

Revelation 19:6-10—And I heard as a voice of a great crowd, and as a voice of many waters, and as a voice of strong thunders, saying, Hallelujah, for [the] Lord our God the Almighty has taken to himself kingly power. Let us rejoice and exult, and give him glory; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright [and] pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints. And he says to me, Write, Blessed [are] they who are called to the supper of the marriage of the Lamb. And he says to me, These are the true words of God. And I fell before his feet to do him homage. And he says to me, See [thou do it] not. I am thy fellow-bondman, and [the fellow-bondman] of thy brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Do homage to God. For the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus.

Revelation 21:1-5—And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea exists no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of the heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he shall tabernacle with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, their God. And he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall not exist any more, nor grief, nor cry, nor distress shall exist any more, for the former things have passed away. And he that sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he says [to me], Write, for these words are true and faithful.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, we want to thank Thee for all Thy mercies that Thou hast bestowed upon us in the past few days. We thank Thee especially for the Lord's Table. We praise and thank Thee because Thou hast brought us to Thy very presence. Thou hast done so much for us. Thou hast gained our hearts, and we just bow and worship Thee. Before we depart we are going to hear Thy Word once again. Lord, speak, Thy servants heareth. May Thy name be honored and glorified. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.

What Happens When the Church Fails?

Once our dear brother Sparks asked brother Watchman Nee a question: "What is the most difficult thing in the Bible to be fulfilled?" The answer of our brother Nee was Ephesians 5:27: "That he might present the church to himself glorious, having no spot, or wrinkle, or any of such things; but that it might be holy and blameless." If we know ourselves I think we will agree that this is the most difficult thing in the Bible to be realized. With man it is impossible and that includes every one of us. But with God nothing is impossible; therefore, God has His own

strategy. God knows how to fulfill His Word and make us His tabernacle that He may dwell with us.

But when we read church history, we find that the church has failed again and again throughout the twenty centuries even with all the mercy and grace that God has given to her. But thank God He has a strategy. What is it? The strategy of God is the overcomers. In the book of Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, the letters to the seven churches in Asia Minor end with one word: "He that overcomes let him hear the voice of the Spirit." *He* that overcomes ... So throughout the centuries, in spite of the failure of the church, He has been calling for overcomers. Those letters to the seven churches in Asia were written towards the end of the first century, and the Spirit says, "He that overcomes." The Lord has been calling for overcomers from the first century onward, and thank God, by His grace there have been those who responded to Him.

We find this in Revelation 7 because in the second part of that chapter we read: "After these things I saw, and lo, a great crowd, which no one could number, out of every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palm branches in their hands. And they cry with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb. And all the angels stood around the throne, and the elders, and the four living creatures, and fell before the throne upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour and power, and strength, to our God, to the ages of ages. Amen. And one of the elders answered, saying to me, These who are clothed with white robes, who are they, and whence came they? And I said to him, My Lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they who came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sits upon the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. They shall not hunger any more, neither shall they thirst any more, nor shall the sun at all fall on them, nor any burning heat; because the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them, and shall lead them to fountains of waters of life, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes" (vv. 9-17).

A numberless crowd all robed in white took palm branches in their hands. Who are these people? These are ones who came out of the great tribulation, but this is not the great tribulation of three and a half years. This great tribulation refers to the saints throughout the centuries who have been passing through great trials. That is the reason we find a countless crowd mentioned here. In other words, throughout the centuries, in spite of the failure of the church in general, by the grace of God there were overcomers; there were those who responded to God.

Again we have to explain what an overcomer is. Do not think that the overcomers are extraordinarily good Christians. Overcomers are people like us, yet they understand the blood of the Lamb and they are faithful to the Lord. It is the grace of God that makes them overcomers. Throughout the centuries, in spite of the great tribulation of the enemy attacking them, there have been overcomers throughout the ages.

The Manchild

In chapter 12 we are told about a vision of a woman. This woman represents the church at the end time and she is with child and in birth pains. There is also another vision of a red dragon

which refers to Satan. The red dragon was waiting before that woman, but he was not interested in her; he was interested in the manchild who is in the womb of that woman. Why? Because so far as the church is concerned, she has failed and will do him no harm. May we say that the church is almost in the hands of the enemy. So his interest was not in the woman but in the womb of the woman because he knows that this manchild will be his end.

Thank God, when the manchild is born, he is immediately raptured to the third heaven to the throne of God. Now I know there are many different interpretations, but whatever your interpretation may be, the Scriptures say that when this manchild is born, he is immediately taken up to the third heaven. Of course, we know that after Jesus was born He lived on this earth for thirty-three and half years. So it cannot refer to our Lord Jesus. So who is this manchild?

As we continue to read on in chapter 12:11 it says, "They have overcome him by reason of the blood of the Lamb, and by reason of the word of their testimony, and have not loved their life even unto death."

