

Help Me Overcome

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Date: 04 April 2021

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- [0 : 00] Well, we're looking at Romans chapter 12 for the message this evening. One of my favourite places is the Falls of Shin.
- And if you like, when you've got time, you can search for its precise location. It's worth a visit. There's a time of year during which the salmon return and they head to their home ground, or in this case, home water, of course.
- And they've crossed an ocean and somehow they managed to swim upstream against the current of autumn fast flowing rivers, leaping up small waterfalls.
- I think if you have the opportunity to go, you can see this very thing happen. It's a wonderful thing to behold. It's great to see how these fish swim against all opposing forces.
- You know, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who was a great Baptist preacher of the 19th century, he said, Men usually swim with the stream like a dead fish.
- [1 : 05] It is only the living fish that goes against it. And it seems to me that as we look at Romans chapter 12, maybe there have been many times when we tend to conform to the standards which surround us.
- Today's ever-shifting demands. The tolerances that are defined by what is actually a paradoxically intolerant society.
- And we have a tendency to conform to that. And if truth be told, it is easier to go with the flow, isn't it? It is easier. But then if we do, in the analogy that Spurgeon shared, would we not just be like dead fish?
- You know, the salmon, it doesn't rest until it gets home. One of these things that we can learn from the natural world is an appreciation of God's wonderful power and wisdom.
- And in the salmon, we see that it doesn't give up even when the stream is viciously against it. You know, it stays the course. And it knows where it's headed.
- [2 : 19] And it doesn't come across a nice bay before the entrance to the river and a shoal of mackerel and say to itself, I shouldn't be here.
- But hey, it's comfortable. This will do. I'll stay here. No, it doesn't conform. It encourages us by its attitude and by its application.
- A simple fish. In Romans chapter 12, we find a comprehensive treatment of how to overcome. Paul crams into this chapter.
- It's like a unit by itself. And I'm aware that many of us may have accepted the multiple times when we should overcome. When we know in our hearts and our minds this is something that we should be pursuing.
- But sadly, we've ended up and we've ended up with a burden of guilt at not attempting or succeeding in an area. And that burden of guilt lies upon us and it is in the background of our thinking.
- [3 : 25] So this evening, I want to try and help us to be guided by God's word to replace the should. And the should, which is often the consequence of desire or a sense of duty.

And instead of that, replace it with words and actions which actually ultimately glorify God so that God becomes the focus. Even in the struggles, we move away from ourselves.

We move our focus towards God. So let it be a head change. By that, I mean what we're going to learn in this chapter.

Let it be something that will go into our thinking and we'll understand it. But let it also be a heart change. Let's feel that this truth is very much for us this evening.

God, in his wisdom and concern for you as his child, has given you encouragement. Not just to know something, but to feel it. But let it not stop there.

[4 : 30] Let it be a life change. A life change that occurs as the actions and the beliefs coincide. That knowledge and assurance is added to performance, as it were, to living out what we believe.

You know, the book of Revelation also speaks of those who overcome. And the message this evening is, help me overcome. Help me to be an overcomer.

That word from the Greek language can also be understood as a conqueror. And we know that Paul, writing to a Roman context, is very well aware of the military surroundings.

So we can think of what can be very dangerous, what can be very much against us, what can be overpowering in other circumstances. And we can say, Lord, help me to be a conqueror.

Help me to be an overcomer. So we're going to look at it very briefly this evening. Firstly, by beginning with what is essential.

[5 : 35] Our relationship to God. And that's how Romans 12 begins, doesn't it? It talks about the worship, the reasonable worship. Not the Sunday worship, although that is very important.

But the living out of the worship of God in our lives. A constant. And so it's an essential element. And the essential element is to know God and his word.

You know, to find a help to become an overcomer, it starts here, doesn't it? It starts in the Bible, in God's word. And that's a very important thing.

You go there to begin with, not as a last resort. It's not a self-improvement magazine. It's not a course that you've picked up on internet for life coaching.

No, it wonderfully and simply, it is through the knowledge of God, according to his word. And notice the phrase, do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

[6 : 40] And it seems to seal into the content of this teaching of the whole chapter. It seems to summarize it in this short verse that ends the chapter.

And it seems to give us the incentive and the encouragement to take responsibility for this. But not in our own strength. Obviously, with the help from God.

So Paul is speaking to Christians about being an overcomer. And the most essential basic level is in relationship to God.

And verses 1 and 2 mark out this hurdle. So what do we find in verses 1 and 2? We see that this is going against the flow of secular advice and influence.

