudden, he goes through some adversity, maybe someone dies in his life. Through that adversity, what happens? Something gets developed. He gets developed into something greater. All great superheroes have a terribly rough refining process to make them who they are.

One of the greatest hymns, which he also quoted, is called "How Firm a Foundation." One of my favorite lines in there is this: "When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, my grace, all sufficient shall be thy supply. The flame shall not hurt thee, I only design thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine." The dross in your life—the stuff that is not so pretty, the stuff that kind of sucks, the stuff that might make you want to take a victim status, look at yourself as "woe is me," look at yourself as "man, I got dealt a bad card"—the Bible says God only put that into your life for one purpose: "thy dross to consume." He wants to take you through the fiery trial and burn that dross off, but He also has something inside of you that He is trying to bring out, and it is gold: "thy gold to refine."

God made each of us with some fat to burn. He also gave us some muscle to tone. Do not lose sight of this because the workout is tough. He is going to take you through some tough things, but He is trying to tone you up; He is trying to burn some things off of you. The sad thing is, in the Laodicean persecution, it is not the devil's weapon of choice to ruin the church. All down throughout the Dark Ages, you saw what they did to the church: burning those Christians at the stake, taking their kids away from them when they were young and raising them up as Roman Catholic priests so that would tear the heart out of the Bible believers, and things like that. All kinds of horrible atrocities. But what that did, it developed one of the greatest churches the world has ever seen: Jesus Christ's Church. The Philadelphia Church Age came out of that persecution.

But you know what the devil realized? He said, "You know what, this is not working. These Christians are just stupid. They are not understanding. They are not getting scared. They are not backing away. They are not backing down. It is only making them stronger. What can I do? Oh! Make them everything that their hearts have ever desired and make sure that the world gets behind them and supports them: community, fellowship, all that good stuff, love." So instead, the devil nowadays has breached our defenses by offering us everything that we want.

Through the ages, the church was made stronger by what she had to overcome. Today, our weakness is in our tendency to avoid adversity. The devil has offered us victimology in the place of responsibility. It is not about what you are up against or the odds that are stacked against you. The question is, what are you willing to overcome? The amount that you are willing to overcome will determine the amount that God can use you. Those are the stories that God wants to develop in your lives.

A lot of you, especially when I am dealing with these kids, it just shocks me some of the backgrounds that they have come from. It just amazes me that these kids are still fighting, that they still stand up and try to do what is right for God. But I oftentimes tell them, the ones that are really down about their circumstances and their backgrounds, "Listen, God is doing something

with you that He is not doing with everyone else because He has got a story He wants to tell with you unlike anyone else's." That is what is happening here. The greater the adversity in your life, the greater God can use you. That is just how it is, folks. If you found yourself with a tough road and a tough life to live, God is trying to tell an awesome story with you.

I am kind of worried. I know in a couple of weeks here we are going to be celebrating the Fourth of July. But at this rate, if we keep going like we are going, it is not going to be Independence Day; it is going to be Dependence Day. That is what we are looking at. You find some of the goofy stuff that is out there in the world right now. I saw an article about college kids complaining about Halloween costumes being too offensive, and they need more safe spaces on campus to have coloring books and to be able to take naps. We will talk about universities, all right?

There is a big fuss between the Democrats and the Republicans. One of the big things that socialists push is a higher minimum wage and income inequality. Folks, the Bible said, "The poor you shall always have," and you are not going to make a liar out of God by giving everybody a universal income. We are complaining about CO2 levels and cow farts and stuff like that. It just blows my mind the stuff that we call adversity compared to what the great men that lived on this planet have gone through before us.

This world is not going to be perfect, folks. The Bible says that God cursed this world. That is the funny thing. I guess that is where we are at today. We either neglect the Bible or we just do not believe it, and the fact of the matter is your neglect or disbelief will not change what God set in motion in this world. God cursed this world, and then you complain about how bad it is. It is supposed to be bad; it is cursed. Do you think because you do not believe the Bible or you neglect it that it is no longer relevant?

The question is this: Why has God given us so much good in a cursed world? That is the question. The question is not why there is only one way to get to heaven. The question is why did God allow us filthy, wicked sinners anyway to get into heaven? The question is not why do bad things happen to good people? The Bible says there is none good, no, not one. The question is why do good things happen to us bad folks? It is all kind of nonsense that we get into. The question is not why there are so many poor, like I said, but here is a great question: Why do we live in a time and place where so many can become wealthy? If you study history, the majority of the world has been poor. Even today, if you get anywhere close to \$50,000 to \$100,000, you are in the top 10% in the world. Do you know that in America?

