

## **How to Overcome**

*Prayer*

### **Illustration:**

One day the devil was putting on a yard sale of all his tools. He put them all out on the tables, and priced them. Oh my... but there were a lot of treacherous instruments: Laid out for all to see were: Hatred, envy, jealousy, pride, lying and deceit as well as various others.

Laid on a special table all by itself was a tool that had more wear marks than any other. In fact, it seemed that it must have been the devils favorite tool. Although it was worn and scratched and had seen the most use it was priced very high.

One of the customers was interested in this tool and asked the devil: "What is the name of this tool?"

Satan replied: "That, is discouragement"

The customer then asked the devil: "Why have you priced this old, beaten up and weathered tool so high?"

Satan smiled and looked directly into the eyes of the customer and said: "Because discouragement is more useful to me than all the others. With this tool I have been able to pry open and get inside a persons heart when I cannot get to them with any other tool. It is badly worn because I use it on almost everyone, since so few people know that it belongs to me..."

Discouragement is still the Devil's tool. Not many people realize he's using it on us, and he's using it on some of us today. Life is full of discouraging circumstances. Even the most blessed people, the most successful, the most spiritually mature, face constant disappointment and discouragement. The aim of my sharing this with you today is that you would honestly face the problems served up to you in life without fooling yourself, without giving up, but rather by acknowledging the problems and discouragement, by acknowledging our need for help, by getting help from others, and by trusting and obeying God in the midst of problems.

Have you ever considered Joseph? I mean apart from the musical and his colorful jacket? In life, isn't it true that we all face trials, problems, and issues? Whatever word we use, whether Christianese or secular these occurrences are difficulties that we don't just need to overcome, but that we need to deal with emotionally as well.

From a biblical viewpoint there are many examples, us let us look at the life of Joseph for a few moments.

When Joseph was a baby his mother died

His father was a scoundrel and not very easy to live with  
His brothers were jealous of him and sold him into slavery  
He became a slave  
His home was torn from him  
He had no rights at all  
Potiphar's wife falsely accused Joseph when he spurned her advances  
He was thrown into prison and forgotten

Now if that were you today; how many neurosis, depressive episodes and addictions would result? Would he have PTSD, would he be an addict? In short, how would Joseph have coped with all the tragedy in his life?

Oh but pastor, we don't have much in the way of slavery today?  
Really what about those young men and women who with hope for a better life get involved with notorious characters and are sold into sexual slavery even today.

But children today don't get estranged from their families or their homes torn from them? What about the former policy of separating children from their parents when they sought refuge or asylum at the US border? What about the foster system? Some of the unfortunate kids are taken in until they are eighteen years of age and then kicked to the streets when the foster parents no longer receive any subsidy.

What about false accusations? There was recently a story that told of a young man who was being scouted by three NFL franchises when he was accused of Rape. He was sentenced and served eight years before being released when it was discovered the woman had lied.

My friends, many of the same issues faced in biblical days are still with us today. Although the face of the problems have changed, the underlying issues have not. And so I assert that the biblical solutions are as relevant today as they were 2000 years ago.

Let me give you another example from recent history:

There was a young man in the USA who when he was seven years old, he and his family were forced out of their family home on a legal technicality. This young boy had to go to work to help support his family. At nine years old, his mother died. At 22 he lost his job as a store clerk. He wanted to go to law school, but his education wasn't good enough to get in. At 23 he went into debt to become a partner in a small store. At 26 his business partner died, leaving him with a huge debt that took many years to pay off. At 24 he started courting a young woman and at 28 he asked her to marry him. She said "NO" After three attempts and at 37 years of age he was elected to congress in the US, but two years later he failed to be reelected. At 41 years of age his son died. At 45 he ran for the senate again and lost. At 47 he failed as a candidate for vice president of the US. At 49 he ran for the senate again and lost...

At 51 he was elected president of the USA... his name: Abraham Lincoln

Both men were struck down numerous times by trials and adversity but yet both overcame and both made a real difference.

