

Living as an Overcomer – Tony Evans

Exhibiting Steady Faithfulness - Chapter 3

1. Read Revelation 2:8-11. Jesus is speaking to the Church of Smyrna. Jesus identifies Himself in verse 8 as *“the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.”* In the video, Tony Evans says that the *“First and the Last”* signifies that “what they were facing, He is in control of.”
2. First and the Last also means that He is eternal, He has no beginning and no end. He is the ultimate overcomer. Through His resurrection, He overcame death.
3. Evans, in his book, points out the division in the world of politics today. There is the same division in the world of Christianity. God wants truly committed Christians and these will become the true overcomers. He does not want the “undecided” Christian. Evans defines “undecided” Christians as those that claim to be Christian when it benefits them. Read James 1:6-8.
4. Jesus tells the Church of Smyrna about remaining steadfast in faith. Regardless of the current situations in their lives, Jesus encourages them and us to be faithful. He doesn’t want Christians to be tossed around by whatever is happening in the world. He wants them to know that He is in control.
5. We have read about what it was like to be under Roman oppression. The Roman soldiers were notoriously vicious. Consider the beatings that Jesus received or the Roman candle shown in the movie, “Paul, the Apostle”. Their treatment of anyone that did not submit would have been horrible. Jesus endured the horrible treatment of the Roman soldiers, the beatings, the crucifixion.
6. When I read verse 9, I think of the hymn, “Give thanks with a Grateful Heart”. The chorus said, “let the poor say ‘I am rich’, because of what the Lord has done for us.” It all comes down to what you value in life. The world measures the rich based on things and money and Jesus did not.
7. We have learned that the Romans viewed the Caesars as gods. The faithfulness to Christ of the Christians in the Church of Smyrna would have brought persecution on themselves and Jesus says even to the point of death.

By failing to follow the Caesars as gods, the Smyrnan Christians “were, in short, an enemy of the State and placed on a watch list. Their property was confiscated and they couldn’t access the funds in their bank accounts. Jesus reveals this when He mentions they are rich, meaning spiritually, yet live in poverty.” (Evans)

8. When we studied Acts, we learned about the Jews that followed Paul around and harassed him. They were faithful to the Jewish religion and not to God. Jesus called these type of people, “*a brood of vipers*”. Here in Revelation 2, Jesus says that they make up “*a synagogue of Satan.*”

“That you may be tested: If this attack came from the devil, then why couldn’t these Christians in Smyrna just rebuke Satan, and stop the attack? Because God had a purpose in their suffering, and so He allowed it. God uses suffering to purify (1 Peter 1:6-7), to make us like Jesus (Romans 8:17), and to make us truly witnesses of Him. In all ages, the blood of the martyrs has been seed for the church.” (Guzik)

9. Jesus is in control of everything that happens on earth, even the difficult things. At times we go through trials or difficult times in order to test us or help grow us as Christians. Consider what Jesus endured for us.

“If you feel like you can’t keep up with emotional pressures, know that Jesus knows your pain. If you’re having trouble paying your bills, know that Jesus knows your stress. If you’re crying, know that He not only knows you’re crying but knows how that feels. If your world has been shaken, know that Jesus is aware of that, too, not only because He’s an omniscient God who transcends time and space, but because He lived a fully human life while on earth. In other words, Jesus is your Savior, but He’s also your compassionate Savior.” (Evans)

10. I have told you numerous times that ‘joy’ is not the same as ‘happiness’. Joy comes from God and it is present regardless of your current circumstances.

11. Jesus is encouraging the Christians at Smyrna to make faithfulness the same way. He wanted them and thus wants us to remain faithful regardless of what is happening to us.

12. Philippians 2:8 describes Jesus’ own faithfulness. Paul wrote, “*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*” Being obedient to God is equivalent to being faithful to God.

13. Regardless of what the “prosperity gospel” believers say, you will be persecuted and have trials. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 3:4 “*In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.*” Read Matthew 5:10-12.

“Why Are We Tested?”

14. According to Tony Evans, when we are tested God expects three things to happen in our lives.

- a. We should increase our compassion and understanding others enduring similar problems. As a result we “extend our experience of His compassion and kindness to others.”
- b. We learned in the Adrian Rogers study that as Christians we are to “grow in our walk with Christ”. The more we know about Him the more we will understand why.
- c. We will develop a deeper personal relationship with Him or “increasing our intimacy with Christ.”

