

"The Overcomers"

<u>Occasion</u>	Evening Service at Therfield Chapel
<u>Day, Date & Time</u>	Sunday 9 November 2008 at 18:30
<u>Basis</u>	Revelation 15
<u>Readings</u>	Revelation 15 Ezekiel 7:4, 8-9, 25-27
<u>Songs</u>	from Mission Praise: 143, 40, 155, 151, 219, 148 from The Source: 19
<u>Author/Speaker</u>	Paul Rydon

Who do you think the people are who in John's latest vision stand beside the sea?
According to John,

they are the ones who had been victorious over the Beast
and over his image,
and over his mark
and over the number of his name.

These are the saints,
the people of God,
the 'Overcomers'.

Do you recall at the beginning of the book
that Jesus says in his message to each of the seven churches
"to him who overcomes, I will give"

For example,
in the case of the church at Smyrna,
the overcomer "will not be hurt at all by the second death". (Revelation 2:11)

The 'overcomers' are those in every age
who stand out against the wiles of Satan and his cohorts
and stand for God and his Son Jesus Christ.

These are those who become subjects of the Kingdom of God,
who receive eternal life,
and who will not be cast into the lake of fire at the last judgement

We can find them throughout the Bible:
They stand out from the crowd,
as those who revere God.

Enoch,
Noah,
Abraham,
Jacob,

Joseph,
Moses,
Samuel,
David,
Elijah & Elisha,
Jeremiah,
Daniel and his friends,
Ezra and Nehemiah,
the 12 Apostles (except Judas),
Paul and Timothy
and many, many others.

Of course, none of them was perfect,
but they had one thing in common
that they believed God
and set out to serve him.
But they were not alone.

God had to tell Elijah when he thought he was the only one left,
that there were seven thousand souls who had not bowed the knee to Baal. (1 Kings 19:18)

When Jesus prayed on the eve of his crucifixion,
he prayed not only for his disciples,
but for those who would believe in him through their message. (John 17:20)

In every age, however apostate it may have been,
God always preserves a remnant who are loyal to his name
and who take the message on to those who come after them.
And those of us here who love the Lord,
who have accepted his offer of salvation,
who believe him
and who have received forgiveness at his hand,
we stand too in that long line of those who have overcome.
We are those who have been victorious over the beast
and over his mark.

Yet it is abundantly clear from every section of the Bible
that such a pathway will be costly.

Remember, Jesus' words to his disciples at the Last Supper:
¹⁸"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. ²¹They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me.
(John 15:18-21)

And if we learn anything from the Book of Revelation
it is that the people of God have had a tough time.

The Christian churches to which John was writing in his time
and for whom these visions were intended
were being persecuted by Rome.

Commanded against their beliefs to pay homage to Caesar

Today, the Christians of Orissa in India
are being murdered,
raped
and driven from their homes;
their villages and churches,
schools
and even orphanages
torched by militant Hindus.
Across the world Christians suffer for their faith.

But what about the people of God in our cosy once-upon-a-time-Christian England?

Can we honestly say that the description
'victorious over the beast and the number of his name'
applies to us?

Last Thursday evening I attended the Hertfordshire Christian Concern meeting
in Hitchin
to hear Pastor Ade Amooba speak on behalf of Christian Concern for our Nation.
I wish you could have been there too.

This man is big and black.
Born in Nigeria, to a Nigerian Christian family,
he has lived in England, London I believe, for 21 years.
He opened his address by thanking us
for sending missionaries to Nigeria
two generations ago.
His grandfather was converted under their ministry
and now he and his four brothers serve the Lord.
If ever a man had a heart for our nation,
this man has.
I was deeply moved.

He works among the youth of the nation's capital.
He got together with churches and local authorities in London,
raising substantial amounts of money,
restoring an old church building
to provide subsidised affordable child care
so that young single mothers could get back to work
and do something with their lives
rather than languishing on social benefit.

But more than that,
he works with government agencies and ministers to address policy issues
that affect the people of our land.

He is uncompromisingly Christian,
but believes that results are achieved by working with the authorities

and policy makers
rather than against them.

He spoke of the work of 'Christian Concern for our Nation'
which is a spin-off from the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship,
and you may remember that we had a visit from Mark Mullins from them
at our Food4thought evening back in March this year.

He discussed the recent Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill,
which allows among other things the creation of 'human admixed embryos',
that is, human-animal hybrids,
which has just been passed by our parliament.

He told us that since the first abortion bill some forty years ago,
we have killed more unborn babies
than the number of people who died in both world wars put together.
He expressed his delight that abortion had not been further liberalised in this bill,
but sadness that other seemingly unethical measures,
which go against Christian conscience had been passed.

He discussed inconsistencies in the law
where there is now no need for a legal father in IVF treatment,
whereas when marriage breaks down the father is pursued for support.

He told us about different cases
where they had supported those who were being discriminated against
because of their Christian principles:

Like the Christian Relate Counsellor who had lost his job,
because he refused to give sexual advice to same-sex couples.

Like the Christian foster-parents who were deregistered
for refusing to teach their prospective foster children
about homosexual relationships.

In that case the decision was fought against and repealed.

And as I listened,
I realised that the battle we face is a huge one
as the secular forces in our nation are marching through our land
at a formidable rate,
destroying or undermining every vestige of morality,
human dignity,
righteousness
and respect for human life, in the name of progress.

In the process,
right becomes wrong,
good becomes evil
and anyone who seeks to maintain the holiness and purity of Christianity
is liable to find themselves on the wrong side of the law.
And this in a country built on the rule of law and Biblical principles.

