

“Just as I Overcame” (Revelation 3:14–22)(11.21.21)

Revelation 3:14–22 (NIV84) *Jesus is speaking* -

¹⁴“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. ¹⁵I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! ¹⁶So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. ¹⁷You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. ¹⁸I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

¹⁹Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. ²⁰Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

²¹To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. ²²He who has

an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“Just as I Overcame”**

INTRODUCTION:

Today is the last Sunday of the year. [pause] Really. Next Sunday is the start of Advent, the start of the Christian year. It seems appropriate that for several centuries, today was designated as Christ the King Sunday or the Reign of Christ Sunday. Why do I say that? Because in the end, the end of this world, the ruler of God’s creation will be recognized as Lord of lords and King of kings by all. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

In this message to the church in Laodicea, Jesus uses that description – the ruler of God’s creation, and closes it by proclaiming that those that overcome, that conquer, will share the throne of God. This apocalyptic book of Revelation closes the Holy Scriptures and closes human history. The scriptures close with the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God, ruling over the new heaven and the new earth.

So, this is a perfect scripture for ending the Christian year. I wish I could say I planned it, but I cannot. It was the grace and blessing of the Holy Spirit. I concluded last week's message about the Church in Philadelphia with Jesus' adamant declaration, "I am coming soon!" That is what Advent celebrates. Advent commemorates Jesus' first coming, His birth, and looks forward to Jesus's second coming – culminating in His coronation as Christ the king!

BODY:

Let us look at some context for the Church of Laodicea. They were a wealthy city known for their quality wool with which they made clothes and carpets. Because of their wealth they became a banking center. To give you an idea of the extent of their wealth, I remind you about the earthquakes that had destroyed neighboring cities. Those cities sought and were given aid by Rome to rebuild, but Laodicea declined any aid, relying solely on their own resources.

One natural resource they didn't have was water. They built an aqueduct from a city several miles away to pipe in their water supply. When it arrived, it was tepid, lukewarm, and not very appealing to drink. It was often mixed with hot or cold wine.

Interestingly enough, Laodicea was known for something else. They had a medical school there that focused (excuse the play on words) on the eyes. They produced and sold an eye salve to treat common eye ailments.

It seems that the Church of Laodicea had assimilated itself into the surrounding culture. The people, who were supposed to be the body of Christ, embraced the ways and wiles of their secular society. They measured themselves by the same standards as the pagans around them. They relied on themselves and their wealth.

Jesus said their assessment was totally inaccurate, **"But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked."** Immediately, a children's fairytale came to my mind. I thought maybe that connection was an original idea – but I was not the first to think of it.

The Emperor's New Clothes by Hans Christian Andersen:

Many, many years ago there was an emperor who was so terribly fond of beautiful new clothes that he spent all his money on his attire. He did not care about his soldiers, or attending the theatre, or even going for a drive in the park, unless it was to show off his new clothes. He had an outfit for every hour of the day. And just as we say, "The

king is in his council chamber," his subjects used to say, "The emperor is in his clothes closet."

In the large town where the emperor's palace was, life was gay and happy; and every day new visitors arrived. One day two swindlers came. They told everybody that they were weavers and that they could weave the most marvelous cloth. Not only were the colors and the patterns of their material extraordinarily beautiful, but the cloth had the strange quality of being invisible to anyone who was unfit for his office or unforgivably stupid.

"This is truly marvelous," thought the emperor. "Now if I had robes cut from that material, I should know which of my councilors was unfit for his office, and I would be able to pick out my clever subjects myself. They must weave some material for me!" And he gave the swindlers a lot of money so they could start working at once.

They set up a loom and acted as if they were weaving, but the loom was empty. The fine silk and gold threads they demanded from the emperor they never used, but hid them in their own knapsacks. Late into the night they would sit before their empty loom, pretending to weave.

For the sake of time and because you are likely familiar with the story, I will significantly shorten it. None of the Emperor's trusted advisors nor any

of his subjects could see the clothes being made; but, no one would admit it, not even the king himself. They all feared being considered ignorant or unworthy.

The night before the planned parade, the two swindlers didn't sleep at all. They had sixteen candles lighting up the room where they worked. Everyone could see how busy they were, getting the emperor's new clothes finished. They pretended to take cloth from the loom; they cut the air with their big scissors, and sewed with needles without thread. At last they announced: "The emperor's new clothes are ready!"

The next morning was the time of the big reveal. The swindlers helped the Emperor put on the invisible clothes. He stood in front of the mirror admiring the clothes he couldn't see. "Oh, how they suit you! A perfect fit!" everyone exclaimed.

The emperor walked in the parade down the main street of the city. And all the people, who had lined the streets or were looking down from the windows, said that the emperor's new clothes were beautiful. "What a magnificent robe! And the train! How well the emperor's clothes suit him!" Never before had the emperor's clothes been such a success.

But there was one little boy. "The Emperor doesn't have anything on! He is naked." cried the child. "Listen to the innocent one," said the proud father. And the people whispered among each other and repeated what the child had said. "He doesn't have anything on. There's a little child who says that he has nothing on." "He has nothing on!" shouted all the people at last.