You know, as Christians, we continue to battle against selfishness. Many aspects that reside in us all. None of us are exempt.

[7 : 38] But one thing that we will often find is that sometimes our friends, work colleagues, even family members, they will offer advice.

And it might come across like this. Do what you feel is right for you. Or put yourself first. You deserve it.

You know, it's clear as Christians that we actually have a far superior motive to be an overcomer. We have a higher calling. We have a more secure and dependable resource to guide our lives.

So we go to that resource. We go to the Bible. And we see what God instructs us. And how he guides us. So step one in how to become an overcomer is to step off the throne of self and kneel humbly before God.

I like to think of it much as Mary was at the feet of Jesus while Martha was in the kitchen. Mary listening, hanging on to every word.

[8 : 49] And Paul says that the servant attitude of the Christian will be one whose mind is filled with the knowledge of God's word.

Who is hanging on to every word. And this will result in overcoming things like uncertainty. Well, I'm a great fan of football.

I don't need to divulge the team I support. It's not in a major city. So that gives it a little bit of a hint. But in football, there is an area of the defending goal that is called the corridor of uncertainty.

The corridor of uncertainty. Now, what happens there is when there's a corner kick or a free kick, the ball arrives in this area, this particular area around the six yard box of the goal, of the defending goal.

It seems to be between the goalkeeper and the defenders. And the corridor of uncertainty is the place where neither know who should take responsibility.

[9 : 58] And it results in fear and anxiety. You know, an element of evil that remains in every human being and in Christians is the corridor of doubt and uncertainty.

It's a vestige in the Christian of the time before we came to faith. And it holds in there. It struggles to stay there.

So it would give us doubts and fears. And the devil will play on that. And so many of us have been there by saying, what's God's will for me?

What's he doing in my life? Why are these things happening? What should I do? What decision should I take? I'm so uncertain. Or we may be facing fears and struggles.

Whichever they are personal to us. So here is the antidote. To be an overcomer. To not fall into the corridor of uncertainty.

[11 : 05] Here. Put God first. Not yourself. Swim against the flow of ungodly behaviour that is so prevalent and so much the norm of society.

Swim against it. Mix in a deepening knowledge of God's word and ask him for his help. He won't turn a deaf ear to you.

And with your decisions and choices, test your choices. Test your options. By the criteria, the holy criteria of and the paradigm of God's word.

You know, one thing I can say categorically is that God will never direct us to do or choose or say something that would go or run against his holy nature and his goodness and the instruction of his word.

So you can be an overcomer. But you need to look to the one who can help. I read recently of a species of spider called *Argoneta aquatica*.

[12 : 14] It lives in a hostile setting. And the documentary suggested that it carries with it an environment that enables it to survive.

So this air-breathing spider would find a suitable leaf. And each time it went to the surface of the pond, it would bring back an air bubble.

And the air bubble would be held in the thick hairs of its abdomen. And through that air bubble, it could survive in the water. Well, one writer, Barber, who shares this in his book or an introduction to a book, he sees a parallel with the life of the Christian.

And it struck me that it's a true parallel, isn't it? You see, we live in a hostile world, much like how the water is hostile to the general well-being of the spider.

And Barber says, but we carry with us our own special atmosphere, much like how the spider carries with it an air bubble that enables it to breathe.

[13 : 22] You know, my friend, we are in Jesus Christ. But we're also in the world. But that relationship with Christ and God's word is the air that we breathe as Christians.

It is how we can overcome in a hostile world. The second point is relationship, not just to God, but to other Christians.

And that's found in that passage between verse 3 and 13. It should be different, shouldn't it? But it's all too often that Christians and or churches can have conflict.

Now, one thing I realized, and it doesn't make me a compromise in my striving to avoid conflict, but it helps me to understand something that's true to human nature.

When I joined a bowling club, one of these outdoor bowling clubs on the grass, it was when I was ministered in another place, another location, that whenever there are people together, there's a tendency to have conflict.

[14 : 32] To my surprise, in one of the bowling sessions that I attended, there was an argument about the type and the cost of the new lawnmower.

Or it developed and people were arguing about how high the grass should be cut or the strictness of the rules for visitors to the bowling club, what they should be allowed to get away with with their dress code.

It seemed to me that wherever you put people together, you're going to have a tendency to conflict. But we as a church, we don't need to capitulate to that.

We don't need to lose hope. We don't need to have a pessimistic approach to things. When we have a mission in our church, when we have an outreach, for example, here in Lima and where we have a special event, you know, it wouldn't happen if everyone said, oh, it won't work, so we're not going to try it.