1. Extending Compassion and Kindness to Others

- 15. Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-5. Empathy is critical when extending compassion and kindness to others. If you haven’t walked in their shoes, how can you understand what they have endured in their lives? Consider the prison mission field. I have heard ex-cons say that the inmates will not listen to someone who hasn’t be incarcerated.
- 16. I am not suggesting that only ex-cons reach out to win inmate souls for Christ. Experiences and testing can provide us with understanding that ultimately will soften our hearts for other people and what they are going through. We are to share the love of Christ with others through compassion and kindness as He would.

2. Growing in Our Walk with Christ

- 17. Read James 1:2-4. When our children are growing up, they can learn through trials. The same thing applies to Christians. We are to grow as Christians. God puts problems and difficult people in our path to help us to grow. He does not want us to self-reliant, He wants us to rely on Him.
- 18. When we have trials and we will have trials, God expects us to grow from them. Evans says, “God works behind the scenes to develop, strengthen, and guide you to His intended kingdom agenda for you.” 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God’s agenda is to get everyone into His kingdom.

3. Increasing Our Intimacy with Christ

- 19. When you go through trials and you rely on Jesus to get you through them (not out of them), then you increase your intimacy with Christ. Your personal relationship with Him deepens.

20. The more that you rely on Him, the more you can rely on Him. There is a trust that builds but there should also be a relationship that builds. It is different than an earthly friendship, it is a spiritual relationship unlike any other.
21. Philippians 3:10 says, *“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death”*. Paul is talking about more than knowing about Jesus.
22. Jesus’ love for us is a boundless love. As Romans 5:8 says, *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*
23. In verse 10 of Revelation 2, Jesus says that things will get bad. They will suffer. They will face imprisonment and possibly death for their faithfulness. He says that He will reward them for their faithfulness.
24. The reward is the “victor’s crown” or some translations call it the “crown of life”. Rev. Jim Cymballa calls it the “victor’s crown of eternal life”. Jesus said in Matthew 16:25, *“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”*
25. Jesus is saying in this verse in Revelation 2 and the verse in Matthew 16, “Don’t be concerned about this life on earth, the next life will be amazing.” Or “If it comes down to a choice between your life on earth and Me, then choose Me and we will be together forever.”
26. There are all kinds of discussions about the 10 days of suffering in verse 10. Just accept that it is a limited amount of suffering. Jesus is in control of all things on earth and in heaven, even this time of suffering. In the Book of Job, everything that Job went through from Satan had to be passed through God. The same thing still applies today.
27. In the final verse to the church of Smyrna, Jesus says, *“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”* Jesus is saying, “Pay attention and understand that this applies to anyone that will listen.” What Jesus says to the church of Smyrna applies to us also.
28. When He spoke to the church of Ephesus, Jesus said, “Make me first in your life, now and forever.” To the church of Smyrna, Jesus said, “To avoid the second death, put me first in your life by being faithful.”

29. Second death! Isn't one enough. I have heard, "If you are born once, you will die twice. If you are born twice, you will die once." The first death is a physical death. The second death is a spiritual death, it is life without God in the "lake of fire." Revelation 20:14-15 says, "*Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*"
30. You must be committed to Christ. The rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-27, believed that he had done everything right but when Jesus said, "*One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.*" He was not willing to completely commit to Jesus.
31. Where is your faith? Are you all in with Jesus? Are you willing to say as Paul did and mean it? "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believe*". (Romans 1:16)

"And when trouble comes as a result, keep your eyes on Him. Hang on. Buckle up. Be faithful. He will be with you in the pain and waiting for you at the end with a crown of life and all the rights and privileges that go with that position." (Evans)

I saw a meme on Facebook that fits this lesson.

FAITH doesn't always take you out of the problem,

FAITH TAKES YOU THROUGH THE PROBLEM.

FAITH doesn't always take away the pain,

FAITH GIVES YOU THE ABILITY TO HANDLE THE PAIN.

FAITH doesn't always take you out of the storm,

FAITH CALMS YOU IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM.