

The Features of the Overcomer

by T. Austin-Sparks

The overcomer is to have the name of the New Jerusalem written upon them, symbolizing their spiritual connection with the New Jerusalem and their participation in its characteristics.

Scripture: Genesis 14:18-19, Genesis 18:17, Psalm 122:6, Hebrews 1:5, Hebrews 7:3, Revelation 3:7-13, Revelation 21:1-4

Topics: "Overcoming", "Spiritual Authority"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks explores the characteristics of the overcomer as depicted in Revelation, emphasizing that the name of the New Jerusalem signifies peace, righteousness, and the spiritual authority of Christ. He draws parallels between Melchizedek and Christ, highlighting the importance of kingship, priesthood, righteousness, peace, and endless life in the believer's journey. The sermon illustrates how true overcoming is rooted in spiritual detachment from worldly influences and a deep connection to heavenly realities. Sparks emphasizes that the overcomer's identity is intertwined with the eternal truths represented by the New Jerusalem, which embodies God's ultimate purpose for His people.

Transcript

READING: Rev. 3:7-13; 21:1-4.

You will notice in the passage in chapter 3 of the Revelation, that the overcomer is to have the name of the City of God written upon him. "He that overcometh... I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem...." That is a somewhat remarkable statement, and full of interest; and certainly the more you think about it, the more you wonder what it means that the overcomer is to have the name of the New Jerusalem written upon him. We want to understand, therefore, a little more of what that name signifies, and how it is associated with overcoming.

As has been our custom so far, so again, we go back to the earliest touches upon Jerusalem which we have in the Scripture, and there we shall get our key.

The first reference to Jerusalem in the Bible comes in with Melchizedek in Genesis 14:18-19. There we find the first mention of it by its abbreviated title of Salem. "Jerusalem" means "the City of Peace." A very great deal more has been made of it, and there are volumes written upon the name of Jerusalem, and many very wonderful ideas have been associated with the name, but it is quite simply expressed as "the City of Peace." There may be a root in the word which means safety by reason of its position, its strength

and elevation, and in that sense it may be termed the City of Peace, as being a city exceedingly difficult to upset, to destroy. But we can be content for our purpose with the simplest of definitions. Apparently, Melchizedek was king of this city, as well as priest of "God Most High."

We see from this chapter that Melchizedek first comes into view with Abram's return from the defeat of the kings. If you read the whole chapter, you will see that a number of kings made a league, and they brought the rulers of Sodom and other local cities under their power. These served them and paid tribute to them for a number of years. Then they revolted against these allied kings, with the result that the allied kings made this assault upon them to bring them to heel again. They overpowered them, robbed them, and carried away spoil and many prisoners, including Lot and his wife. Abram was informed of what had happened, and with some three hundred and eighteen men, trained in his own household, he pursued after the kings, and by a night manoeuvre gained an advantage, overpowered them, recovered all that had been taken, including Lot, and brought them back. On his return from this successful and victorious expedition, the king of Salem as well as the king of Sodom met him, and Melchizedek blessed him, and Abram gave him a tenth of all.

Here, then, is Abram in the capacity of an overcomer, and you recognise, as we pointed out in our last meditation, that Abram's strength which in a spiritual sense he passed on to the City of which he was, in a sense, the father, for which he looked - was largely due to his own spiritual detachment from this world. He refused all gifts from the king of Sodom, refused this world's honours and favours, and in various other ways kept himself free, while in some cases the Lord, on His part, very strongly broke him free from earthly elements and relationships, and so maintained him in a position of spiritual strength. Now we find that spiritual strength, by reason of his detachment from things earthly and attachment to things heavenly, expressing itself in this victorious warfare, and in the position of an overcomer he comes into touch with Melchizedek, and Melchizedek with him, and certain pre-eminent spiritual elements and features are introduced. It is interesting to notice that all the associations of Melchizedek are spiritual and not temporal. Wherever you touch Melchizedek in the Scriptures, you touch some abiding spiritual principle, something which is not temporal, not passing, and not merely of this earth; not even related to this earth when what is touched is of God, but something higher than that. The bringing of Melchizedek and Abram together in this way brings out this series of spiritual elements, which run right on and become the governing features of the New Jerusalem.

