

We are in week 2 of our series called *Overcome*, looking at all Jesus conquered and freed us from through his life, death, and resurrection. Last week I challenged all of us to see if we were living in defeat or living in the victory he's already won. We began by looking at a passage in Colossians that showed us all our sins have been nailed to the cross and forgiven. They are paid in full. On our way home from church last Sunday, my son, Luke, asked me a question that got to the very heart of the matter. He began with "Hold on a second", always a clue that something was hitting him funny. Then he asked this: "If Jesus has fully paid for all our sins, those we have, are, and will commit, does that mean we can just sin all we want because it's already forgiven?"

It's a really good question. How would you answer that yourself? If someone took an assessment of your life, how is your life answering that question? If your sins are paid for, do they really matter anymore? We know Jesus died to secure our eternity, but what impact is it supposed to have on our present?

For many of us, we still have an "unhealthy relationship" with sin, myself included at times. We dabble in it, take it lightly, think we still can't help ourselves, or we tolerate just a little bit of it, secure in the idea that we are better than we used to be. But if that's you, that's living the life of defeat, not a life of victory, and Jesus doesn't want you there because that life misses out on what he has made possible now. Last week we saw how Jesus overcame the condemnation of our sin. This week we are going to look at what he has done to overcome its power in our lives and the potential we now have because he's won. Like last week, I encourage you again to see if you are living in victory or defeat, and what you are missing out on if the latter.

[Romans 6:1-8] What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For one who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

Before you came to Christ you were a sinner who was owned and ruled by sin and sinned without even knowing and wouldn't have had any choice, even if you did. You were spiritually dead, separated from and hostile towards God, and mastered by sin, and there was nothing you could do about it. It's why we can't be surprised when a godless world perpetrates evil. It is following its leader and it can't help itself. It was the same for us before Jesus.

But something changed the moment you trusted in Christ. Jesus overcame not only the condemnation of sin, he also overcame the power of sin to rule your life. How did he do that?

I'm so thankful we had a baptism today because it's a physical picture of a spiritual reality. Before Jesus, you were dead and ruled by sin. But when you trusted in Christ, you were crucified and buried with him. The old you, the old self, was nailed to the cross along with your sins and

buried with Christ. Jesus died to pay for those sins and overcome its hold on you. And just as Jesus was raised from the dead, that same resurrection power was given to you when you put your faith in him. That power will one day resurrect you in perfection, and we'll talk more about that next week, but that resurrection power also raised you to new life right here and now. If your life was a movie, your life in Christ is the sequel, and the storyline has completely changed. It's why we tell these baptism stories because they tell of the victory we have in Christ. You were a slave to sin. Now you belong to Jesus, and the life you live you now live with him.

Some of you need to be reminded of that this morning. If you have trusted in Christ, the old you is dead and buried. You are not slightly modified. You are brand new. What's new? Your heart, mind, soul, your affections, and your master. The mistakes that defined you are now old chapters of a new life. We all have those tapes that play in our minds that condemn us and tell us we will always be that and always do those things. But that's not true.

We refer to ourselves as sinners. We do that rightly and humbly. We do it to confess our weakness, our inability to do it perfectly, and our desperate need for grace and forgiveness. But to say that about ourselves is incomplete. **You are a sinner, yes, but more accurately, you are a redeemed sinner.** Jesus bought you, paid the full price, which was his life, and set you free from the bondage of sin. **That means sin no longer owns you, your past no longer defines you, and your future days can be lived with and for Christ.** Are you living that way? Do you believe you really have a choice? Let's keep reading.

[Romans 6:12-14] ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Before Jesus, sinning was your default reflex. You had no choice. Now that you are in Christ, obedience is, or at least can be. By God's grace, you have been empowered to obey sin or obey God, to offer yourself to unrighteousness or righteousness. Righteousness is a legal standing, but it's also a relational word. Righteous means to be in right relationship with God, and we honor that relationship by obeying him. But to want to do that, we have to believe his standards are proclamations of love. We may not always like them, but we trust they are for our best. Do you believe that? Want that? It's a big question because here's what all of us do from time to time.

