

Yes We Can (Overcome Sin)

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick
2009-02-07

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| | |
|-------------|----|
| No We Can't | 2 |
| Yes We Can | 3 |
| Matthew | 3 |
| Mark | 5 |
| Luke | 6 |
| Paul | 7 |
| James | 8 |
| Peter | 10 |
| Jude | 11 |
| John | 12 |
| Conclusion | 13 |
| Added Note | 14 |

Presenter: Larry Kirkpatrick
Location: Mentone Seventh-day Adventist Church, CA, USA
Delivery: 2009-02-08 01:04Z
Publication: GreatControversy.org 2009-02-08 01:04Z
Type: Sermon

CITE THIS ARTICLE AS: Larry Kirkpatrick, "Yes We Can (Overcome)." ONLINE AT:
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A phrase, “Yes we can,” was popularized during the recent United States presidential campaign. The candidate who won the presidency insisted that both America and the world can change for the better. Of course, so did the candidate who lost. But today’s message has nothing particularly to do with the election. What it *is* about, is God’s promises for change.

We need a word from on high, and today there is one. We need hope from above, and there is some. People not only like a positive message, they need it. We seem trapped in a perpetual fog of gloom. We become negative. After we’ve been around awhile, our aspirations and dreams are tempered by reality. The idealism of younger years gives way to cynicism. The world, we learn, is not as we thought it was; it is hard. Nothing that is meaningful comes easy.

No We Can’t

When it comes to the spiritual, people want the benefits of truth and the imagined benefits of sin all at the same time. Satan understands this; he encourages us in this thought. If he can’t keep us out of church, he will at least work to keep us in error. He prompts us to think that sin cannot be overcome in our lives.

There is a book just off the press. Our goal here is not to assail the author, a man I take to be sincere and well-meaning. I do not doubt that he wrote his book in order to help others. But he has been around awhile and understands that he must temper what he wants to say.

One section of his book particularly addresses the question of sin. In the space of seven pages previous, he uses the words for sin some 30 times. Much of what he says is true.

Nevertheless, on the top of page 35, the language shifts. He comes to his point:

The point is not that we never overcome some bad habit through heroic moral effort from time to time, but that we never come to the place where we break all our bad habits (p. 35).

The author has put the phrase “bad habit” where he means “sin.” Neither before nor after this in the book are “bad habits” mentioned. What he is trying to tell the reader is that

The point is not that we never overcome some sin through heroic moral effort from time to time, but that we never come to the place where we overcome all our sins.

He knows that to say this directly would engender resistance. So, for our own good, he says it subtly. Don’t misunderstand. I do not doubt his sincerity. And it is true that sin is a bad habit. And yet, it is much more; it is rebellion. The author would agree with this. But reading his book seems to suggest that he thinks that we will be healthier Christians if we realize that we cannot overcome completely.

Yes We Can

That doesn’t sound like any kind of good news, though, does it? We can’t overcome. But today there is a word from on high; there is a word from God. Through the power of Christ, we can overcome.

Yes we can!

Our object over the next several minutes is the following. We shall let God speak. We will let each one of the eight New Testament writers tell us, Yes we can overcome.

Matthew

And when the tempter came to Him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But He answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God (Matthew 4:3, 4).

We begin in the wilderness. Satan comes to Jesus. He cannot force Jesus to sin. He must entice Him to. But it is the same with us. Recall these words from *The Great controversy*, p. 520:

No man without his own consent can be overcome by Satan. The tempter has no power to control the will or to force the soul to sin. He may distress, but he cannot contaminate. He can cause agony, but not defilement.

Satan was trying to get Jesus to let go His hold on His Father and to save Himself. Jesus was God, He did have right to divine power. But “that power He had laid down” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 336). As God still, Jesus was “not in the possession of almighty power” (*Ibid.*).

(Notice that this is *not the same* as possessing almighty power while voluntarily refusing to use it; a crucial part of Jesus’ mission was to demonstrate the experience of faith that we, who literally do not possess almighty power must live. See also John 5:19, 30; 17:5; Philippians 2:6-8.)