This is the work of God's arch-enemy Satan
symbolized by the Beast in Revelation
and it is God's people who resist who will suffer
as they seek to follow Christ in this murky world.

And so in our chapter today,
John sees seven angels with seven plagues
(or afflictions or calamities as the Amplified Bible suggests)
which are to be the final judgement on an unbelieving and rebellious world.
The wrath of God is not poured out until chapter 16,
so this chapter is merely introductory.

The victors over the beast,
the people of God
stand beside the sea.
They are onlookers of the judgement that is about to be wreaked upon the Earth.
They are given harps and they sing a song,
said to be the song of Moses and the Lamb.
And the song is about God.

These people,
who have suffered so much in their fight against the Beast
have eyes for no-one but God.
There is nothing self-congratulatory about their words.
There is no self-righteousness,
no pride;
Just simple adoration for the God they serve.

There are four elements to their song:
His great deeds,
his justice,
the glory due to him
and his holiness.
This teaches us something of the character of God.

So what has God done that is so marvellous?

Firstly he created the earth,
the Universe
and the host of heavens.

The vastness of the observable universe is there for all to see.
Modern science has revealed its grandeur,
its balance,
its power.

We have traced its origins to a point in time
and in space
to a dense pinpoint of matter,
yet we have no knowledge of the power which caused it to explode outwards
to become what we observe today.

He set the whole universe up in such a way

that the earth is delicately placed close enough,
but not too close to its sun
spinning on its axis and rocking to produce day and night,
summer and winter
so that conditions are just right to support life as we know it.

Then he created life.
Again we hypothesise as to how life might have developed from a single cell,
but we have no idea how that intricate cell came to live.
God simply tells us that he made man in his own image and his own likeness
and breathed into him the breath of life.
And then he set him like God himself to care for his creation.

When man fell from grace he set in motion a plan to redeem him back to himself
and ever since, those who call on the name of the Lord
have a special place in his eternal purposes.
He sent his own Son into the world of men to suffer in our stead,
to pay the price of sin
and redeem the elect back to himself.
All these and much more are the mighty works of God.

Then there is his justice and truth.
Modern man denies the existence of Truth,
yet even the simplest mind knows that without Truth,
there can be no certainty and no justice.
He alone is the creator and the arbiter of good and evil,
for he alone is God.

Hence many will fear him and give glorify to his name.
Glory is due to him,
simply because he is God.
It is He who controls the universe and all that he has made.
It is his.

We live in it by his grace.
Even our life is dependent on him.
Those who rebel against his authority refuse to glorify him
or like modern man deny his existence,
but those who acknowledge the receipt of his grace,
glorify his name and give him the worship that is his due.

And then there is his holiness.
We should never forget the 'otherness' of God.
Some of our hymns and songs verge on the over-familiar.
We think that because Jesus became one of us
that we can almost embrace him and give him a cuddle.
But we forget that God is holy.

He is altogether non-human.
He has personality
and we describe him as a person,
but he is pure Spirit and altogether untouchable.
He is Holy and we approach him only through Christ

who has opened the way, by his death and resurrection
for us to approach the holiness of God.

And then the song concludes that all nations will finally be compelled
not by force, but by the compulsion of what is,
to worship the God of all,
for his righteousness will be revealed to them.

And so it was as John continued to see the visions before him,
that he saw the Temple - the Tabernacle of God.
John would have recognised this from his deep knowledge as a Jew
of the Old Testament Tabernacle
in which the Arc of the Covenant was held.

And out of the tabernacle came seven angels dressed in white,
symbolising the purity of the holiness from whence they came,
armed with the seven final judgements
on the world of rebellious mankind.

Then one of the living creatures around the throne of God,
gave them seven golden bowls filled with his wrath.
And the temple was filled with the smoke of the glory of God.

Remember in the Exodus that the glory of God appears as smoke
or a pillar of cloud by day
and as fire by night
and often filled the temple in Old Testament times.

And no-one could enter the temple
until the wrath of God on the earth was complete.

Next week we shall see what the final judgements will be.

The wonder of the Book of Revelation
is that it gives us an insight into what is going on in heaven.

We may be bemused at the beasts and the horses
and the strange and fantastic imagery that we see,
for it is so foreign to our modern,
materialistic
western minds,

but one thing is clear
and that is that there is a battle between God and the devil in his various forms
and caught up in that battle
are the people of God.

As the book approaches its climax,
we see more and more clearly
that any power that Satan has is always limited
and that he is already defeated by the Lamb who was wounded.
We also see that those who side with him will be judged according to their deeds
and the wrath of God is terrible to behold.

In the battle,
those who stand firm for God often suffer and die for their faith
but find themselves alive and well at the end.

They often appear as a minority,
yet there are myriads of them.

In this chapter they are those who have been victorious over the beast
and have never submitted to his rule,
nor been marked as his.

We are the people of God who stand today in the midst of the battle on earth.
Myriads have gone before us
and we have no knowledge of how many there are yet to come
before the end of time and the great Judgement day of God,
but we are the ones who fight today.

The battle is not the same in every corner of the earth,
but our battle in The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,
today in the 21st century since Christ was made a sacrifice for us
is to stand firm for him,
if necessary to the death.

We fight on many fronts:

We fight to maintain a personal lifestyle
that is consistent with the truth that God is in charge of this world
and we humans are not the masters of all we survey.

We fight the sin within our own hearts that displeases the Spirit of God
and destroys the joy of our salvation and our relationship with Jesus.

We fight for truth
amongst a people who have lost its meaning.

And we fight for justice
and just laws in our land.

We fight to be the Overcomers whom God loves to bless.

May each of us be among them.

Amen

Paul Rydon – 9th November 2008