

The End of the Lord and the Way to It
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Chapter 1

I want to bring to your attention four things in the Word of God which seem to be parallel in principle.

If you turn to the end of the book of Genesis, and put your finger in between that book at the last chapter and the book of Exodus, you will see that the end of Genesis sees Joseph in exaltation. After humiliation, after rejection and after death in type and in pangs he has come to the throne, and is found in the position of all authority. With the beginning of the book of Exodus we find his brethren in oppression, in rejection, with a time of great suffering commencing.

Then if you turn to the book of Esther, and again put your finger in between that book and the next, the book of Job, you will find that the book of Esther at its close sees Mordechai in exaltation; after humiliation, after rejection, after the sentence of death, and, at one point quite clearly, the pangs of death, now clothed with royal apparel riding upon the king's horse with the king's most honourable prince proclaiming before him, the first man in the land. You turn over the leaf to the book of Job, and the beginning of the book of Job sees a heavenly drama introduced through the suffering of Job, a time of suffering on the earth in relation to something in the heavens. I do not think that it is an accident of arrangement that the book of Job follows immediately upon the book of Esther. The one typifies heavenly exaltation after earthly humiliation, the other shows something being done here on earth through suffering in relation to divine interests in the heavens. We note it and pass on.

If you turn over to the New Testament, to the end of the Gospels and the beginning of the book of the Acts, you have the Lord Jesus in exaltation, after humiliation, rejection and death, in the place of all authority, wearing royal apparel, proclaimed the first; and then what follows is the suffering, humiliation, rejection and the putting to death of the Lord's people on the earth.

Then you pass in the fourth case to Revelation chapter 12. Here you have that sign in heaven, the great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, the woman, the man-child, the dragon standing before the woman to devour the child when born but at its birth caught up to the throne, followed by the residue of the woman's seed passing into a time of suffering; exaltation in heaven, suffering upon the earth. I am quite sure you see there is a parallelism and a correspondence between those four things, and it is a very impressive one. This truth, which underlies the Word of God through and through, is set forth in this way at given times — for you will recognise that the point at which this thing is shown is every time a transition point in history. From Genesis to Exodus it is a point of transition from what is personal to what is corporate; from God's dealings with individuals, to God's dealings with a nation. Passing from the book of Esther you pass out of the monarchical into a new period. Passing from the Gospels into the Epistles it is again a new dispensational point, a new historical chapter in the economy of God. So it is in Revelation chapter 12. Now if this is, as we surely believe it is, truth running beneath the whole course of history as under the hand of God, then it has a very real message for us. As only a fragment of it, I want to bring two things before you in that connection.

The Purpose of the Overcomer

The first is this, that it sets forth the purpose of the overcomer. Let me say just in a general word that the overcomer is the most important thing in God's programme at the

present time, and therefore the overcomer becomes the object of our most serious concern and of our most definite business. That is our pre-eminent business at this time. Have you noticed in the four occasions to which we have referred what the pre-eminent characteristic is of each, the one thing which is peculiarly the object in view on every occasion? It is life, and life in an active sense as right up against the force of death. Do you remember what Joseph said to his brethren when he made himself known to them? He said, "God *sent me before you to preserve you alive.*" The Psalmist wrote many years afterward in Psalm 105:17: "*He sent a man before them*", referring to Joseph. Joseph said, "God *sent me before you to preserve you alive.*" Death was everywhere active, threatening, the menace of this people, this elect people, and Joseph therefore went before not only in point of time (that is a minor point), not only in point of place (that is a minor point), but in point of spiritual experience. He went through something in experience which put him in the position of being able to serve them in the matter of their very life. That is the major point. When you get hold of the significance of that you see where the importance lies. It was a life matter when death was raging.

Do you not see that that is exactly what the issue was in Esther's case? Mordechai sent a message to Esther. "*Think not that you will escape in the king's palace.*" If this thing goes through that wicked Haman has schemed and devised, you with your father's house will perish. May it not be that you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this, when death is everywhere, menacing, threatening. Esther said that she would go in to the king, contrary to the law, saying, "*If I perish, I perish*". That is only another way of saying, I will take my life in my hands for the life of my people. And by Esther's going before in the matter, in fellowship with Mordechai, the life of the people was saved, the holy seed was preserved in life.