Today as you sit here listening to this sermon, I am wondering how things are going for you? I am aware of some, but there are many issues and trials that you may be experiencing that that only God or maybe family know about. As I pray each week I wonder what discouragement you are facing and although I do not know I pray that our Lord Jesus Christ will be your strength to overcome whatever you are facing.

Let's step back for just a second and look inside... What are we facing today?

- Are you facing the loss of a child or even our children?
- Are you facing a divorce?
- Are you facing alcoholism?
- Are you facing a drug addiction?
- Are you facing loneliness?
- Are you facing financial problems?
- Are you facing a failed business?
- Are you facing cancer?
- Are you facing your mortality?
- Are you facing a serious illness?
- Are you facing depression?
- Are you facing a bad marriage?
- Are you facing grief over those who have gone on before you?
- Are you facing physical or emotional abuse at home?
- Are we facing self-hatred or guilt?
- Are you facing problems with others?

If you are not facing any problems, say thank you to God and hallelujah, because you seriously need to appreciate it and rejoice, because I can safely say that for the majority if not all of us life is difficult.

Do we as Christians look to God in prayer or do we try to cope on our own?

Do you seek God in his word? Do you find comfort in his instruction?

For example:

1 Peter 5:7: "Cast all you anxiety on him because he cares for you"

Is our perspective a positive one? Because let's face it our culture is not very positive. Just turn on the news for an hour and you will get what I am saying. But what does God say?

Turn with me to Romans 5:3b-5: "... we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

Is this our perspective today?

How about Romans 8:17-18: "Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

How about the book of James? Do we find strength and help in the pages of this Godly book? Consider this morning James 1:12: "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."

Maybe the next chapter has helped. Turn with me to James 1:2-4: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance and let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete not lacking anything."

Did you notice what he is saying in verse 2? My Brothers and Sisters. That means Christians...

When we are really going through the trials of life do we lean on romans 8:28? Do we believe the words in the scripture? Really believe them? "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

This morning do we trust God is real and cares and has a plan for us? Do we trust that we are being made complete lacking nothing?

Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

This morning if you have lost faith, if you are discouraged, if you are down, have you said: "Lord I am sorry for my lack of faith in you, I ask your Holy Spirit this morning for the gift of faith so that I can be as Paul when he said Philippians 4:11b where he tells us: "...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances"

None of us want to appear weak or struggling to others. We want others to respect us. We want to preserve our dignity and so on. So what I am about to say may not make you happy but, whatever your problem is this morning, that are more people in the church who have that same problem that you would ever imagine. If we are really honest there are many Christians today who are tired and discouraged.

Life can be a joy but many go to school. And that school may be the school of hard knocks. Even the school colors are black and blue. My friends, life is hard sometimes but that is the point. If you take one thing away this morning let it be this...

**You are empowered by God to choose acceptable ways of dealing with your problems.**

You may be asking in your head or you may already know but sooner or later the question will arise: "What are my options in dealing with life's problems?"

- You can give into them and let them overwhelm and consume you
- You can deny that you have a problem and steadfastly deny there is anything wrong
- You can look at your problems with honesty and sincerity and like the example we saw in the life of Joseph; you can face them realistically and with faith for the outcome

We as Christians are going to rule and reign with Christ. We are going to be wise and prepared to take up our inheritance as joint heirs with Christ. Life can be hard and anyone who tells you otherwise is trying to sell you something. But we can have strength and faith to weather life storms. We simply need Jesus.

I am going to get very real here.

We have all heard of a teenager at some point who has committed suicide. These poor kids needed the strength to weather life's storms that only Jesus can provide. Thousands of kids each year give into fear and ultimately the temptation to just give in, they accept fear and discouragement. And to my horror they are accepting it at an earlier and earlier age.

Remember Elijah, arguably the greatest prophet of the Old Testament. He had a great experience with God. He experienced the power and reality of God in a truly amazing way and yet... he finds himself in the position of having angered the Queen... So she threatened to kill him within one day. 24 measly hours and so he fled for his life in fear. He let the enemy work discouragement and despair upon his heart and so we read that he came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. He said: "I have had enough, Lord, Take my life. I'm no better than my ancestors."