If you look at some of these elements, you will see that they are impressive, but you will, in the first place, be impressed with the uniqueness of the person of Melchizedek. How strangely he comes on the scene. He is never heard of before, and nothing is known about him, beyond what is said here in a couple of sentences, and yet here he is, a king, and priest of God Most High, in a land full of iniquity. He suddenly comes into full view like that, king of Salem, priest of God Most High, blessing Abram in the Name of the Lord: a remarkable personality, and quite fitted by these very features, by the uniqueness of his person, to occupy some very important place in the spiritual history of Jerusalem. He seems, so to speak, to have come out of the unknown, to have suddenly dropped out of heaven, in immediate maturity. There is no immaturity here: you do not begin in infancy, you find this man right in the fulness of things, the fulness which is to take centuries to develop in the history of the Lord's work. A tremendous amount of history will come before there is realised on this earth what is represented by Melchizedek. He enters in this full way, this mature way, and it seems as though he immediately sets up the whole thought of God. The whole mind of God is represented in one man, who comes we know not whence. It is as though God puts the fulness of His thought in a man at the beginning of things, and then develops history according to that

pattern. That is how God does things. So Melchizedek becomes a most impressive person, and we know from the New Testament, especially the letter to the Hebrews, that he was intended by God to be a type of something very full. He introduces an order of things which is super-earthly, super-Aaronic - without genealogy, without father, without mother, without beginning of days or end of life. There you have eternity, universality, all gathered up in this one man.

Typical Relationships of Melchizedek with Christ.

Note his typical relationships with Christ, as he introduces these pre-eminent spiritual elements. I think we can say that they are, in the main, five.

1. Kingship.

The first is kingship among the Lord's Own people in relation to the elect: kingship in contact with the overcomer, and the overcomer brought into touch with the throne. That is the first full thought of God, represented in Melchizedek. As we have just mentioned, a tremendous amount of history will develop before that is fully realised, but God is going to work from this point toward something which we shall note in a moment.

2. Priesthood.

Not an earthly, but a heavenly priesthood not after the order of Aaron, but after the order of Melchizedek - a heavenly priesthood, an abiding priesthood is what is set forth; in a word, priesthood in God's full thought.

3. Righteousness.

The principle of righteousness comes in with Melchizedek in a special way. It is no new principle. Righteousness is as old as God. It comes in in a special way with Melchizedek, as he becomes king of righteousness. We mention it now, and will speak more fully of it later.

4. Peace.

Righteousness leading to peace; peace and righteousness in relation to kingship and priesthood is what is brought before us. When you put those things together, you cover an immense range of the work and Person of the Lord Jesus. Work backwards - peace, because of righteousness, because of heavenly priesthood, because of absolute sovereignty.

5. The Endless Life.

"...like unto the Son of God... after the power of an endless life" (Heb. 7:3,16). That is the designation given by the New Testament to Melchizedek.

Let us sum those up again both ways - kingship, priesthood of a heavenly order, righteousness, peace and endless life: endless life, because of peace being given, on the ground of righteousness, through the heavenly priesthood, with the throne of universal sovereignty upholding it all. That is an outstanding vision and setting forth in one man of those typical elements of the Person and work of the Lord Jesus.

Think a moment or two longer of kingship as introduced by Melchizedek in relation to Christ. The remarkable thing is that Christ came out of Judah, the tribe of government, the tribe of monarchy. But no

priest came out of Judah: there was no priesthood there. The Apostle argues that if Christ had been on earth - a striking phrase - He would not have been a priest, because there are no priests out of Judah. That carries His priesthood away from earth at once and brings in a heavenly order of priesthood. So that Christ's priesthood arises on another ground from that of Aaron. He is Priest established in relation to resurrection. The one hundred and tenth Psalm makes it very clear that His priesthood does not belong to that side of the grave which relates wholly to this earth. The grave breaks fully and finally our contact with this earth. That is the meaning of baptism. Baptism is intended to be a declaration of the fact that in our death-union with Christ all relationship of a spiritual kind with this earth has been brought to an end. Mark you, we only come into the values of Christ's heavenly priesthood in so far as that is true, because His priesthood is not of the Aaronic order, applying to people on the earth living earth-bound lives. Christ's priesthood is founded upon the fact that He is in heaven, and that at once speaks of resurrection. So that His priesthood is in the virtue and the good of resurrection.

Come back to Abram, and you will see that, with regard to the City, Abram had to come in a typical way right on to this ground, the ground of resurrection, with even Isaac broken away from this earth as holding any kind of relationship with it still, and that right out on resurrection ground in relation to heaven the purpose of God as to the City is fulfilled. So Christ's Priesthood is established as related to resurrection. "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (Heb. 1:5) touches His resurrection, and this priesthood of Melchizedek is typically after the power of an endless life.

Why did Christ's Priesthood become dependent entirely upon His resurrection? For the simple reason that God was awaiting kingship; that there can be no true priesthood apart from kingship in the thought of God. Lay hold of that, and dwell upon it. There is no full priesthood in God's mind apart from kingship. Kingship is essential to priesthood, if priesthood is to have its fullest expression.