So this manchild is a collective term; it includes all the overcomers at the coming of the Lord. When this manchild was born, he was taken up to the third heaven. Now we know that the air above the earth is where the headquarters of the enemy of God is; therefore, whoever can go through his headquarters to heaven means they have overcome the enemy. They are the ones who will be the welcoming party to the coming of the Lord.

The Days of Noah

This takes us back to Matthew 24: "But as the days of Noe, so also shall be the coming of the Son of man. For as they were in the days which were before the flood, eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day on which Noe entered into the ark, and they knew not till the flood came and took all away; thus also shall be the coming of the Son of man" (vv. 37-39).

Here the Lord Jesus mentioned His coming and the word *coming* in Greek is "parousia" and those who understand Greek tell us that *parousia* means "the presence." Today the Lord Jesus is not present so far as His body is concerned. Even though in spirit He is present with us, yet in His body He is not present, but one day He will be present. Furthermore, they tell us that presence does not mean one time, one event. It tells us of a period of time and a series of events. So in the Bible we discover that the prophecies before the coming of the Lord have all been fulfilled. There are still prophecies to be fulfilled at the coming of the Lord and afterwards, but all the prophecies before His coming have all been fulfilled. So we are not waiting to see what events will happen. But there is one event that will tell us that His coming is here because He said His coming is like in the days of Noah—people eat and drink, marry and are given to marriage. And we know that suddenly the flood came upon the earth and Noah entered into the ark.

The Days of Lot

And in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 17, we are told that the coming of the Lord is like the days of Lot. When Lot came out of Sodom, fire and sulfur came down from heaven. And in Matthew 24 it says, "Then two shall be in the field, one is taken, and one is left; two [women] grinding at the mill, one is taken and one is left" (v. 40). Luke 17 tells us: "In that night there shall be two [men]

upon one bed; one shall be seized and the other shall be let go" (v. 34). This is not telling us there are six people; there are only two. The earth is round; therefore, when the Lord shall come, some people are sleeping; one is taken and one is left; so do not fear to go to bed. Two women are grinding, and that is morning; one is taken and one is left. Two men are working, and that is daytime because the earth is round. So when the Lord is coming, in some places it is morning, in other places it is noontime, and in other places it is night, but in every place one is taken and one is left.

The Sign of the Lord's Coming

The Lord said, "The sign is His coming like a thief." Now when the thief comes to your house, will he blow a trumpet and say I am coming? Will he come and steal your garbage? Of course not! It seems as if the thief always comes when you are unprepared, and he will take the best of your possessions. So the one who is taken is the best; the one who is left has failed. But we say the number of the church is twelve, for instance, twelve apostles. Where are the other ten? In Matthew 25 there are ten virgins and it says five are wise and five are foolish. When the Lord delayed His coming, they all went to sleep, and the sleep here is death. So the ten refers to the Christians throughout the centuries, from the first century up to now, who have died. But thank God, at the coming of the Lord they will be raised.

The first sign of the coming of the Lord is when suddenly throughout the world some people disappear because they have been taken to the throne. After they are taken to the throne the Bible tells us that immediately Michael and his angels fight Satan and his followers, and they will be thrown upon the earth. In other words, the air is cleared for the Lord and the overcomers to come down from the throne to the air which will not be seen. The coming of the Lord is in the same way as His departure.

In Acts 1 we find that when the Lord ascended from Mount Olives to heaven, the disciples saw Him going up, "And having said these things he was taken up, they beholding [him], and a cloud received him out of their sight" (v. 9). In other words, the disciples saw Him leaving the Mount of Olives going up, up until a cloud took Him. They could not see Him anymore, but He was still going up until He reached the third heaven. How do we know He reached the third heaven? Pentecost is the proof that He had reached the throne; therefore He was anointed as the High Priest and the oil began to fall down which was Pentecost. But He could not be seen.

The Leaving of the Lord was in Two Parts

The ascension of the Lord Jesus was in two parts. The first part was from the Mount of Olives to the cloud—visible. The second part was from the cloud to the throne which was invisible. Even though the disciples could not see Him after the cloud covered Him, yet they were still looking upward. Then in verses 10-11 it says, "And as they were gazing into heaven, as he was going, behold, also two men stood by them in white clothing, who also said, Men of Galilee, why do ye stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, shall thus come in the manner in which ye have beheld him going into heaven."

The Lord's Return Will be in Two Parts

In other words, the way the Lord left earth to go to heaven will be the way He will come back from heaven to earth, and it will be in two parts. When He left, the first part was visible, the second part was invisible. But when He comes back it will be the reverse. The first part will be invisible because He comes like a thief, and a thief always comes as invisible. But the Bible says that in the second part He will come like lightening, and it will flash from the East to the West; everybody will see it. So the one thing that we are waiting for is that suddenly some believers will disappear all over the world, and this is the sign of His coming.