No, we try it because we think it could work. And even by our assessment, if it doesn't work, who knows if by that failure, actually God has been working to show that he receives all the glory.

[15 : 45] You know, in a village or in a town or in a city, we have the Lord on our side. We have the Lord of the impossible. We have the Lord of the lost causes.

We have the promises of God. And we have the provision of his grace, his help. So we don't need to be like the disputing bowling club.

We can be different. Be an overcomer. But how is that going to happen? Well, at the beginning of the chapter, we saw that it involves sacrificial service of God, the logical, the reasonable, the rational worship.

It is a life lived out, obedient to God and seeking to glorify him, putting God first. Now, it doesn't mean that we're not in the picture at all.

It just means that God is the priority. Now, we see that this is followed not by us, but by considering others. We're to be humble. That's a difficult thing, isn't it?

[16 : 44] Because it runs against what simple nature provides very strongly in us, pride. But we're to be humble. We're to be transparent as God's children. What you see is what you get.

We're to be consistent. You know, it means that we can have a sense of belonging together. It means that we can serve together. We can pull in the same direction together.

If we've got God first and we're looking out to the interests of his people and his church, we will recognize the unity of God's people.

That's what Paul is speaking of in this passage. He's talking about a unity of God's people. He's talking about overcoming evil with good through the unity of God's people, of the individual Christian being an overcomer, which will mean that they will joyfully and positively strive for biblical unity in their congregation, in their church as God's children.

There's a beautiful description of it in Romans 12 and 13, which I'll read right now. Romans 12, 12 and 13.

[17 : 54] Paul says, be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer, share with the Lord's people who are in need, practice hospitality.

You can be an overcomer by practicing that advice. And then it continues. Relationship to the world, verses 14 to 20.

Now, we get to a very difficult part of this passage, equally difficult in some ways, more difficult than what happens within the fellowship of God's people.

How we are to be in relationship with those who are antagonistic or worse towards us because of our faith or because of what we stand for.

Now, we may suffer wrongdoing. Jesus prepared the disciples for that. He prepared us. And in essence, by telling the disciples, this is what you can expect to face.

[18 : 50] We may pay a price for standing our ground. And in certain locations, that can be a very high price. We may have a cost to defending our principles, but we should not develop or adopt an attitude of revenge.

So whatever is going to happen, Paul is saying, be an overcomer. Overcome evil with good. Do not develop or adopt an attitude of revenge.

Revenge is an example of something that we could call sinful pride in action. Our pride is hurt. Sometimes even when we feel we've suffered for Christ's sake, you know, it's not like we're thinking his name has been dishonored.

It's thinking that our pride has been hurt. So verse 19 says and tells us the proper route. Leave it with God.

He will deal with it. Now we read this hugely realistic and encouraging verse in verse 18. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

[20 : 03] It's realistic. That's one of the great things I love about this passage. It's so realistic. It's so right now. Because it realizes and it recognizes that there can be times when peace is lost.

When it's impossible. But we must ensure that if that ever happens, it's not down to our selfish pride. Be an overcomer.

As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. You know, when I worked in the motor trade, I travel through from Inverness to Macduff every day.

And at first, I have to confess, I struggled with the accents. And the further east I went, I struggled with the Doric. But over time, I started understanding words and phrases.

And sometimes, to my embarrassment, I would inadvertently say things the way the local folks were speaking. And I hoped that they were not thinking I was mocking them.

[21 : 10] But I don't know if you've noticed that it's so easy to start speaking in a manner, to adopt a behavior, to have what surrounds us as an influence on us.

It's so easy. I remember going on a supporters bus to a football match, and it was full of supporters. And someone started a very rude song.

And young children to old people on the bus started to sing along and join in with that rude song. A strong character provides examples for people to follow.

And we just need to look at history and see how horrific history shows us the stories of mass evil because the people went along with it. There seems to be a tendency in humanity to imitate, to look for models, to look for examples to follow.

I don't know what age group you are, but there's so much pressure presented to have a certain look or to follow a certain example. But we do, as Christians, we do have a model to go by.

[22 : 30] We have an example to follow. And what Paul is teaching in chapters 12 to 15, it seems to be like it's echoing what Jesus instructed. It's like a rewording of what Jesus taught.

And here in chapter 12, it's all crammed in so much into this unit. It's maybe what John Stott was famed for calling countercultured, to say, to do, to be the opposite of what sin-guided world and influence in society would impose on us.

Paul says, on the contrary, take the Jesus route. Be an overcomer. Don't let sinful desire for vengeance determine your path.