Friends there are two voices. One speaks fear and the other speaks faith. Do we listen to Satan when he whispers "Give up it is hopeless" in our ears or do we hear the other voice that says: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" That voice which encourages and lifts up when we see no way out. Do we hear him saying: "I'm the Lord your God. Nothing is impossible with me."?

In 1 Kings 19 it is clear that he is alone, and so he has chosen to give in and give up

In the second choice, which we said is to deny the problem; have we ever seen people saying:

- My daughter says she is lonely and has no friends, but I don't think it's really anything to be concerned about. She will grow out of it
- My husband doesn't really have a drinking problem
- My wife isn't cheating on me with my brother

Let me be clear, I am speaking this morning about the denial of real problems not something paranoia has magnified to make a small things bigger that it appears. There is a tendency by some to exaggerate a problem to gain attention and in others to minimize a problem in a effort to cope.

Oh but pastor, I would never... (Mark 14:20-72)

Well Saint Peter did. In Mark 14:29 he says: "Even if all the others reject you, I never will!" But Jesus isn't fooled by bravado. Jesus said: "This very night before a rooster crows twice, you will say three times that you don't know me." He added: "Even if I have to die with you, I will never say that I don't know you!" All the others said the same thing...

And yet they were not truthful in their strength they chose to deny Jesus. In fact, peter even said in verse 71: "I don't even know the man you're talking about."

Jesus was being real with Peter when he told him he would be denied. He was trying to tell him that he was weak and that he had a problem. He wanted him to realize his weakness and be real with himself. He wanted to Peter to see that denying the truth is not the answer.

Today will we be honest with ourselves? Will we acknowledge weakness in ourselves and ask Him for His strength or will we allow pride to push us into denial of areas of our lives that God wants us to face?

Of course now we come to the third option...

Will we choose to face our problems realistically and faithfully?

We looked at Joseph and his life appears out of his control and yet through each tragedy, difficult, accusation, strife and struggle he did the best he could and overcame. But how did he do it?

I ask that you consider the following observations about Joseph that enabled him to face his difficulties faithfully:

- He continued his relationship with God Almighty despite his circumstances

- And we read over and over again: "...And the lord was with Joseph"
- He chose not to give into temptation but to live righteously despite the difficulty. He was obedient to God
- He was not focused on himself. Despite what he was asked to do, he did it with all his strength as if he was doing it for God himself, even when he was in prison he sought to help others. Remember the cupbearer and the baker?
- He did what he could to solve his problems. Remember him asking the cupbearer to remember him to Pharaoh? He didn't give up, he didn't give it, he simply tried his best and trusted God.
- Most importantly... He never forgot that God had him in the palm of His hand. You may ask how I can say this last point... (Gen. 50:20) "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

#### Illustration:

When I was studying psychology, I came across a lecture by Dr. Menninger. Dr. Menninger gave a lecture on mental health and a member of the audience asked a very pertinent question: "What would you advise a person to do if that person felt a nervous breakdown coming on?" What he said might surprise you this morning... He said: "Lock up your house, go across the railroad tracks, and find somebody in need, then help that person."

When we get involved in the lives of others and get out of a self-pitying or self-centered mentality we overcome.

This morning, whatever you are facing you need to know that as a child of God. If God be for you who can stand against you?

Folk, I believe in being real and living a life of sincerity before God. And so I submit this morning that you don't have to let life overcome you. Christ has already won the battle. He has you in the palm of his hand and no matter what adversity, depression, illness, frustration or trouble life throws at you he is present in your adversity and will turn it to good. He is present when you feel alone, he is present when you are depressed, he is present when you are suffering. And just as when he cried over the suffering of the people at the death of Lazarus, he doesn't separate himself from your suffering, but he stands ready to help you overcome. He raised Lazarus from the dead and he will help you overcome those things you may be struggling with this morning. Give your cares to him because he cares for you and if you will gather the courage to be honest with yourself and not give up God will see you through your storm. Victorious!

I close with this scripture from Revelation 21:7

Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

\*(Excepts & parts of illustrations from an outline by Dr. John Yates II)