Today's generation is filled with problems that have solutions that rely on someone else to change rather than us changing ourselves to adapt and overcome. As long as this world is filled with imperfect people, we will always have someone to push the blame on. That is very convenient for us when we do not want to change. You push the blame on someone else; you now have an excuse not to grow and not to improve. When your solutions are dependent on someone else, you have to wait for them to change before you can move forward. Here is the sad thing: you think you are getting a good deal out of it because you are no longer responsible, but now you just turned your freedom over to them. You cannot move forward. You cannot improve

the circumstances. You cannot improve your life until they do something about it. The sad thing is the devil realized that, and he passed that buck to us, and we took the sales pitch.

This is one of the greatest things that God showed me, and no matter what your situation is in life, I want you to remember this: God gave us all the same set of rules, the Word of God here, but different circumstances to live and do. The question is this: He wants to see if you will use your circumstances to avoid following His rules. That is the game we are playing right now. You say, "Why are so and so, why do they get to grow up with good parents? Why do so and so have a good wife? Why do so and so have a good husband? I got a bad one. Why do so and so have a good job and I got a bad one? Why do so and so have good health but I do not have that?" Will you use your circumstances to avoid following His rules? Or will you take His rules to override your circumstances and let Him tell a great story no matter where you are starting, no matter what your life is, no matter what hand you have been dealt? That is what the question is.

Let me be honest here. Let us not completely lopsided it. Not playing the victim does not mean you go around ignorantly dismissing all of life's legitimate issues. The Bible says Jesus Himself was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The book of Job records that man is born under trouble as the sparks fly upward. David, the lowly shepherd boy who had enough optimism to face giants, also confessed:

Psalms 90:10

The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

Finally, the Lord Himself declared to man:

Genesis 3:17-19

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;

Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Folks, all that simply means is this: life has problems, and you are going to get a good dose of them. These problems will breed true victims. There is some messed up stuff that happens in this world. There is some messed up stuff that happens to kids that should not be happening, and they are true victims. God did not design us with tears just for windy days, onions, and laughing. There is a reason that we shed those tears. This might sound silly, but it is really true: if you are breathing, then you are in line for some grieving. That is just the way it is.

But here is the thing: you can choose whether or not life's obstacles make you or break you. One of the greatest things I ever heard is this: pain in life is inevitable, but suffering is optional. That is completely on you. You can choose to fall down as a victim or rise up again and again and

again as a victor. Like I said, God wants to tell a great story with your life. What is impressive is not how hard someone falls; everybody falls. But what is impressive is that in spite of the fall, they manage to rise again, and that is what separates our Savior from all others. He took the fall into sin and death, but He rose again.

III. Three Things to Overcome

I want to jump into our message today, and there are three things that you are going to need to overcome to get the victory in this life.

- Overcome the Devil
- Overcome the World
- Overcome the Flesh

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion here, I said this to you before: today's generation is filled with problems, with solutions that rely on someone else to change, rather than us changing ourselves to adapt and overcome. As long as this world is filled with imperfect people, we will always have someone to push that blame on. But God gave us all the same set of rules. He gave us different circumstances. He wants to see if you will use your circumstances to avoid following His rules. Folks, do not do that. Be a victor and overcome.

- Overcome the devil by getting saved and then fulfilling the will of God that He has for your life, passing that gospel on.
- Overcome the world by seeing the world that He wants to take you to one day.
- Overcome your flesh by warring against that flesh and fighting until God takes you home to glory.

That is simple. I cannot wait until we get up here to camp and see all that God is going to do. I know the kids are excited. I am excited. I am just looking forward to us instilling this type of attitude in all of our kids. Do not see yourself. Do not care what the circumstances are in your life. Do not look at the tough situation that God gave you as an obstacle that you cannot overcome. Listen, the rocks that you have to walk over, boys, those are just stepping stones. Those are just things you can throw into your backpack to make yourself stronger. Do not give up. Do not give up. Be a victor. I want you to overcome.

Let me have a word of prayer here.

Heavenly Father, thank You so much for the attentiveness of everyone, Lord. I pray that there is something they can walk away with today, Lord, and just be able to apply that thing to their lives, Lord. You have done too much for us, God, that the salvation that You have given us, the eternity that we get to look forward to, God, we ought to just discuss it with ourselves and look at anything that comes in our way in our life, God, and look at ourselves as some type of a

victim. Lord, You have the victory for us at Calvary, and You have given that thing to us in so many other ways. God, I just trust and pray that we will take that attitude and get ourselves right with You. We love You and thank You and pray in Your Son Jesus Christ's name. Amen.