We do not know when the Lord will return, but we are living at the time when He may return at any moment. Suddenly, the best are gone; but are you ready?

How to Overcome

Know the Preciousness of the Blood of Jesus

In Revelation 12 we discover how they overcame. "And they have overcome him by reason of the blood of the Lamb, and by reason of the word of their testimony, and have not loved their life even unto death" (v. 11). Overcomers are not someone special but those who know the preciousness of the blood of the Lord Jesus. Thank God, we all have experienced the cleansing of the blood of the Lord Jesus, but do you know that we need His blood every moment? The closer one lives to the Lord, the more he needs the cleansing of the blood. And we are told that even the tears of our repentance need the blood.

Do we treasure the blood of the Lamb? Do we live daily, hourly, momentarily under the blood of the Lamb? How we need our Lord Jesus! We cannot live even for a second without Him. We need His blood to cleanse us from time to time that we may stand before God and our communing with God will not be interrupted. Whenever the Holy Spirit shows us wherein we have sinned, let us repent and claim the blood of the Lord Jesus. When Satan tries to accuse us, if we try to reason with him, we will fail. The only way to overcome him is to claim the blood of the Lord.

One time Satan accused Martin Luther and showed him a scroll. It was written inside and out with the sins of Martin Luther, and Satan laughed at Martin Luther and said: "These are your sins. How do you dare do the work of Reformation?" And Martin Luther took up a pen and wrote over the scroll, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin," and Satan fled. So it is by the blood of the Lamb, and there is nothing for us to boast of. We are as sinful as anybody else, yet we thank God and trust in His blood.

Because of the Word of Their Testimony

Secondly, "because of the word of their testimony." They have the testimony of Jesus and when they say "Jesus is Lord" there is power. There is a funny story in the book of Acts. When Paul was in Ephesus, there were seven sons of Sceva, the high priest, and they were trying to cast out demons. When they saw Paul cast out demons in the name of the Lord Jesus so successfully, they tried to do the same thing, and they said, "We cast you out in the name of Jesus that Paul

preached.” And the demon said, “Jesus I know, Paul I am acquainted with, but who are you?” And the demons leaped upon them and overpowered them, and they fled away.

So the word of your testimony must be true; you must be what you testify. If you live under the name of the Lord Jesus, when you use His name, it is powerful, and Satan will flee. But if you do not live in Christ your word has no power.

They Loved Not Their Life Even Unto Death

Thirdly, “they loved not their life even unto death.” This life is soul-life. They are willing to lay down their soul-life and let the life of Christ take over. And these are the secrets of victory.

So we see how the Lord Jesus is welcomed by this group of overcomers. And when the air is cleared He and these overcomers will come down from the throne to the air and Satan will be thrown upon this earth. That is the beginning of the three and half years of great tribulation. If Satan is here on this earth, what will it be like? It is the great tribulation.

But let us look at a different side of this. We have mentioned that one is taken and one is left. What will happen to the one left? He will go through the great tribulation, but what is this to Christians? Even if he has to go through the great tribulation it is God giving him a second chance. As he goes through the great tribulation and refuses to bow down to the beast, he can still become an overcomer. So even during the great tribulation overcomers will be coming out. This is in chapter 15: “And I saw as a glass sea, mingled with fire, and those that had gained the victory over the beast, and over its image, and over the number of its name, standing upon the glass sea, having harps of God” (v. 2).

After the three years and a half our Lord Jesus will come down with His overcomers from the air to the Mount of Olives and it will be divided into two which opens the way for the Jews who are left in Jerusalem to flee from persecution. Before His coming down from the air at the end of the great tribulation, all those who have died in Christ and all those who are still living will all be raptured to the air—not to the third heaven. This is in I Thessalonians 4, where we read of the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, and they will all be raptured to the air. The whole church will be gathered in the presence of the Lord.

If you permit me to say that there are a number of hymns that talk about the coming of the Lord and they say, “When the trumpet blows, then the Lord shall come,” but to us Christians it is a little too late. However, that was the belief in former ages.

The Judgment Seat of Christ

While all the Christians are gathered together in the air, the judgment seat of Christ takes place. For instance, Romans 14 and II Corinthians 5 mention about the judgment seat of Christ. We as Christians will not be present at the great white throne Judgment. One day the Lord will set up the great white throne and He will judge all who died; that is a governmental judgment. It decides whether people have eternal life or eternal death. Thank God we will not go before the great white throne because our Lord Jesus has been judged for us on the cross. Nevertheless, that does not mean Christians will not be judged. We will be judged, but it is not a governmental judgment; it is a family judgment.