Well, it is hardly necessary that we should point out how true that is in the case of the Lord's own humiliation, rejection and death. It was the life question, not historically but eternally. Death was universal, but God had a seed chosen from eternity unto life, and that battle of life had to be fought out by one in advance, and in the much fuller sense He sent a Man before them. Death was vanquished; life in Him was triumphant.

What is the purpose of the overcomer? It is the life question being fought out by the overcomer, it is the life question being determined and settled in advance on the behalf of others, it is an encountering of death spiritually and overcoming in that realm for the sake of others. That is what is there, and if the man-child is caught up to the throne it is definitely said there that he was to rule the nations with a rod of iron. The residue of the woman's seed owes very much to the fact that the man-child has been caught up to the throne. The exaltation of the man-child to the throne is really the ground and the guarantee that the residue will be preserved and will come through eventually. It may be a time matter between the firstfruits and the harvest, between the man-child and the residue; it may be that some will go through first and others will go into tribulation to come out of the tribulation. The time point is not the main thing, and we need not make it the main thing. The point is that, God must have those who fight out this battle on behalf of others. It is the life question, and the overcomer's business is to go through spiritually, go through the suffering in relation to overcoming death.

Of the Lord Jesus it was predicted from the beginning that He should bruise the serpent's head under His heel, but then it is just as definitely said concerning the church that, "*God shall bruise Satan under your feet ...*". Who will say that the whole church is in that position of having Satan under its feet? But here in Revelation 12 you have a man-child, you have a part of the seed of the woman with Satan under its feet, for at that point Satan was cast down. "*Now is come the salvation and kingdom of our God ...*".

I think the point is quite patent. The life and death question is being fought out in advance all the time in the interests of others, and it is to that that God calls those "*who will follow the Lamb whithersoever He goes*".

Now the other thing is this. A transition is being effected in every case. Take the first case of Israel. Israel stood, of course, in the grace of God, chosen by the grace of God; that is, not for anything that Israel was. You have the grace of God seen all the way through. It is said, The Lord did not choose you because of any good in you! They were chosen in the grace of God. And if ever grace was magnified surely it was magnified in the choice of Israel. And then you will remember that from God's side the covenant was kept. Think of the prophecies of Balaam; Balaam, compelled by God to say what he had no intention of saying, and there came out from his lips concerning Israel, this Israel in the wilderness, this Israel of which we know so much that was contrary to God, "*He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob.*" What a statement over against the real literal facts! But that is the one side, the divine side, and it relates to standing through grace. But there is another side; state is of as great concern to the Lord as standing. And so the suffering into which we find Israel brought with the book of Exodus is connected with that transition from standing to state, from the objective to the subjective, from life as a gift through grace to life as an inheritance.

You remember that there are both these things in the New Testament: "... *the free gift of God is eternal life*", but that they might inherit eternal life. There is no contradiction; it is transition from one position to another. It is, in a word, the transition from childhood to sonship. So the sufferings of Israel both in Egypt and in the wilderness were the sufferings under the hand of a Father, to bring them to a spiritual position that they might in type come to the throne to govern. That was God's thought in the end, and all His dealings with them in the wilderness were intended to bring them to the place of dominion in the land. The suffering, therefore, was related to that throne which already existed. What God took up in Israel in the brethren of Joseph here on the earth was connected with Joseph as in the throne; it was God bringing them to the throne. He had gone before, and they were intended to follow on, come to supremacy, and it was through suffering, through discipline that they were to come there.

Take Job, and you find exactly the same thing. "*I heard of thee by the hearing of the ear*", said Job, "*but now mine eye seeth thee ...*". That was transition from the objective to the subjective. The great transition that Job was in was a transition from acceptance to position, to state. God said of Job that he was a just man, a righteous man, a perfect man, there was not another man like him in all the earth. That is how God looked at Job, but oh, what a different Job there was at the end of the story. He is in a new position altogether through suffering, and he comes out to a place of spiritual authority which he never had before, through suffering. You know the background of it all was Satan, the overthrow, the undermining of the power of Satan all the time through this, so that Job virtually at the end was standing in authority over Satan. That was the point. "*Hast thou considered my servant Job?*" The devil challenged God about Job, and God said, Do what you like, but do not touch his life. Satan did all that he could, and the end of the story is that Satan is beaten, defeated, out of court, and Job is in the place of power through the suffering.

