

DYING TO LIVE, Part 4

The Life Overcoming

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In this series, we have considered “Dying to Live”: that insatiable human desire to live to the full — and we learned that God, who made us, arranged for us to find it — in relationship with Jesus Christ.

Then, we listened to Jesus teach about “Living to Die”: the need to first lose our own lives — not in physical death, but in volitional surrender to the will of God — in order to find the life abundant that He promised.

Last Sunday, we discovered that Jesus Himself was “Living to Die” — aiming for all His days at the cross, where His life’s purpose was fulfilled. We concluded that life’s true value is realized when we give our lives away to others.

Today, we come full circle back to the theme “Dying to Live” to see that Jesus was willing to die because of what He saw that it would produce: a great harvest of eternal souls (people who would live forever with Him in Heaven). What are you living for? What are you willing to die for?

He Gave It Away

It wasn’t enough for Jesus to merely live His life; He came to give it away.

Jesus’ teaching was transparent; His miracles were revealing; His morality was transforming. But what has generated the kind of allegiance and worship represented by this gathering today (and tens of thousands like it across the country) is that Jesus gave His life away for the sake of others.

That’s what we remember this weekend: that a real man, named Jesus, laid His life down as a gift of love. He hung on a cross until He died and thus removed all barriers between us and our Creator. His death purchased our pardon. He was our Substitute; He became our Savior.

On the third day, God raised Him to life again! A new kind of life. A life of resurrection power! This is the “Life Overcoming.”

Jesus saw His death as transitional. He was very much in touch with what was on the other side of that passageway.

Homecoming

For one thing, it was a homecoming for Him. He was returning to the life from which He had come.

John 13:1 Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. ² It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. ⁴ So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, ⁵ and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

Jesus knew *“that he had come from God and would return to God.”* He knew where He had come from and He knew where He was going. That knowledge made Him secure enough to humble Himself and serve His disciples; it gave Him courage enough to let evil men have their way with Him. They might kill His body, but they could not harm His soul. And His Father could raise Him, if need be, from the dead.

Everlasting Friendship

And so it happened. God raised Jesus from the dead to generate a new kind of relationship between God and humanity. A relationship that even death cannot interrupt!

God has always wanted our friendship; He made us to be suitable companions. Our indifference, resistance, rebelliousness, and disobedience make His heart ache. But the prospect of our redemption makes His heart glad.

Jesus foresaw the day when the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, along with the angelic hosts, and all redeemed sinners would celebrate life together and recognize the handiwork of God in all that He has created and all that He has done and enjoy His glorious friendship forever.

“Because of the joy awaiting Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame” (Hebrews 12:2). “The joy” is what Eugene Peterson describes as *“that exhilarating finish in and with God.”*

Hebrews 12:2 *Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we’re in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he’s there, in the place of honor, right alongside God.³ When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!*

What You Know Can Help You

When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, what should you do? Go over that story again! How Jesus put up with all that life threw at Him. Whatever it was, He could put up with it. Why? Because He was the Son of God? That is NOT what it says.

He could put up with it because He knew who He was and where he was headed.

Do you know who you are?

Do you know where you are headed?

Do you know what is waiting for you there?

If you have put your trust in Jesus Christ, then you are one who has been forgiven and you are one who is loved by God the Father.

John 14:21 *Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them.*

John 14:23 *All who love me will do what I say. My Father will love them, and we will come and make our home with each of them.*

*John 16:27 The Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God.
28 Yes, I came from the Father into the world, and now I will leave the world and return to the Father.*

If you are following Jesus Christ in this life, you will be where He is in the next life.

John 17:24 Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began!

What waits for you there? A reunion with friends and loved ones who have crossed over ahead of you. Indescribable beauties and wonders and glories. And some notable things will happily be absent:

Revelation 21:3 "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

Oh, that will be... heavenly!

How to Make it Over

But that's then, and this is now. There all pain will be over, but here things can get tough! So tough, that your faith may fade. How can we hope to make it through?

