

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Overcomers

John Lee

2020 is shaping up to be unlike any year we have experienced. The Covid virus and social unrest have brought a sense of unease and instability. As we now enter the period of national elections with their kept and unkept promises, we have the ingredients that easily lead us to feelings of uncertainty and instability. The virus leaves us with the uncertainty of life. Social unrest leaves us with the uncertainty of history and the future. And elections leave us with the uncertainty of promises likely to be broken. In the Lord's last written words, eight times in **Revelation**, the early church was called to overcome or to be "overcomers" (see **2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21** and **21:7**). This is a time when God calls His people to be "OVERCOMERS."

Often throughout history, God's people are called to overcome, and the current times seem to strongly call us to that. It is easy to miss how closely the reality of biblical lives parallels what can occur in ours and, in so doing, we diminish the modern contained in the journeys of the old saints. We fail to see that, in the midst of their distresses, they exhibited some of their greatest worship.

In **1 Corinthians 14:33**, we are told that God is not the author of confusion. What a beautiful thought! In the midst of a world of confusion and instability there can be assurance and peace. God is the Rock/our Rock. He is the epitome of stability and the antithesis of confusion. God is the key to our enduring. He has given us three great institutions: the family, civil government and the church. All three are to be sources of peace and stability. And when they are not, man struggles. Stability is God's turf. But we are in a society of instability and confusion. And as such we are on Satan's turf, but we need not be without God.

When a nation rejects absolute truth, moral standards and biblical values, then everything is grey and there is no certainty. We live in a world that claims to be so enlightened while at the same time it tears down foundational values. In claiming freedom, it rejects family roles, integrity, personal responsibilities and modesty, then wonders why chaos rules.

Imagine your life if you knew the future. Would it change you? You would think it would, but the children of Israel were told repeatedly by the prophets what the future held. They often ignored it and went on unchanged. As **James 4:14** tells, we don't know what will be on the morrow. But in these closed and cancelled times of uncertainty one truth remains unchanged: **JESUS IS COMING AGAIN. THE RETURN OF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN CANCELLED. ETERNAL PEACE AND CERTAINTY ARE COMING.**

This is a time when, being an overcomer is so crucial, a time when we can and should let our lights shine by overcoming the depression, anger, uncertainty and worry gripping the world.

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In **Revelation 12:11**, we are told: "*they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of testimony and not loving their lives unto death.*" Three key steps to overcoming: 1) accepting the blood of Christ, 2) believing and sharing His word and 3) trusting Him so as not to fear death.

Overcomers realize that life is fragile; drawing near to God is critical and showing joy even in difficult times is a light shining opportunity. If our joy is true joy, it will be congruous with pain and suffering. The test of godly joy is whether it is compatible with times such as these. Overcomers know with assurance who holds the future.

But what about the future challenges these days do and will bring to Christians and the church? Most of us have not been able to assemble as we have been accustomed to during the years. Some services have been cancelled, others shortened. Hopefully this lessening of our fellowship and time together will instill in each of us a greater desire and appreciation of our

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assemblies as we are able to reconvene. But could our flesh start leading us into thoughts such as: "Even though we've been meeting less I still feel close or closer to God than before." "It sure was nice not to have to go to church so often or to have shortened services." Will our devotion to assembling together decline because of a false sense that we did fine without it? We must remember and remind ourselves how important our assembling together is.

God instituted our assembling together not only to praise and glorify Him (which it should), but because He knew that was what we need. The encouragement and edification can only come in its fullness when the church is assembled together. We must be diligent to not lessen our assembling together when the pandemic eases but to appreciate and cherish our time together even more.

We also must remember that God divinely instituted the Lord's Supper as an individual responsibility ("*let a man examine himself,*" **1 Corinthians 11:28**) but to be done in the aggregate, as an assembled congregation. In **1 Corinthians 11**, Paul repeatedly says "*as the church...in one place*" when referring to the communion. Emphasizing that it is not only a grand time of communion with the Lord but also a grand time of communion with, and as, our church congregation.