Jesus was in the wilderness in communion with His Father. “The Lord Jesus came to our world, not to reveal what a God could do, but what a man could do, through faith in God’s power to help in every emergency” (Ellen G. White, Manuscript 1, 1892). How were Jesus’ mighty works wrought? He said, “the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works” (John 14:10). How are we to overcome? The same way.

Satan wanted Jesus to trust in Himself. The answer of Jesus was that believers are not to trust in themselves. They are to live but to live by the promises of God. Every command in Scripture is a promise. Everything that God asks you to do, is a promise of His help to do it.

Mary understood this. At the marriage feast in Cana, she told the servants, “Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it” (John 2:5). This should be our simple attitude toward Jesus. Whatever He says to you, do it.

Yes we can overcome.

Mark

And He said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come (Mark 4:26-29).

Jesus is describing the kingdom of God. He says that it is like a garden. The farmer prepares the soil, plants his seeds, waters and weeds. Day after day he rises and toils. He does not know exactly how everything works, but he is persistent.

If he follows the basic principles of gardening, the plant grows up to maturity. When the ripe wheat appears is he surprised? Not at all. He may not understand every detail of why these methods work, but he knows enough to raise the wheat. What then? Very simple. He harvests the wheat. He reaps the result of his labors.

Today we may know little about farming, but another illustration is similar. We do not know exactly why electricity works as it does, but we know enough. If a home is wired correctly and there is a power source, you can walk into a room, flip the light switch, and the light will come on. You can sit down and read by that light—reap the harvest.

To live as a Christian does not require a graduate degree. It does not require even that you can read. All that is needed, at the bottom line, is that you can believe. If you know how to ask God for help, then all you need do is embrace the help He gives.

God is looking for a harvest in your life. He knows that if you pray to Him, read your Bible, trust in His promises and act upon them, that you will become ripe wheat, 100% natural. He is not gardening to no purpose. He is looking forward to the harvest. He anticipates victory in

your life. That is why Jeremiah 29:11 is so encouraging. “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (ESV).

Yes we can overcome.

Luke

If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:9-12).

Luke wrote both his gospel and the book of Acts. This Acts chapter four incident begins one chapter earlier. Peter and John go up to the temple. On the way, they heal a lame man. A crowd gathers. Peter launches into a sermon. The authorities break it up and lock them away for unauthorized preaching. The next day, at their hearing, Peter presents these words.

Watch closely. The man who is healed is described as impotent, then made whole. The word “impotent” here means powerless, unable to take effective action. Notice that the question is, how is he made whole?

The greek word for “made whole” is *sodzo*, and here is the same word, *sesotai*, (in the third person, singular, perfect, passive, indicative form). All that that means, is that in the underlying the biblical language, the statement is that the man has been (completed action) healed, made well, saved, made complete, or whole.

Now see verse 12. “There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Underneath saved, we have, again, as in verse 9, *sodzo* (in the form here of

sothanai, a first aorist, passive infinitive). That is to say, “saved” is seen in its whole aspect. It is like looking at a train and seeing everything from the first to the last connected units. All of what it means to be “saved” is in view.

All of salvation is the work of God. He initiates, He draws. Even our response to Him is empowered by Him. We believe because He makes it possible for us to believe. We have nothing to give to Him that He has not given to us.

To say that we are saved through Christ alone is not to say that we are inactive or non-participatory. But we receive no merit for any conditions fulfilled, for any movements toward God we make; He is the one who has made these movements possible for us.

In any case, the point we want to understand at Acts 4:9-12 is that inspiration uses the same word for making a man whole in a work of healing, as it does when it speaks of a man being “saved.” This is found with *sodzo* all the way through the New Testament.

It is not that the same word does not have two discernibly distinct meanings, but that we are wise to notice how closely intertwined biblically the ideas of being “made whole” and being “saved” are. Salvation is no mere legal status outside of ourselves; God works in us through His Spirit and changes us inwardly.

He will, through His grace, change men and women. He not only claims to make us whole but makes us, actually, whole people. To God, salvation means making whole, nothing less. Every healing where Jesus *sodzoed* someone was an illustration of the power of the everlasting gospel to make men whole.

