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THE OVERCOMER AT THE END-TIME

by T. Austin-Sparks

Reading: Revelation 12.

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."

As to these words in the eleventh verse, we remind ourselves again, that they are part of an utterance by a loud voice in heaven at a time when the heavenly hosts were watching a colossal conflict which was taking place in the lower heavens, a conflict between celestial and diabolical forces; Michael and his angels on one side, Satan and his angels on the other. The occasion of the conflict was an object, a corporate object here spoken of as a man-child, or a son; which son, or man-child, having been raptured to the throne, precipitates this terrific battle and its issue with Satan and his angels being cast out of the heavens - "no more place being found" for them there - down to the earth. Then a loud voice is heard in heaven (a "great voice" the revised version has it) saying: "Now is come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down who accused them before our God day and night. And they [our brethren] overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony, and they loved not their life even unto death. Therefore, rejoice O heavens and ye that dwell in them. Woe for the earth and for the sea because the devil is gone down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time." There is very much of detail in that with which we shall not stay for the moment, but note the occasion of that utterance as well as the substance of it, for that, and all that is connected therewith, is what is before us at this time.

Now it will be necessary for us to just look at the book itself for a moment or two and make a very hurried survey.

We note that chapter 11 brings us to the time of the end. The seventh trumpet closes that period; that is the completing of things, of that phase or part of the dispensation. Chapter 12 deals with the end time, but it is very important for us to see that chapters 12 to 14 are a parenthesis. That is, they are not in the direct line of the narrative; they are - as the word parenthesis means - a section or clause inserted for explanation or confirmation of what has been said. The narrative is complete in itself but something is introduced in a parenthetical way to elucidate and explain certain things in it, and so chapters 12 to 14 inclusive are a parenthesis, an explanation of what has already been said. Recognizing that, if we are able thus to see, chapter 12 corresponds with chapters 2 and 3, and the word which is the key, or the link, between chapter 12 and chapters 2 and 3, is the word "overcome". We know how all those messages in chapters 2 and 3 come to the Overcomer, that is, they are concluded with "to him that overcometh". The link between that section and chapter 12 is just that word: "And they overcame", the overcomer is the key and the link. In chapter 12 the man-child, the son, is the group of overcomers at the time of the end. I suppose I ought to stay here to say that that may not be agreed to by some. I know quite well that it is so, and if I say it with emphasis please do not think that I want to impose upon you my own conviction or that I am trying to make you accept that interpretation. My emphasis is the strength of my own conviction, that is all. You are still to go to the Lord about this thing and get from Him His witness. To me this is a matter of unparalleled importance, and I think we may see some of the importance of this thing as we go on. Now that also is by way of parenthesis. Let me repeat as to what I feel myself, that the man-child in chapter 12 is the group of overcomers at the time of the end. I note two things; that this man-child is referred to as "they". Verse 5, "she was delivered of a son, a man-child", verse 11, "and they overcame him..." That is not a single entity, that is a corporate body. It is true the word 'son' (v. 5, R.V.) is the Greek word *huios*, frequently used of Christ; but the combination in this chapter of *teknon* (twice), not so used, and *huios* (once), only strengthens if it does not prove our point, i.e., the "Overcomer" - "Man-child" - is Christ and a company out of the church caught up to the Throne before the tribulation (Rev. 3:10,21). Some of you may not, of course, see the value or force of that; others will, because of a large school of interpretation that thought this man-child was the Lord Jesus and that all this took place when He was born. But the context needs a good deal of wrestling with to conclude that that is so.* (see Appendix)

Now then, if our interpretation is correct, we are able to open out into a larger realm and see the great thing which is in view here. What is the thing that occupies the central and supreme place in this revelation? It is a company associated with Christ in His throne as having overcome the great dragon, the old serpent, the devil, Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, the accuser of the brethren. That is what is here - a company in that throne-position and union with the Lord Jesus, the first and inclusive Overcomer. Now, beloved, that ranges the whole history of this earth or this world. It represents God's primary and ultimate thought concerning man in union with His Son, Jesus Christ. It represents God's original thought concerning His Son, and then His thought concerning those whom He chose in Christ before the world was; and

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His thought concerning His Son and those whom He chose in Him from eternity was that they should reign and govern and administer this universe for and with God; that they should be linked with the throne of God in universal administration and government. That thought, that truth runs all the way through the Word of God. On that He set His heart. Against that this other one, presented in these various titles representing the varied forms of his activities and character, set himself in one great age-long challenge and resistance. But God had had His thought, His intention, His purpose for us in Christ in relation to His throne, and the overcomers are that. This company embodies the original intention of God, and are God's sphere and instrument of His success. They declare the success of God concerning His original thought, therefore "Rejoice O ye heavens and ye that dwell therein", for God has succeeded in spite of everything. You might think that speaking like that represents some great difficulty for God - not at all. If God had dealt with this whole thing in naked infinity, it would have been like a snap of the fingers to wipe it all out. But it is by Man that He has done it: by Man for man, and that represents a terrific conflict. Now you see what is in view. The achievement of God, the success of God in Christ, in those who are in Christ and that represented by a company, a specific company called "Overcomers".