Take the Jesus route. Don't confuse heart pride with Christ's honour. Take the Jesus route. Live out the change you have in Christ.

And by doing so, Paul says, we will heap burning coals on the head of our enemy. But this might not be such a terrible thing because the Lord himself may use that to bring to faith, to convert even the fiercest enemies we could have.

[23 : 43] Well, in conclusion, what do we see as underpinning? Being an overcomer. What holds all this together?

What can we leave this evening with with an idea that is absolutely fundamental and critical to being an overcomer? Well, I read recently, evil is overcome only by good, which the Son of God himself demonstrated on the cross and which believers are called to emulate.

And this is the key. We have seen the celebration of Holy Week all over the world. It was very sad for us here in Lima that we could not provide our normal services of Holy Week in the building.

But so often when we look at how Holy Week is presented, it's a diluted message that's communicated. It's Easter eggs.

It's lambs jumping in the field. It is daffodils. It is the chance to restart and have a lot of things that the secular mind is attracted to.

[24 : 59] And that's not a bad idea. But it's not the full message of the Easter week. You see, a message that avoids the reality of heaven and hell, avoids the reality of perfect goodness in God and evil in the human heart.

It's a boulderized version. It seeks to try and avoid offense, which the cross necessarily must provide.

You see, the cross was a cross of pain. And unless we realize that the cross without pain, without nails, is not the full measure of what Christ has done, we will miss out the critical thing about being an overcomer.

As we read the Bible. As we read the Bible, we get the core message coming to the surface. It's not really about your fears. It's not really about your needs in this world.

They are real and they are important. But the core message of life, of our soul, is not about that. What Paul wrote to the Roman Christians and what he said in chapter 8, verse 37, is that we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

[26 : 19] And he was speaking in the context of eternal security, of forgiveness of sin, of being made right with God upon the merit of Jesus Christ, who died on a cross and who rose again on the third day.

The Easter message is to encourage the church to see that the present circumstances may be dreadful. Lives may be lost tragically.

Hopes vanquished. Dreams dismantled. But the central evil of humanity, the sin that is in the core of every human being, every one of us, it only has one remedy.

But what a remedy it is. It's a remedy for eternity. To be an overcomer, we must first be a follower of the one who overcame the world.

Jesus said, I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart.

[27 : 20] I have overcome the world. You see, Jesus is the supreme overcomer. He overcame sin. He overcame death.

He overcame sin by taking its penalty upon himself on the cross. He overcame death by being raised to life on the third day. He conquered it. He was forsaken.

For our sake. But he didn't forsake us. He went to the cross. He died on the cross to overcome the weight of guilt and shame that was due because of our sin.

He died for us. But he died instead of us too, as one pastor says. We can trust the supreme overcomer, Jesus Christ. He rose again.

He was victorious over death. He sits enthroned and is sovereign over all. He has overcome the cosmos. He has overcome the world systems.

[28 : 21] And he calls his people. He calls you as a child of God, as a believer in Jesus Christ, to be an overcomer in his strength, by his grace.

And what John tells us in the book of Revelation is that those who have overcome are blessed. Help me overcome. You may be seen.

The fears, the doubts, the struggles, the addictions, the broken relationships, the hurts, the pains, the worries, the anxieties, whatever they are.

By God's grace, we can overcome. We may become overcomers. But let us make sure that first and foremost, we have come over to the cross.

And that we've pleaded for the mercy of God and for the victory of Jesus and for the hope of eternal life in him. If you haven't done that, my friend, come now. Come over to the cross.

[29 : 22] And leave an overcomer. Chris Tomlin's song sums it up beautifully. There's a place, he says, where mercy reigns and never dies.

There's a place where streams of grace flow deep and wide, where all the love I've ever found comes like a flood, comes flowing down at the cross. I surrender my life.

I'm in awe of you. Where your love ran red and my sin washed white. I owe all to you. There's a place where sin and shame are powerless.

Where my heart has peace with God and forgiveness. Where all the love I've ever found comes like a flood, comes flowing down. At the cross, I surrender my life.

I'm in awe of you. Where your love ran red and my sin washed white. I owe all to you. Here, my hope is found.

[30 : 20] Here, on holy ground. Here, I bow down. Let's pray. Lord God, help us to learn from this teaching from Paul's letter to the Romans.

To people who faced great uncertainty, danger, threat. But were to be overcomers. Help us to overcome evil with good.

The goodness of Jesus Christ. Lord, hear our prayers. The struggles of each one we present to you this evening. And ask for your grace.

Sufficient for every need. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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Amen. Amen.