You were dead in sin, stuck in a pit, under its rule. Jesus pulled you out and set you free. The power of sin was broken, but too often we put ourselves right back under it. We run away from Jesus and put ourselves right back into bondage. That sheep would have been fine had it stayed by the shepherd's side, and we will be fine if we stay by the Good Shepherd's side. But what happens? Jesus rescues us, we run away from him, run towards sin, and find ourselves stuck again. We don't lose our salvation, but we miss out on the newness of life Jesus gives us. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Why do we do that? Why do we still sin? **Sin is a legitimate longing satisfied in an illegitimate way.** GK Chesterton said “Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God.” We are looking for joy, happiness, peace, fulfillment, and we convince ourselves it can be found somewhere other than God. Every time I indulge my flesh, hold a grudge, try to make much of myself, or spend my time on wasteful things, I’m trusting that what I’m doing will bring satisfaction that only comes from God and the new life he has made possible. **When we don’t believe God knows or has what’s best, we go our own way.**

Where are you not believing God? Trusting his way is best? Where are you looking for peace apart from him after these lousy two years we’ve lived through? Sex, money, relationships, career, stuff, attitude? You won’t do this perfectly. We are all a work in progress. God, in his providence, still left the flesh for us to do battle with. Even Paul laments in chapter 7 the fact that he often chooses the things he really doesn’t want to do, things apart from God, things that put him back in the bondage of sin. But when we choose that path, we miss out on the new life Christ has made possible. We live in defeat rather than victory, and Paul goes on to tell us the fruit of our decision.

[Romans 6:20-23] ²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When you were slaves of sin the output of your life was death. Nothing you produced was good. Nothing you did honored God. You were dead and fruit of your life was death. But Jesus has changed all that now. We are now under God’s rule. He now owns us, and he has made possible a life that leads to a glorious eternity in the future and a life of sanctification now. Sanctification is a Bible word that means set apart and holy and “the process by which we become more like Jesus.” And that’s accurate, but I think we miss out on the glory of the word. It’s more than a process of purification.

Sin is the barrier between you and intimacy with God and you and the new life he has for you. **The gospel is not a system to manage your sin. It’s the power of God to kill it.** God is working on me right now in an area that he addressed in my 20’, 30’s, and now again in my 40’s. It’s not that he hasn’t changed me. It’s that our sin is like an onion, and he continues to peel back layer after layer. But as he’s doing this, I’m not just becoming a “better Christian”. **I’m falling more in love with my Savior.** I’m becoming more like him because I am knowing him more and more. I’m experiencing the joy of the freedom he gives and becoming who he always intended me to be. And in the midst of all that has come these last few years, Jesus is still overcoming all that is standing between me and him and I am experience anew the newness of life he offers. He wants to do that in you. If that’s possible, why would we ever go back to a life of sin?

Kristi McKelheny reminded me of a show called *The Biggest Loser*. It was a show where overweight people worked with a trainer and dietician and turned their life around and lost a bunch of weight. Very inspirational. But as part of their motivation, after they had lost a bunch of weight, they would have the contestants go for a hike and place weights on them equal to the amount of weight they had lost. The point was to remember what it was like carrying around that burden and remind them they don't want to return there because the cost was too great. It's the same with our sin. Keeping yourself under the weight and burden of sin comes at a cost. It damages your relationship with God and stifles your ability to walk in newness of life. God doesn't want that for you. He has something so much better.

Test the fruit of your life. What is your life producing? Are you happy with it? Do you believe it's what Jesus wants for you? Ask God to see it through his eyes. Ask him to make you aware and change your heart to desire righteousness. Remember, he has no condemnation for you. Then ask others what they see. We can't do this alone. We need each other's help. A couple weeks ago I confessed to you all my sin of gluttony, that my flesh desires food and lots of it. What you don't know is I had lunch with the elders right after. And you want to know where we went? A brunch buffet! Their presence helped me choose righteousness that day, trust God, and experience the joy of him and his best for me.

Determine God's position in your life. Have you placed God at the margins of your life or is he in the center? Tim Keller recently tweeted that the cause of all sin is the lack of joy in the Lord. The more you know God the more you are going to want to live in the new life he has made possible. The more you love God the more you are going to want to live a life pleasing to him. If you are not abiding in God, if he is not at the center of your life, you'll doubt what he's made possible and doubt what he says is best. But when you experience him, and him first, all the rest will follow.

This is Palm Sunday. In Scripture we read it as Jesus' Triumphal Entry. Historically a conquering king or general would ride into his capital with pomp and circumstance, trailed by those he defeated. For Jesus, he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. He did not have his defeated enemies trailing behind him. They waited for him at the cross, but the people there had a sense of what he had come to do. They shouted "Hosanna", a word of praise, an acknowledgement of rulership, and a cry that meant "Oh save us now!" And he would do that very thing. By the breaking of his body, he overcame, and his victory is our victory. The enemy of sin is defeated. It's power over you is broken. The new life Jesus has for you is possible. Let us live in the freedom he has won.