Over against that, then, everything else is set and to that everything else is related. All that is in the Book of the Revelation is connected with that. Chapter 12 is the key to the whole book. Everything thus far moves up to chapter 12 and everything else moves from chapter 12. Perhaps one ought to keep the connection between 12, 13 and 14 because they are so intimately bound up with one another, but this part of chapter 12 is the pivotal point upon which everything revolves. As you go back and traverse this book you begin with Ephesus and see the first love left. "I have this against thee, thou hast left thy first love." You seek for an explanation of leaving the first love and you find the explanation is not to be found simply in the waning of an enthusiasm, but in the attempted quenching by the deluges of spiritual antagonism, the object being to close down the fire of love for God in the heart. You know that true love for the Lord does not just wane of itself, you do not just give it up and let it go; you know it is by reason of great pressure, great adversity, conflict, discouragement, wearing-out tactics as well as by subtle insinuations and subterfuges and such like things; the snare of the world, deceitfulness of sin, and the awful opposition of the enemy - why? This is not merely a natural, temperamental thing. It is against that ultimate object of the Lord, the throne. You have Balaam's subterfuge leading to spiritual fornication; and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, and that woman Jezebel, the false prophetess, and the name to live, but yet dead; mere profession, the false claims of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan; then the lukewarmness of Laodicea.

All these things represent different ways and means by which the enemy has sought to get in to destroy the testimony. You see, the lampstand is the testimony. At that time and in that place it was God's testimony in the earth, and all these things are working against the testimony to destroy it, to quench it, to blot it out, and God is appealing for a maintenance of His testimony, and all these things are against the issue of that testimony as maintained, which is in the throne. And so you find they overcame because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony. They have kept the testimony of Jesus, these Overcomers. Do you see the link between these things? And all else you find, whether it be in the nature of the persecutions through which the saints have passed, which are mentioned here; or the subterfuges, the snares, the deceptions of the serpent; or the many trials, adversities, sufferings of the Lord's children, so many that we could never catalogue them; all that we pass through as we seek to go on with the Lord and be faithful, it is all directed against this ultimate issue, the coming of this company of Overcomers to the throne.

It is the explanation of what we are passing through now; the explanation of all trial on the one side, from the adversary's side; sufferings, persecutions, pain, anguish, to quench the testimony with a view to thwarting that rapture to the throne. On the Divine side we are not protected against it because the Lord wants us to overcome, and you will never overcome unless there is something to overcome. There are the two sides, the Divine, sovereign side and the diabolical side to thwart this. All is related to that, beloved, all is leading up to this final fury of the erect dragon waiting to swallow up this corporate company who are to bring about the issue of the ages.

Does it not strike you as a thing of immense moment, that a company (we do not know how many, small or great but comparatively small we judge, a company nevertheless of the Lord's children) are going to be the Lord's occasion for the precipitating of the crisis of the ages; that is, bringing about that time and that condition when and where there is no more place for Satan and his angels in the heavens. I think it is a tremendous thing to say that: "there was found no more place..." as though the heavens said: 'There is no more room for you here any more.'

Now we do not want to get hilarious about it, it is too solemn - but that is the issue: "no more place in the heavens"; and that is arrived at by this company being raptured to the throne in the face of the fury of the dragon. They are God's instruments for winding up the old regime which held for thousands of years contrary to God's original thought. Supposing

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this is that time, supposing that we have entered into this last phase! Only to suppose it is to explain a great deal. But, beloved, the intention of the Lord in these days is to show us how to overcome. We have got to know how to overcome. We have got to come to see the means of overcoming, the ground of overcoming, and that is what is in view as we pursue this matter in these pages, that we shall be put in the way of understanding what overcoming is, and how to overcome.

So we see that with the rapture to the throne of this man-child company a great change takes place in the heavens as well as on the earth. With this rapture the first thing that is seen is war in heaven. The next, the issue of that war: "no more place" in heaven for these forces of evil. Therefore, they are cast down out of the heavens, and then a great voice in heaven is heard at the moment of that casting down, saying: "Now is come..." (it almost seems to say 'now at last, now at length, now', the great eternal now! This hierarchy which has encircled the earth as "prince of the power of the air", "the world-rulers of this darkness, the principalities and powers, the hosts of wickedness in the heavens", now at length they are cast down, and now is come) "the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ."