Paul

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Philippians 4:13).

We have to take all that Paul said in the New Testament into view, and there is much that he wrote. Included in that is Philippians 4:13. Immediately before this, Paul says that he has learned how to be contented. This is a large part of our problem. We have not learned to be contented with God.

We follow superficially, at a distance. We want to be Christians but we don't want to follow Christ too closely. We don't trust Him. He might take away from us some treasured possession.

If you have had small children, you understand this. Your child will pick up a common rock or stick and be urgent about keeping it, not thinking in the moment that there are more valuable and interesting things to treasure. Too often we have our own worldly treasures and desires, worth so much more to us than eternity. But God will give us changed desires and interests.

And that is precisely what some are afraid of. They fear not only that they can but that they will overcome on that point of idolatry. Then a gospel of "we never come to the place where we break all our bad habits" becomes attractive. Let's take God at His word. We can do all things—yes we can—through Christ who strengthens us. That is putting it all on the line. God has put it all on the line.

James

Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He shall lift you up (James 4:8-10).

Here are further promises, now offered by James. He makes clear to us that there are conditions involved in overcoming. We are to draw near to God, to cleanse our filthy hands, to purify our filthy hearts. There is a place for being afflicted, mourning, weeping, for those who are determined to be changed.

If we are not determined, then self-affliction, mourning, and weeping can be set aside. There is no shortage of “power parlors,” little “Christian” boutiques where people can go to feel good about themselves and demonstrate their social respectability. Go and hear the jokes the “minister” tells.

But then, where are you with God? He will refuse to draw near to you. He does not intervene to take away your double-mindedness. That is your business. You must cooperate with Him if you want it removed. His power is available, but you must choose to be single toward God. Humble yourself before Him; mourn, weep, and dwell in the shadow of your guilt for awhile. Tell Him and ask Him, Lord I believe; please help my unbelief! He shall lift you up. Remember, His every command is a promise. When He says, “cleanse your hands, ye sinners,” He means that in His strength, your hands can be cleaned, your guilt removed, your sinning, ended.

As the will of man co-operates with the will of God, it becomes omnipotent. Whatever is to be done at His command may be accomplished in His strength. All His biddings are enablings (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 333).

Yes we can overcome.

Peter

According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Peter 1:3, 4).

Many can identify with Peter. Who among us hasn't, at some time, said something foolish, inserted one or both feet deeply into your mouth? But later in the Bible, Peter has continued to change. He overcomes his impetuosity.

God gave to Peter all things that pertain to life and godliness. And Peter ran with it. He learned to trust in Jesus, to put all his weight on the exceeding great and precious promises. He became a partaker of the divine nature. He escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Think about Peter. Was this was easy for him? Is it easy for you and I? It was the result, not only of years spent walking with Jesus in Judea, but of more years spent walking with the Holy Spirit. Luke 2:52 tells us that as Jesus grew, He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." So did Peter; he grew as a person, intellectually, emotionally, spiritually.

He did not attain to full Christian maturity in a moment, but as time went on, he settled into the truth, both spiritually and intellectually, so that he could not be moved. He grew "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13). God's word, which every man shall live by, His promises, were enough. Escape was possible. The new Peter escaped from the old Peter! On his own? Never. But by the power of the living Christ.

Yes we can overcome.

Jude

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen (Jude 23, 24).

Judas concludes his short epistle with this towering affirmation of what is possible through Jesus. Are we able to keep ourselves from falling? Is there any power in ourselves to overcome Satan and self? No. But unto Him—Jesus—let there be glory and majesty, dominion and power. He is able.

What is it that Jesus is so able to do for us? He is able to keep you from falling. Consider that. Judas has the believer in a standing position with reference to Jesus. He, Jesus, is able to keep you from falling. That is, this promise comes from the perspective of one already standing. This one recognized his need, trusted in Christ, laid hold on His nail-pierced hand, and stood up. Now standing, Judas reminds. Jesus is able to keep you from falling.