One day the whole family will be gathered at the bema, the judgment seat of Christ. I think it is difficult for modern people to understand this. I came from a large family and in those days it was the custom for four generations to live under one roof. And once in a while there would be a family time. All the members of the family would be gathered together in a room, and the head of the family would be sitting on a lifted place called *bema*. If you are not one of the family you could not be there.

One day all the members of the family of God will be gathered to the judgment seat of Christ. And during that time, if you have done something that brought glory to the family, you will be praised and even rewarded. If you have done something that brings shame to the family you will be disciplined; but it does not mean you are no longer a child of God.

Today, in this country we despise discipline; but without discipline you will not grow up. Our heavenly Father loves us; therefore He disciplines. So if you refuse to be disciplined by God today and you want to be free, one day at the judgment seat of Christ you will be disciplined, and that is what the Bible says in Matthew 25. In the parable of the ten virgins five of them had extra oil; so they were able to rekindle their torch and welcome the Bridegroom and go into the marriage feast. But when the five foolish virgins rose up to welcome the Bridegroom, they did not have extra oil because they were not disciplined, so the door was closed (vv. 1-13). In the case of the bondman who hid his talent the Lord said to cast him into outer darkness where there shall be weeping and the gnashing of teeth (vv. 14-30). In other words, those who are not disciplined today will be disciplined during the millennial age. Many brothers and sisters want to know where, but I am not going to tell you.

When the judgment seat of Christ was going on in the air, the seven vials of God's wrath are poured down on the earth. After that the Lord will come down from the air with the overcomers to the earth. And before the millennial time begins there will be the judgment of the nations—the goats and the sheep (see Matthew 25:31-46). The sheep nations will go into the millennium as the people, the nations of the world. But the goat nations will be destroyed. And then there will be the millennium.

The Two Marriages

At the end of the Bible there are two mentions of marriage—one in chapter 19 and the other in chapters 21-22. Time-wise they are a thousand years apart. Chapter 19 tells us that this marriage is the beginning of the millennium age, but in chapters 21 and 22 it is after the millennium is over and eternity begins. These two marriages are called the marriage of the Lamb, but the components are different.

The Bride of the Lamb

Who is the bride of the Lamb in chapter 19? "Let us rejoice and exult, and give him glory; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright [and] pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints" (vv. 7-8).

This is the first mention of the marriage of the Lamb. Who is the bride? The bride is those who have been given to be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the

righteousnesses of the saints. Thank God, as we believed in the Lord Jesus we are clothed with Christ. He is our righteousness and because we are clothed with Christ therefore we can stand before God. We cannot stand before God in our dirty clothes. We have to be clothed with Christ as our righteousness so that we can stand before God. But to be the bride we need another garment, and that is the righteousnesses of the saints. Christ is our righteousness, and because He is righteous, therefore we must be righteous. In our daily life we need to be righteous so that we may be clothed with the garment of righteousnesses.

In Psalm 45 we are told about this marriage. "All glorious is the king's daughter within; her clothing is of wrought gold" (v. 13). This is the bride, and her clothing is of wrought gold. Gold in the Scripture represents the nature of God; so in other words, she is clothed with wrought gold. God made Christ our righteousness, but to be the bride she needs to have another garment.

"She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of embroidery; the virgins behind her, her companions, shall be brought in unto thee" (v. 14). Here we see the raiment of embroidery. In other words, the Holy Spirit is working in our lives, and stitch by stitch He will wrought within us the righteousness of Christ that we may be like Him. This is the embroidered garment. This is the raiment that is called the righteousnesses of the saints.

We find this also in the first epistle of John who tells us that because He is righteous we also need to be righteous. We follow His footsteps, and if we do that we will have the wedding garment. This bride is composed of the overcomers of all the ages.

This Marriage Includes the Whole Church

In Revelation, chapters 21 and 22 tell us that this bride is the new Jerusalem and the foundation is the names of the twelve apostles, that is to say it includes the church. The whole church will be there; but the gates have the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. In other words, this bride is composed of all the works of God throughout the ages both in the Old Testament and New Testament time. Nothing of the Lord will be lost. Everything that God has done will be there. So this is the gathering up of all the works of God with mankind throughout the ages, and this new Jerusalem will be the tabernacle of God with men.

So this is the glorious plan of God.

Let us pray:

Dear Lord, we do want to thank Thee for all Thy goodness to us. Who are we that Thou hast done so much for us? We do confess how often we have misunderstood Thee. We rebelled against Thee and yet Thou hast loved us to the uttermost. It is all Thy doing and we are here to worship Thee. May Thy name be honored and highly exalted. As we return to our different places make us vessels and instruments in Thy hand that the testimony of Jesus may be uplifted, that we may be those who in a sense hasten Thy return. Oh dear Lord, come quickly. Our hearts are before Thee. We ask in Thy name. Amen.