Also, as we examine ourselves, maybe we find something in each of our lives we need, and have intended to, correct or improve on. But in spite of our intentions, we just haven't gotten to it yet. Maybe these slowed-down times are an opportunity to reboot and hit the reset button. I know little about the inner workings of computers, iPads or cell phones, though I use them all. But I have learned one of the best and simplest ways to get them working correctly when they malfunction is to turn them off, then back on. We call that resetting or rebooting. Could that be something for us to consider: rebooting some portion of our life during this slowdown? Making changes in our lives that will improve our service.

Has God brought these times to teach us and cause us to reflect? Possibly, but God does not cause everything that happens. Because He is sovereign, nothing happens that He doesn't allow. We cannot change the last few months, but we can learn from them and prepare for the upcoming challenges resulting from them. We can become even stronger
OVERCOMERS.

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Rapture! Really?

John Morris

The word "rapture" is derived from the Latin term *raptus* which meant "to snatch or seize." Birds of prey are called *raptors*, since they snatch up their prey. A person is said to be *rapt* with attention when something has so *seized* his interest that he is *caught up* in it. And we understand Solomon's meaning when he speaks of a husband being *enraptured* with his wife's love (**Proverbs 5:19**).

If we were reading **1 Thessalonians 4:17** in the Latin Vulgate (a fourth-century translation of the Bible), we would find a verb form of *raptus* appearing in Paul's description of how Christians will be "caught up" in the clouds at the Lord's return. It is this fact that has given rise to the modern use of "rapture" among many Bible believers. And applied in this limited, literal sense, "rapture" is certainly an acceptable way to describe what will be experienced by Christians on the Last Day. The term, however, is generally used in connection with much more.

In his 1998 book, *Rapture: Under Attack*, best-selling author and champion of the "pre-Tribulation" view of "the Rapture," Tim LaHaye, spells out point-by-point how he believes events will unfold in the final days of the world as we know it. In condensed form, his play-by-play runs as follows:

1. Jesus will descend from heaven, but His appearing will be witnessed by the righteous only: "... anyone who does not participate in the Rapture will not actually see it, for it will occur in the '*twinkling of an eye*'" (p. 38).
2. The dead in Christ will then rise (with changed bodies).
3. Those who are alive and remain will also be changed.
4. Both groups will then be caught up (raptured) together to meet the Lord in the air.
5. The Lord will take the raptured to His Father's house.
6. While in the Father's house, the raptured will appear before the judgment seat of Christ (but with no threat of being condemned).
7. While the Lord and the raptured are in the Father's house, the "Great Tribulation" will take place on Earth (during which time those "left behind"—those not raptured—will have opportunity to turn to the Lord).
8. After a number of years has passed on Earth (seven, in LaHaye's view), the Lord and the raptured will enjoy the

Marriage Supper of the Lamb, after which Jesus will descend to earth with the raptured to set up His earthly kingdom.

9. This earthly kingdom will persist for a thousand years (during “the millennium”). At its close, the wicked will then be resurrected and judged.

So goes LaHaye’s understanding of how “the Rapture” and surrounding events will transpire. And so goes the understanding of many of our Bible-believing friends. But is this, in fact, what the Bible teaches? To some extent, yes. But on many points, no.

To begin with, note that this view of the “end times” teaches that the Lord’s return will be a two-stage affair. Jesus will return once to gather the raptured and take them to His Father’s house, then return again to set up His kingdom on earth (a notion, by the way, entirely out of step with the Lord’s teaching, see **John 18:36**). LaHaye attempts to support this dualistic view of Christ’s return by appealing to **Titus 2:13**

Jesus is coming back. His return may be sudden, but it will not be secret. It will be visible to all, audible to all, and its accompanying judgment will be final for all.

where Paul states that Christians should be “*looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.*” He contends that “*the blessed hope*” and “*glorious appearing*” are distinct events—the two different comings of Christ. But is that the natural reading of the passage? Would someone without preconceived ideas understand Paul’s statement in that way? Seems highly unlikely. And what’s more, the Scriptures simply do not speak of a second, second coming—a third coming, in other words. “*To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation*” (**Hebrews 9:28**). The Bible speaks of Jesus coming again, not again and again.