The Aaronic priesthood broke down in Eli. Samuel was then brought in, and what happened? Samuel was not brought in to introduce a new order of priesthood. Samuel was brought in to introduce the king; and from that time the king always took precedence over the priest. David, himself king, wore the linen ephod, combined the two in his own person. But the priesthood in David was subservient to his kingship. All the meaning and value of the order of Aaron, of course, is gathered up and included in Christ, but it is transcended by the order of Melchizedek.

Kingship is the supreme, the dominating note. That is the first and highest position. Then what comes next? Righteousness! But that introduces the priesthood. The question of righteousness is dealt with by priesthood; but it is a righteousness which can only be established by a throne of supreme authority. It is the throne, the kingship, which gives the power to the priesthood. The Old Testament makes that perfectly clear. The priesthood afterward derived its power and its appointment from the throne. Notice how David dealt with the priests. He dismissed high priests and brought in others. When high priests failed God, David put them out of office. That was a momentous thing to do. Go back to the days before there were kings in Israel, and let anybody touch the priest! But here is a man who has taken a position above the priests. With David it was a question of the throne governing in the matter of righteousness. If the high priests failed God, broke down on the question of righteousness, then the throne intervened, and that priesthood could no longer stand.

These two things are found together in Christ, and you see that He is King and Priest, and by His very throne He upholds righteousness and His priestly work. We have a great High Priest, Who is King, Who is Sovereign.

When you have the throne established, righteousness upheld by supreme authority, then you can know peace. All these are operating in the power of resurrection. He is King, He is Priest, and He has established peace in virtue of His resurrection.

Thus sovereignty comes in, and sovereignty is seen to be not a matter of a realm only, but rather a matter of moral and spiritual glory. His Kingship is that. It is the sovereignty of peace.

There is a great value about this, if we could grasp it. These moral and spiritual elements, such as peace and righteousness, are things which have behind them all the tremendous power of supreme lordship. You and I know quite well that our righteousness cannot support us: and neither can it support anyone else. Our righteousness will break down. It is a poor thing, a puny thing. We know quite well that our peace will not support very much. What is the strength of our own peace? Well, it is as the strength of a very weak assault upon it. It does not take much to upset our peace. Then take any other moral and spiritual virtue you may think of, and see just how far man's own virtue will carry him; man's own moral and spiritual features. Not very far! But then think of the Lord having righteousness and peace and all the other virtues, and by His Spirit imparting those, and putting all the strength of His throne behind them, all that that throne means of victory. It is righteousness triumphant, because of One Who is absolute Sovereign in this universe. The sovereignty of the Lord Jesus is the sovereignty of righteousness. If you can upset His throne, you upset His righteousness. If you can upset His righteousness, you upset His throne. If you can destroy His peace, you destroy His sovereignty. These things go together. What we need is that the Lord should be enthroned at the centre of our being with all the sovereign power of His mighty righteousness, all His glorious peace, all His deep imperturbable joy. It is not an abstract element. The throne, and all that it means, is with and behind all.

That is surely what was intended to be the embodiment of those spiritual and moral truths and realities. When Jerusalem was supported by righteousness, then Jerusalem was unshakable. When Jerusalem forsook righteousness, then the very support of Jerusalem was withdrawn, and Jerusalem collapsed.

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalm 122:6). Jerusalem lost its peace, when it lost its righteousness, because it lost its sovereign upholding. These things go together. You cannot have the Lord supporting you in His sovereignty, in His kingship, if you are violating righteousness.

Abraham was made to know God on this matter in connection with the cities of the plain "Shall I hide from Abraham that which I do?" (Gen. 18:17). The Lord told Abraham that he was going to destroy the cities, and Abraham went in search of righteousness. "Wilt thou consume the righteous with the wicked?" God said in effect, Try it! That is not MY way! I never destroy righteousness! If you find righteousness, I cannot destroy; I am bound to uphold righteousness! So Abraham made his exhaustive search, and found none. He had to say, You are perfectly justified in doing this thing! God could not have done it if Abraham had found righteousness. Righteousness and the protection of the throne go together. The lack of righteousness means that the throne cannot function to protect. The New Jerusalem, which came into view through Abraham, was to take its character from him, was to be the embodiment of all these things. And when you carry the matter beyond the historic Jerusalem, you find the next focal point is Christ Himself, and then the Church, which is His Body - the New Jerusalem, which is to express all that God had in His mind as spiritual thought concerning His Own people.

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