I pause to note the distinguishing words - "Now is come the salvation of our God". The salvation of our God is come now. Sit down with that in this connection for a little while and see where that will lead you. "Now is come the kingdom of our God"; the kingdom of our God is come now. "Now is come the power of our God". The power of our God is come now. Here is Divine energy, Divine force, Divine might, here it is Now. But then note. "And the authority of his Christ". The exousia of His Christ; the jurisdiction of the Lord Jesus has come now. How much hangs upon this 'now'! You weigh these sentences one by one and you see that with this rapture of the man-child there synchronizes this arriving at the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the jurisdiction of His Christ. A great point to reach, that! To fathom all that, we need much more time than at present; we will leave it there for the moment. There is a new phase of things on the earth as well as a new phase of things in the heavens. Before passing to that, note how this thing is put. There is a great voice in heaven, and that great voice says: "Our God... our brethren". There is a company in heaven looking on, who call this overcomer group "our brethren" and speak of God here as "our God". Some already there have been interested in this final overcomer conflict. There have been overcomers in every age and they have overcome and they are interested in this thing to its end, and they say "our God" and "our brethren" - "who accuseth our brethren"; and notice, when you go on, "Satan is gone down", is gone down - that is someone speaking from above, not underneath, saying 'Satan is come down'. Those there are saying: 'he has gone down', they are above.* A new phase then begins on the earth, and then you go on to the other two chapters, 13 and 14.

* Katabaino is not always used for 'to go down', but sometimes 'to come down' or simply 'to descend': but the best authorities translate it in the former sense here, i.e., 'has gone down', and that is more than justified by the context, the voice is speaking in heaven and is noting that the "Accuser" has been "cast" down (verse 9).

You have on the one side, antichrist, and on the other side linked with that, the tribulation of those who have not been raptured, or the tribulation on the earth into which those enter who have not been raptured, even the Lord's people. The discrimination in the seven letters is between those who overcome and those who do not overcome. (I cannot accept that the seven letters addressed to the seven Churches were addressed to those who were not the Lord's people, neither to just a few inside a merely professing Church). I believe the messages were addressed to those who were the Lord's people in a state of spiritual apostasy or weakness, out of the way, in a state of declension, and there is a division between the Lord's people who are in a state of declension and those who overcome. I think it is J. N. Darby who says concerning the Philadelphian saints: 'but then there were very blessed encouragements given to them. There was an hour of great temptation coming upon the whole world to try those who dwell thereon; some might be victorious in the trial, but those who kept the word of His patience would be kept from the trial. On the whole world it would come, but where were they? They had gone out of it.' That is the position here, and the great tribulation overtakes non-overcoming believers. There will be those who were kept out of the great tribulation, but there will be those who "come up out of", who were kept there and who came out of the tribulation in the midst of which they have washed their robes which had become spotted by the world.

We see what is in God's eye, in His mind. We see that the end-time is going to have this central thing, the securing of this overcomer group, this overcomer company. In the securing of that company through spiritual travail, and the rapture of that company, God is going to secure His original purpose, His pre-eminent thought. Changes in heaven and in earth will be related to that. That company will be raptured on a threefold basis. "They overcame because of the blood of the Lamb." That is one of the things we have got to consider carefully, more fully; "because of the blood of the Lamb". That is foundational. "And because of the word of their testimony." The blood of the Lamb was that which was provided for them,

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apart from them, the word of their testimony is their part. We have got to know, first of all, God's basis of victory, and then our side of the victory, what the word of testimony is by which we overcome. And then, as to the cost, the third factor: "and they loved not their lives [their souls] unto the death."

That is the position as I believe we have it, perhaps only at its beginnings, just now. Maybe we are coming into it. Some of us feel sometimes we could not stand very much more, the spiritual conflict and pressure is so great. Beloved, do you see the tremendous issues bound up with this conflict, do you see the need for us to know what the means of victory and the ground of victory are? Therefore it is necessary that we gather together in days like these. These are times when we need to be in solemn convocation. The ends of the ages are coming upon us and there is a very, very big explanation to the pressure and the suffering, the spiritual intensity through which we are passing now. Some of you are feeling that pressing in, that intense spiritual pressure: it is becoming almost unbearable. There is an explanation, a big explanation, the biggest explanation to anything that ever existed. God is about to accomplish His end and change the aspect of the universe. Oh, wonderful thing! all that, beloved, has its operation in saints. We are in that. That is taking place in us. Perhaps we might sometimes think it might be very much easier if we saw an erect dragon, if these figurative things were literal, we would know where we were and what we had got to do. But it is this spiritual pressure, this thing that comes to us, not in the bare, naked, devilish antagonism of the enemy, but that which is coming in very often along what we call ordinary, everyday things, the domestic things, the business things; yes, all that, coming in that way, it is all the conflict, it is there. But again, we see there is a marvellous explanation to it, and we need grace, much grace, we need a mighty instrengthening of the Lord.