And what about the nature of His second coming? LaHaye asserts that only the righteous will see Jesus at His second appearing. But that’s not what the Bible says. John wrote: “*Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him*” (**Revelation 1:7a**). The soldiers who pierced Jesus’ flesh with spear and nails, and the people who moved political mountains to make it possible that day, will have been dead for over nineteen centuries when Jesus returns.

Yet they will see Him. And the clear implication is that they will not be among the righteous when they do. Righteous or unrighteous, dead or alive, everyone will see Jesus when He appears. And, it should be noted, everyone will hear Him. There is some disagreement among proponents of “the Rapture” over whether or not the lost will hear the Lord when He returns to gather His own. But the Scriptures leave little doubt:

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation (**John 5:28, 29**).

All the wicked dead will hear Him. Shall not the wicked living?

Which brings us to the resurrection. According to LaHaye and others who espouse his view of “the Rapture,” there will actually be two resurrections—one of the righteous at Jesus’ first appearing, then a second of the wicked at the close of “the millennium.” Two resurrections and two judgments, each couplet (resurrection and judgment) for only one category of persons. But the Bible paints a very different picture. Paul said to Felix, “*I have hope in God...that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust*” (**Acts 24:15**). One resurrection involving both categories of people. Jesus, in the aforementioned passage in John, affirmed the same thing: “*...the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth...those who have done good...and those who have done evil...*” (**John 5:28, 29**). Commensurate with Jesus’ single second coming, there will be a single resurrection of all the dead...and a single judgment of all humanity:

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats (**Matthew 25:31, 32**).

Jesus is coming back. His return may be sudden, but it will not be secret. It will be visible to all, audible to all, and its accompanying judgment will be final for all. And that finality is why it’s so important to be aware of the errors of the doctrine we’ve been examining. By promising two returns, the doctrine of “the Rapture” promises people a second chance—another seven years, according to LaHaye, another three and a half years, according to others—but a second chance all the same. A second chance to get right with God if the first chance was squandered. But the Bible makes no such promise. When Jesus returns, “*all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him*” (**Revelation 1:7**). Because they’ll have a second chance?



Please check your expiration date!

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No. Because they will have wasted their last chance.

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming (1 John 2:28).

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A Bad Day

Wade Stanley

Bill Buckner played professional baseball for 22 years. He hit for a career average of .289 with nearly 3,000 hits. He won the National League batting title in 1980. But how is he remembered? He missed a routine ground ball in the 1986 World Series. In one moment he went from "solid major-leaguer" to infamous scapegoat.

Who wants to be known for who they were in their worst moments? A snapshot in time, a moment of weakness, or a careless word can permanently change our view of someone.

Bill Buckner is hardly an isolated case.

When we think of the apostle Thomas, I rather suspect one word comes to most of our minds - doubt. However, the same Thomas wanted to know where Jesus was going after death and how to get there (see **John 14:1-6**). Thomas was not doubting Jesus; he wanted to understand Jesus. When Jesus proposed a dangerous return to Judaea in order to raise Lazarus, it was Thomas who said "*Let us also go, that we may die with Him.*" Are these the words of a doubter?

It's certainly fair to draw conclusions about others — and ourselves — when we see persistent, repeated behaviors. But is an out-of-character moment or a failure inconsistent with what we know about someone sufficient grounds for completely re-defining what we think about that person? Yes, Thomas doubted; he also wanted to know the truth and was willing to die alongside Jesus. I see in Thomas exactly what I would expect: a mixture of successes and failures. Or, to put it another way, I see a human being.

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