Jesus is glad to do this, but He wants to do more. Judas understands that there is an Investigative Judgment at times' end. He sees that Jesus wants to present you faultless before the presence of His glory to the Father.

No bad habits. No sins. Faultless, before the throne of the God of all. But there is more.

To Jesus, says Judas, let there be glory and majesty and dominion and power. When? Both now and ever. Some want to give Jesus glory later but not now. The promise is for now. Let Him have dominion in your life now. Let Him have power in your life now. Let Him have glory in your life now. He is able to keep you from falling.

Yes we can overcome.

John

And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:13, 14).

The last book in the New Testament was authored by John. In vision he sees persons wearing white robes. A dialogue ensues with an angel. Who are they? They are those who came out of great tribulation.

Life in our world looks tougher and tougher. We are in a global economic crisis. But this is not the end. This is just the kindergarten for our generation. More, far more intense things are ahead. But God has to start somewhere.

Look at His goal. He intends to produce a people unlike any other who have ever lived on planet earth; a people who embrace His grace fully and overcome fully. You think this is the hard time? This is but the beginning of sorrows. Every generation must have a beginning of sorrows. Step by step, God leads us to His harvest. That which stands ahead of us is so intense that it is almost beyond description. And so, these promises that, yes, we can overcome become very, very important.

The angel tells John that they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Notice, there is blood here. It is the blood of Jesus. It is the purest blood, the blood of God who came and lived as a man and overcame as a man. It is the life of Jesus, sweated out in the sands of Palestine for 33 years, at last, wrung out of Him on the cross.

This life, this blood, they wash in. They have a part. There is something to do in following Jesus. But it is *following* Jesus, believing on Him, pursuing His pattern, trusting in His

love, embracing His Spirit, accepting that we ourselves are bankrupt and that His merits alone avail to save.

He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). Not slain at random; not slain for a nameless mob. Jesus is a person, and a personal Savior. He died on the cross for your sins personally, specifically. He wants you in the kingdom (Luke 12:32). And so, at the last, Jesus expires. He dies for you. His life is wrung out for you. So that you can look on dumbfounded? Perhaps. But also, so that you will have something pure to wash in. Keep on with the scrubbing.

Yes we can overcome.

Conclusion

And so, what say these samples concerning our mighty Healer? Sin is a problem, yes. Overcoming is no easy matter, true. Self dies hard, yes. But Jesus died hard too. He is your salvation. He died so that you might live. All of His commands are promises. He wants you. Not the old you, not the corrupt caricature you have made of yourself; He would lift you up out of your self-hatred and alienation. He wants to see—and you yourself to see—the true, the new, you. He wants you to know that while the “failure” you dies, the “reconstructed” you lives, because Christ is in you (Galatians 2:20).

And so, my friends—my fellow bankrupted, needy, downtrodden friends—Jesus offers Himself for you and to you. He is more ready to give you what you need than you are to surrender to Him what you do not need. Won't you give Him something today? Something you've been holding back? Won't you trust Him? He appeals to you today. Revelation 3:20, 21 is a challenge and a call to us. If we make it our own, then He will be glorified this day.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne.

Yes we can overcome.

Added Note

Someone will want to know who the author is and who the publisher of the book mentioned near the beginning of this message is. The publisher is Review and Herald, whose editors should know that when they publish such material, there will be consequences. As for the author, brothers and sisters, we need to learn not to trust in men. Preachers and princes alike are fallible, even when they mean well. Read your Bible and your Spirit of Prophecy books, and have great care what else you read.

Biographical Note: Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick is a convert to the Adventist faith. Since 1994 he has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He holds degrees from Southern Adventist University and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. His work has included research assistant for the Ellen G. White Estate, pioneering Adventist internet ministry, involvement in GYC, and presenter at the 50th Anniversary *Questions on Doctrine* Conference. He is author of the books *Real Grace for Real People* and *Cleanse and Close*. For many years his sermons and papers have been published on the internet. Larry and wife Pamela have served churches in Nevada, Utah, and California. The Kirkpatricks presently serve at the [Mentone church](#) near Loma Linda, California.