Oh, unto this, doctrine is not enough, teaching will not do, light merely as a matter of light, beloved, is not always power. No; power is the capacity for going through, and light does not take you through; light may help you to see your way, but you want energy as well as light, and we need in these days the mighty instrengthening of God to get through.

This message will be very pertinent to the situation in which many of God's people are found at this time. The spiritual pressure is growingly intense. The trial of faith is increasingly 'fiery'. The explanation of God's ways is beyond human ability. There is a cry and a sob in many a devoted heart - 'Why, Oh, why,' The word is for such. Those who know little of this costly way to the Throne will not feel its appeal. Those who are only interested in theoretical prophetic interpretations will sabotage the point by rejoinders such as 'Selective' - (or 'Partial Rapture'), of course.

We have no concern to systematize the truth into such theories or 'teachings'. What is patent to all honest and unprejudiced minds is - as many accredited and highly-respected Bible teachers have taught - that the New Testament does discriminate between Christians, and the force of its general and particular teaching is that there is a 'crown' which can be missed, and a 'calling' which can be forfeited.

There are many letting go the greater for the lesser. The Lord does not bring judgment on them now, but it will be a terrible thing to realise in "the day" that they let go "the on-high calling".

APPENDIX

The "Man-child" of Revelation 12

Inasmuch as many have sought to interpret this Scripture as historical in the past, that is, as having been fulfilled before John wrote at Patmos, and as applying to the birth of Christ, Israel being the woman, it will be well if certain very clear points are afresh taken into consideration and honestly faced.

1. The pangs of travail (verse 2).

Where were the birth-pains in Israel when Christ was born?

Israel has never yet travailed unto the birth of Christ.

Isaiah 66:8-24 shows Christ's birth out of the nation without travail. That Scripture does not refer to Revelation 12.

2. "Clothed with the sun" (verse 1).

The Lord Jesus is Himself the sun, "light of the world", and it is the Church which has been invested with that Light; the revelation of Jesus Christ, the whole Truth of God. The Jewish nation has never stood so robed.

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3. "The moon under her feet" (verse 1).

The moon is an object which has no light of its own, but borrows its light from the sun.

This is exactly what the whole Jewish system of Law and Types did. The Law, the Prophets, the Types, all reflected the Christ, and shone with borrowed light. These are all fulfilled in Christ and realised in the Church, and all are under the feet of - in a subject relation to - the Church. This cannot apply to the Jewish nation.

4. "On her head a crown of twelve stars" (verse 1).

Stars are heavenly living bodies in a ruling capacity. Twelve is the number of governmental power or order.

The twelve Apostles may be seen to fulfil this part of the symbolism. They come in several times in the "Revelation" as in a place of special honour. What is here, we believe, is that, in the mind of God, the Church is seen in the position of heavenly authority according to Luke 10:19; Ephesians, etc. But, while this is God's thought concerning the whole Church as in "Ephesians", only a company out of her actually and experimentally come to know the throne-union in the first instance. Undoubtedly, this is the position today, as it has always been, and this is the occasion for the great amount of exhortation and admonition in the New Testament. And this also is the place and condition which gives rise to the many provisional "ifs" of the New Testament.

5. "As soon as it was born", or "When she was delivered" (verse 4; R.V.).

There is no gap here. Christ was not caught up to the throne when He was born, there was a considerable interval.

6. "A great red dragon"

"Ten horns" (not crowned).

"Seven heads" (crowned) (verse 3).

No such power existed when Christ was born. John was writing nearly a hundred years later than the birth of Christ, and in the seventeenth chapter of this book he shows that only five of these powers had been overthrown, and one was in existence; the seventh was yet to be (17:10). The ten horns as ten kings obtain power at the same time as the Beast (17:12 ; cf. Daniel 7:20).

All these come into view when the Gentile Dominion is at its close.

The Beast and the False Prophet (Political and Religious) are the two aspects of the Dragon which persecute the true Church at the end, and the very removal of the "man-child" is a main cause for this assault and of the commencement of the tribulation.

7. "War in heaven", "The dragon cast down"

("The old serpent, the devil, Satan, the deceiver"), "No more place in heaven".

This did not take place either at the birth or the ascension of Christ.

"Ephesians" still sees conflict in the heavenlies (6:12).

Satan is still "the prince of the power of the air".

True, Christ is far above all principality and power, etc., and we are seated in Him there, but the clearing of the lower heavens with the result that the Church administers and governs the world therefrom is something yet to be, and the "manchild" is the fulfilment of Revelation 3:21,22, unto this end.

We have not incorporated these notes into the body of the message because it is our aim not to allow the messages to be of a controversial character, but always straightforward spiritual teaching. The notes are added that it might be seen that we are not saying things without very good ground in the Word, and careful meditation and study therein.

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