By keeping our eyes on Jesus and studying how He made it through. He will help you when things get tough, because He's walked that way before.

In the year I was born, Clara Ward wrote a song called, "How I Got Over." When Mahalia Jackson sang the song, she brought the house down. Here are the lyrics:

*How I got over...
How did I make it over?
You know, my soul looks back and wonders
How did I make it over?*

*How I made it over...
Coming on over all these years
You know, my soul looks back and wonders
How did I make it over?*

*Tell me, how we got over, Lord?
Had a mighty hard time coming on over
You know, my soul looks back and wonders
How did we make it over?*

*Tell me, how we got over, Lord?
I've been falling and rising all these years
But you know my soul looks back and wonders
How did I make it over?*

*But, soon as I can see Jesus
The Man that died for me
The Man that bled and suffered
And He hung on Calvary*

*I want to thank Him for how He brought me
And I want to thank God for how He taught me
Oh, thank my God how He kept me
I'm gonna thank Him 'cause He never left me*

*Then I'm gonna thank God for old time religion
and I'm gonna thank God for giving me a vision
One day, I'm gonna join the heavenly choir
And I'm gonna sing and never get tired*

*And then I'm gonna sing
somewhere 'round God's altar
And I'm gonna shout, "All my troubles over!"
You know, I've got to thank God
Thank Him for being so good to me.*

*How I made it over, Lord?
I had to cry in the midnight hour
coming on over
But you know my soul looks back and wonders
How did I make it over?*

*Tell me how I made it over, Lord?
Falling and rising all these years
You know my soul looks back and wonders
How did I make it over?*

*I'm gonna wear a diamond garment
In that new Jerusalem
I'm gonna walk the streets of gold
In that homeland of the soul
I'm gonna view the host in white
They've been traveling day and night
Coming up from every nation
They're on their way to the great Coronation
Coming from the north, south, east, and west
On their way to a land of rest
They're gonna join the heavenly choir
We're gonna sing and never get tired
and then we're gonna sing
somewhere 'round God's altar
We're gonna shout, "All our troubles over!"
You know, we got to thank God
Thank Him for being so good to me!*

Finding Quality of Life

God gave you your life. You are not an accident. You're not a speck of insignificant dust. You are not an unwanted person. You have been made in the image of God. You were made with a purpose. You have been made to know God and to enjoy Him forever.

And God sustains your life each day. The question is: What are you doing with it? What are you doing with the life God gave you?

Inevitably, you will do one of three things with it: Either 1) you will spend it on yourself, or 2) you will throw it away and waste it, or 3) you will give it away to others.

If you spend it on yourself, you will only feed a black hole of desire. You'll be driven to find the next thrill, or the next acquisition, or the next conquest, but you'll find no lasting satisfaction.

If you waste it, your strength will be consumed by others at your expense. Nothing is more depressing!

But if, by the help of Jesus Christ, you learn to give it away to others, you will find life's true value, and it will grow fuller and richer every day.

Jesus said, *"I have come so that you may have life to the full!"* (John 10:10)

And then He taught: *"If you cling to your life (try to hang on to it), you will lose it. But if you give up your life for me — for my sake and for the sake of the Good News — you will find it and save it."* (Matthew 10:37-39; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 17:33; John 12:24-25)

We find our lives by giving them away. What are you doing with your life?

If you haven't already done so, give it to Jesus. That's the place to start. Then He will guide your steps each day toward life's fullness.

If Jesus already owns your life, then trust Him to keep it, through whatever comes your way, and start giving it away to others.

- Help someone in need. To get a meal. To fix their car. To repair their home.
- Listen to someone in trouble.
- Do something kind for someone who cannot repay you.
- Help support an orphaned child.
- Keep your community clean.
- Stay by the bedside of someone who is dying.
- Pray for someone who is struggling.
- Tell others about the love of Jesus.
- Worship God.

We find our lives by giving them away. Jesus said so. Jesus did so. Now it's your turn.