

Welcome to church everyone! It is such a privilege to share God's word with you this morning! I love and feel most at home when I get to gather with my brothers and sisters in the faith. Gathering can come in different forms - like those who are joining us in worshipping the Lord online. Y'all are loved and we're so glad you joined us.

My name is Buddy and I've been at this serving at this church as the Pastor of Junior High Ministry for the last 7 years. Today we are wrapping up our summer series, Everyday Faith and the main text for today's message is Revelation 21:1-7.

First things first, I have a question and then a story. Do we have any country fans in the room? Can I get a "Yee-Haw!" from our country music fans? Ok never mind, I need to ask another question - have you ever had a song stuck in your head and then immediately rush over to your phone or device and played it? It's like an itch you have to scratch. A couple of Saturday's ago I was sitting at our table for breakfast and had a country song I couldn't get out of my head. After playing the song, the device then played a song that it thought was similar and that I might like. I got a minute into the song and paused to think about how ridiculous the lyrics were. Wanna hear them? If not, too bad. You're going to have to suffer as I did.

The song goes like this:

This is perfect
Come kiss me one more time
I couldn't dream this up
Even if I tried

You and me in this moment
Feels like magic, don't it?
I'm right where I wanna be

Everybody's talking 'bout heaven
Like they just can't wait to go
Saying how it's gonna be so good, so beautiful
Lying next to you,
In this bed with you,
I ain't convinced
'Cause I don't know how, I don't know how heaven, heaven
Could be better than this

Ok. I don't know about you but my mind immediately accepted that challenge and went into "what scenario can I conjure up to change his mind?" So what if the woman he's lying next to hasn't showered in a couple days? What if they go into an argument right before? What if she's lactose-intolerant and ate a whole lot of dairy? You see how volatile that statement is? There's so many conditions required for his premise to work.

My intent in bringing all this up isn't to belittle the artist but to address the public evaluation of the value of heaven and compare it to what the Bible says.

Today I'll be reading from the New American Standard Bible and here's what Revelation 21:1-7 says:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." 5 And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He *said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." 6 Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the

beginning and the end. I will give *water* to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life, without cost. 7 The one who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.

Here we see a promise for those who are found in Christ or as Jesus, Himself puts it "the one who overcomes." While there are great things in this world, none can compare to the glory of what's to be established by Christ. Yet, there is that condition at the end that I believe deserves a great deal of discussion. I've already mentioned how this glorious end is for those who Jesus refers to as "the one who overcomes" but why does Jesus refer to them as "the one who overcomes?" The answer to this question is found repeatedly throughout this book and a specific section offers practical application for the faith we hold onto today.

Let's start with a little background on the book in which our passage is being quoted. The book of Revelation is of Jesus Christ giving the the author, John the apostle, an unveiling of spiritual truth, the revealing of the Sons of God, Christ's Incarnation and revelation of His Second Coming. At the time he penned this book, John was the last remaining apostle and on account of the impact John was having on the churches in Asia Minor, the Roman ruler Domitian, exiled him to the island of Patmos. As the title of this book indicates, this message is from Christ, written by John and for the benefit of Christ's bride, the Church.

While this book deals with many subjects and discussion is justifiably concentrated on the Second Coming of Christ, we're honing in our focus on how our hope in Christ's future glory offers the inspiration we need for faithful living or to put it in other words how Christians live faithfully, with the end in mind.

With that I want to turn our attention to the second and third chapters of this book. In this section of Revelation we see Jesus give seven different churches scattered throughout Asia Minor a message that typically consists of - a description of His divine authority, a recognition of the spiritual condition of the church, a rebuke, specific instruction for faithful

living and a promise to those who overcome. Just as it was beneficial for the churches then, I believe that we can look at this text and have the same re-proof and instruction for faithful living, for the Church today.

In Revelation 2:1-7 we see Jesus commend the church of Ephesus for their labor, perseverance and discernment. Despite outside influence to take them away from Christ, they've held firm to the central belief of Jesus, the Son of God as their crucified and resurrected Savior and yet we get to verse 4 and we see Christ tell them "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love." Jamin preached a message similar to this last week. Theology is good, necessary to right living but I cannot stress this enough, it cannot replace a life headlined by faith. Don't forsake a life of fervent faithfulness for being the keeper of sound theology. God's highest priority for you in life isn't to be the champion, defender of sound theology, it's to live faithful!

Here's the thing, a people wholly devoted to Christ in the decisions they make, in the priorities they carry, in their love for others, in their speech and in their response to sin is the best defense of the Christian faith! The best defense is a good offense! As Christians we go on the offensive by living faithful to the leading of Christ in all we do. Church, we can live faithfully, with the end in mind by being devoted to Christ in all we do.

For those who remember their first love is Christ and are devoted to Him in all they do the message of hope and future assurance is this - v.7 "to the one who overcomes I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God." Remember how I said each letter to a church consists of a description of His divine authority and a promise to those who overcome? Jesus is able to offer this promise to those who overcome because of His divine authority. In this instance He says that He holds the seven stars and seven golden lamp stands in His right hand. He is the one over the Church and He is the one with the authority to give good gifts to His children. Jesus secures eternal life for those who live faithful.

Moving along, we get to verses 8-11 in which he writes to the church of Smyrna - v.9 "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander by those who say they are Jews, and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." Jesus is calling these ethnic Jews in Smyrna, imposters, a people who had forgotten their spiritual connection to Abraham and are actively working with Satan to harm the followers of the one who fulfilled the Abrahamic covenant, their spiritual heritage. In this instance, the form of persecution these Christians in Smyrna were suffering was an economic one. The loss of work and theft, left these Christians impoverished. In verse 10 says "Do not fear what you are about to suffer." These Christians were about to endure more suffering on behalf of Christ and his message to them is "don't have fear of suffering" on His behalf. We can live faithfully, keeping the end in mind by placing our trust in Christ.

This prompts Jesus to encourage them v.10 "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." 50 years after John died, the Pastor of the church in Smyrna would be burned alive at the stake for refusing to worship Caesar and to this day Christians are being persecuted for their faith. Christians in Nigeria are being slaughtered by the thousands for their faith. We are coming up on a year since Charlie Kirk was assassinated for representing Christ and speaking the truth. We are entering an era of increased hostility toward Jesus and His followers. These believers are far richer because they have received the crown of life and our hope in the resurrected Christ means we receive life that no amount of money or acceptance can offer. This is why He says "(but you are rich)" right after having called them poor. For they have what only Christ can give, life eternal and because they have overcome, are far richer than their persecutors.

Next, Jesus addresses the church in Pergamum where Antipas, likely the Pastor of their church, was martyred for His faith in Christ. They have held firmly to Jesus despite intense persecution. However, Jesus sees and knows all, and states in v. 14 "But I have a few things against you, because you have *some* there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept

teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality." This is a reference back to Numbers 25 when after failing to curse Israel, Balaam suggests that Balak cause Israel to stumble by worshipping their idols and commit infidelity with the Moabite women. Jesus sees this and says there are people among them who are dragging others into idol worship and sexual immorality.

I want to emphasize the words "some there." These Christians had been forming close, influential relationships with "some others" who weren't working with the same end in mind. Romans 8:6 states "For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." Those "others" had minds that weren't focused on life in Christ, but death. Christians filled with hope, working with the end in mind, seek to form close bonds with people working toward the same goal - life in Christ.

Jesus concludes with a promise - "To the one who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows except the one who receives it." Jesus, is the bread of life and whoever overcomes shall not hunger. For those who abide in His Son, God promises life unique and personal to the believer.

In verses 18-29, Jesus says to the church of Thyatira: "'I know your deeds, and your love and faith, and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first. But I have *this* against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols." The letter to Thyatira and Pergamum sound similar don't they? The key difference between Jesus' words to the church of Pergamum and Thyatira is that one is actively forming close relationships with people engaging in idolatry and sexual immorality and the other has allowed teaching that has been tolerated and has made its way through the church.

Essentially, what's being taught is that one could engage in evil with the body without impacting the spirit. As previously stated, to set the mind on the flesh is death. Contrary to this teaching that was making it's way around Thyatira, this doesn't mean the flesh is inherently evil rather it can produce evil because of desires that go beyond the surface. Desires that are not renewed by Christ. What is Jesus' instruction to faithful work with the end in mind? Holding firm and continue submitting to Christ.

Submission is frowned upon in our society. It shows a sign of weakness and to an extent, I agree. The caveat here is that submission is weakness when authority of our lives is given to things or people that aren't worthy. In the instance of the church in Thyatira and the church of today too many of my brothers and sisters have given themselves to things that aren't worthy of their submission. They've allowed themselves to become mastered by selfish ambition, comfortability, self-righteousness, thrill-seeking, sexual desires, materialism, pride, you name it. When those who overcome are working with the end in mind there's one master over them, one who is worthy of their confidence, surrender and trust and that's in submitting to the they're leading and working in Christ. That's it.

What is Jesus' promise to those who overcome? Verses 26 and 27 say "The one who overcomes, and the one who keeps My deeds until the end, I will give him authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are shattered," The promise to be elevated from servant to co-ruler by the reign of Christ.

In the next chapter, Jesus addresses the church of Sardis and says the believers are have a reputation for being alive, vibrant, thriving but at it's heart is dead. Sardis, the capital of the Lydian kingdom, was known for their wealth and luxury that came from their convenient trading location and from the production of expensive garments. It stood high above a valley and was surrounded by cliffs, a nearly impenetrable defense. Yet, the city stood to be captured not once, but twice. Not that it was easy for conquering armies but the soldiers posted at guard of the city wall were too lazy and believed that diligence while being on guard was

unnecessary. Jesus uses these references that the church would know for pointed critiques to the spiritual condition of the church in Sardis and as a promise of future glory.

Verse 2 says: "Be constantly alert, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God." These words are reminiscent of Philippians 2:12-13 when Paul writes "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his purpose." Jesus' instruction for living faithfully with the end in mind is to live out your faith in obedience every day. We can live faithfully, with the end in mind by diligently pursuing Christ.

Jesus' promise to the church of Sardis? Verse 5 "The one who overcomes will be clothed the same way, in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels." Jesus preserves the saints who overcome.

Beginning in verse 7 Jesus speaks to the church in Philadelphia acknowledging that He knows their work, He knows their humble posture of heart, He know their obedience and not denying the name of Christ despite heavy persecution coming from Satan. Similar to Smyrna, Philadelphia was under heavy persecution from ethnic Jews who abandoned their spiritual heritage and formed a coalition with pagans to oppress those who follow the way of Christ. I find Jesus' blessing for this church to be so fascinating.

Jesus tells this church in verse 9 "I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and make them know that I have loved you." At the beginning of the message to the church, Jesus said He placed a door before them that no one can shut. What I'm reading is God blessing this church's faithfulness with opportunities to display the love, truth and glory of God in a way that even it's enemies cannot deny. Can you

imagine if the Church was so resolute in their faith, that God said "I'm giving you opportunities to be a unique part of revealing myself to the world?" When the Church is full of people who overcome, that is the end result. Unique opportunity to powerfully convey the grace, glory and love of God. We can live faithfully, keeping the end in mind through resolve to love Christ through it all and wait on the Lord for opportunities to reveal the love, truth and glory of God.

Finally, Jesus address a 7th church, the church of Laodicea, with a warning about the useless state of their middling faith. In verse 15 Jesus tells them "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will vomit you out of My mouth." Here again, we see Jesus using a culturally relevant example that anyone in living in the city could easily identify with. Inadequate water supply forced the city to build an underground aqueduct to carry water to the city. Hierapolis was a nearby city famous for its hot springs and Colosse was known for its cold mountain stream. Laodicea, however, had dirty, lukewarm water that travelled miles underground. Unless you were accustomed to the water, people would spit it out.

Verse 16 then goes on to indict this church for a specific flaw and may perhaps be the source of their useless, indifferent faith - an unwillingness to take matters of faith seriously. Jesus cites their mindset when He says "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have no need of anything," and you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked," While physically and materialistically, things on the outside look fine, Jesus sees the whole picture and sees the condition of their heart is "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." Friends, if we are to stay out of complacency in our faith we need to ask the Lord to convict us! Jesus says the response to His rebuke and discipline is to be zealous and repent. I don't know about you, but I am most full of zeal and ready to surrender more of my life to Christ when I feel convicted. When I see an area of my life or faith that hasn't been fully surrendered yet or when God

disciplines me to make more use out of my faith. Those are some of the greatest milestones you can have in your faith!

Yet, these people don't see or understand the impoverished position their heart is in! I've put off the conclusions to each of the letters with the intention of bringing it up right now. Jesus concludes every message to these churches with "The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." This general exhortation rings especially pertinent to how the Laodicean church was struggling. They were failing to understand the true condition of their faith and needed hearts that were receptive or ears that would actually listen to the rebuke of Christ! This leads me Christ's instruction to the Church of today: live faithfully, keeping the end in mind with a posture of humility and teachability.

Without humility and teachability you will fail to have ears that hear or hearts that are receptive to the leading of Christ in your life and you're very likely to enter a place of personal spiritual blindness. Christ encourages those who overcome, who live faithfully, keeping the end in mind with the promise "The one who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat with My Father on His throne."

Let's recap:

We can live faithfully, keeping the end in mind by:

being devoted to Christ in all we do

by placing our trust in Christ

form close bonds with people working toward the same goal - life in Christ

hold firm & continue submitting to Christ

by diligently pursuing Christ

wait on the Lord for opportunities to reveal the love, truth and glory of God

having a Heart posture of humility and teachability

Let's conclude by re-visiting the original text.

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.

This is the end we have in mind as we overcome to live faithfully. I want to end with a short story told by Tim Keller.

"Every year or so, I have a recurring nightmare that my wife is flattered by. The nightmare is that my wife dies. Something has happened to her, and I'm trying to make it without her. My wife is flattered because it is obviously my greatest fear. But let me tell you something really weird. I almost like having the nightmare now. Do you know why? Because the first minute after I wake up is so unbelievably great! To wake up and say,

'Oh my it was only a bad dream. Everything bad I was living through has come untrue.'"

The principle of the story here and how it relates to God's full restoration of creation is that even the worst things that happen to you in this life will be taken up in glory with Christ and will be taken up in a way that makes the glory better and greater for having once been broken. The governing authority of sin and brokenness in this new reality will become untrue. This doesn't lessen the hurt or hardship that you experience in this life but this does offer the Christian a hope in the resurrection. A hope that in this restored, eternal kingdom everything is sweeter because what was once a true and governing reality has become untrue in the glory and victory of Christ. This is the end, we live faithfully for. Let's pray.