The emperor shivered, for he was certain that they were right; but he thought, "I must bear it until the procession is over." And he walked on even more proudly.

1) This story may be adapted from Spanish folklore.

2) What are the modern applications?

Like their water supply, the church of Laodicea was lukewarm. They were not zealous for the Lord. Why would Jesus say it would be better for them to be cold than lukewarm? Because someone that is cold is actually easier to convince they need Jesus. The lukewarm believe they already have enough Jesus for their purposes. It is like getting an old-fashioned vaccination. You get just enough of the disease not to be infected by the real thing.

Do you remember the two Emmaus disciples who invited Jesus into their home? Jesus broke the

bread and they recognized Him. In their excited discussion immediately afterward, Luke 24:32 (NIV84)³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

By contrast we have Matthew 24:12–14 (ESV) Jesus says,¹² **"And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.**¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

With no fuel, the fire grows cold. And, so it is with our spiritual life. Lukewarm is unworthy of the Lord Jesus – unpalatable. Most English translations say Jesus will spit out the lukewarm, while the King James is a little more vehement: "I will spue thee out of my mouth."

Jesus counsels them, "Let me tell you what is truly valuable. Buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich. This world cannot give you what I can give you. Do not settle for counterfeit treasure."

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus speaks about real wealth. Matthew 13:44–46 (NIV84)

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

The most valuable thing that we can possess is Christ's righteousness. These are the white clothes He promises. Galatians 3:27 (NIV84) for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. Romans 13:14 (NIV84) Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. When Jesus gives us the salve to put on our eyes, we see ourselves as we truly are. Without Jesus, there is no way to cover our shameful nakedness.

We are wretched, pitiful, poor, and blind until Jesus the light of the world opens our eyes. Remember the man that was born blind. Jesus spit on the ground, mixed the mud with his saliva and put it on the man's eyes. Then He sent the blind man to wash in the Pool of Siloam. It seemed like a strange way to heal – a way that might cause blindness if done by someone else.

The closing verses in this message to the church in Laodicea could be applied to all seven of the churches. **Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.** Never have I heard these messages referred to as love letters, but Jesus is rebuking and disciplining in five of them. Therefore, Jesus is expressing love. In this message, they are told to be earnest or zealous depending on the translation. Only Smyrna and Philadelphia escape the call to repentance.

In previous weeks, I shared with you declining church attendance and church closure statistics. When you look at the culture it is not hard to see we have lost the battle of ideas in the public forum. Too many churches have brought the world inside. Is COVID-19 a rod of correction from the Lord? I do not know, but in my mind, attendance in churches should have increased in response to the pandemic. Instead, they have declined.

This painting of Jesus knocking on a door is world famous. There are many other depictions of this scene done by various artists. While most often, the concept is applied to individual hearts, I believe we wrongly minimize its impact by that limited application. Might Jesus be standing at the door of a church? Our church? Knocking, waiting, calling to us, **"It is me, the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation."**

My friends, Jesus is the cure to the lukewarm malady. Jesus' sheep know His voice and follow their Good Shepherd. Those two Emmaus disciples could not wait to share the good news that Jesus was alive. They had seen Him. They had walked with Him. They opened the door and Jesus came in and shared the bread of life with them. What was true for them is true for the whole church, every church. Without Jesus, we cannot be on fire for God.

In each of these seven messages to the churches of Asia, Jesus exhorts them to overcome. Here, He specifies, overcome just as I overcame. That is a tall bill of order. Dr. H. Bonar gives us some context as he describes this life as a battle:

"Common life in this world is a warfare. It is inner warfare, private, solitary, with no eye upon the warrior. It is outer warfare. The enemies are legion. It is daily warfare; not one great battle, but a multitude of battles. The enemy wearies not, ceases not, nor must we. It is warfare not fought with human arms. It is warfare in which we are sharers with Christ."

1 John 3:16 (NIV84) This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

Before today's sermon, we sang Lift High the Cross. I deliberately chose this as a preparatory hymn for this message, Just as I Overcame. The cross is called the triumphant sign. Twice, Jesus is referred to as the Crucified. In another verse, O Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree.

Jesus laid down His life for the love of the Father. Jesus calls His disciples to take up our cross and follow Him. *Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim, Till all the world adore his sacred name.*

Will you overcome?

CONCLUSION:

John Wesley said in "Thoughts Upon Methodism"

"1. I am **not** afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.

2. What was their fundamental doctrine? That the Bible is the whole and sole rule both of Christian faith and practice. Hence they learned, (1.) That religion is an inward principle; that it is no other than the mind that was in Christ; or, in other

words, the renewal of the soul after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness. (2.) That this can never be wrought in us, but by the power of the Holy Ghost. (3.) That we receive this, and every other blessing, merely for the sake of Christ: And, (4.) That whosoever hath the mind that was in Christ, the same is our brother, and sister, and mother.”

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.