That is the history of the church. The Lord Jesus is in the throne, and now our wrestling is with the principalities and powers, and so on. The church is in the place of Job, being tested, being tried, all with a view to coming to that place of the man-child, where Satan is cast down. There is no more place in heaven for him; the man-child is there, and the whole church is to come there. That is what God is doing in us through suffering, to bring us there. That is the purpose and calling of the overcomer.

The End of the Lord and the Way to It

Chapter 2

Reading: James 5:11.

I want to follow on what was before us in our last meditation. This little fragment of the Word touches on the other side of that which we were considering. "*Ye have seen the end of the Lord*". The end of the Lord with Joseph was the throne, and in a typical way the end of the Lord with Israel in the land was the throne. The end of the Lord with Mordechai was the throne in a sense, and the end with Job was the throne. The end with the Lord Jesus was the throne, the end with the church is the throne; the end of the Lord is ascendancy, is fulness, is victory. That end of the Lord governs everything. The Lord has an end, the Lord is a Lord with an end, and that end is glory and not shame, is victory and not defeat, is ascendancy and not subjection. This is the end of the Lord.

You can link with that other passages if you like which bear it out: "*Eye hath not seen, nor hath the ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.*" God hath prepared! Or again, "*Our light affliction which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*" That is the end of the Lord. You remember that little fragment, which I think is always of such great value to the Lord's people passing through disappointment, in chapter 11 of the letter to the Hebrews. It says of some that they received not deliverance, and they received not the promises: "*God having provided some better thing for us ...*". I think that is a great phrase: "*some better thing*". That interprets the Lord's dealings with us so often. The thing upon which we had set our hearts in life, the thing which we thought would be the best thing, the greatest thing, God never has allowed us to have it, has withheld it, and our temptation often is to think that we have missed the best, and really from God's standpoint, in so far as we are His, the explanation is, "God having some better thing". The end of the Lord is always better.

That may be of personal comfort, and it should be. We can take it in that way, for it is open to application so. But, of course, the great purpose of God in this universe with which we are connected, unto which we are called is so much greater than what is personal, and it is that that is before us. The thing I want to emphasise at this point is the end of God and the way to it.

We have seen that to reach His end God always has that which stands in the position and fulfils the capacity of an advance guard. Joseph, we saw, was particularly characterized by that little phrase in the Psalm: "*He sent a man before them ...*" And Joseph told his brethren that God had sent him before them to preserve life, to preserve them alive. And to Esther the words of Mordechai were, May it not be that you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this; that is, there was going to be a great onslaught of death upon the holy, the elect seed, and God was forestalling the devil, anticipating him by this instrument, getting ahead of him. The marvellous sovereignty of God is the chief characteristic of the book of Esther. While God's Name is not mentioned His evidence is unmistakable; sovereignty is His evidence, and His sovereignty is seen supremely in His anticipating the work of the enemy. So Esther came to the kingdom. She, in union with Mordechai, was God's kind of advance guard against the work of death. The Lord Jesus gathers up all that in a superlative, supreme way. He has gone ahead to preserve life, He is our advance guard in this great battle with death.

Now that leads us to Revelation chapter 12. Here is the overcomer represented in the man-child who is the first after Christ to pass that way on behalf of others yet to come, in the overcoming of death. God's end is complete and universal victory over death. God

reaches His end through instruments who pass through a spiritual experience in advance of others. It is not that they are elected to that, but it is that they go before in spiritual experience, and the chief feature of their spiritual experience is the conflict with death.

In the book of the Revelation, chapter 2, in speaking to the church at Ephesus the Lord concluded His address with these words: "*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life ...*". That just gets me to my point. Life is the issue all the time. What does this figurative language mean, "*eat of the tree of life*"? Oh, surely when we are saved we eat of the tree of life. If the tree of life is the symbol of the Lord Jesus who is the life, if He is the tree of life, surely when we are saved, when we are born again, when we receive eternal life it is then that we eat of the tree of life. Well, if that were so in the sense in which we mean it, then this passage in Revelation 2 is nonsense, for it is "*to him that overcometh*". There is something here which is the inheritance of the overcomer.

When we receive eternal life it is true that we partake of Christ, the life; the gift of God which is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord is one thing, but life in its fullest sense is quite another thing. This tree of life is in the midst of the Paradise of God. That is the end of the Lord, that is fulness, that is where death is no more. To receive eternal life is to receive it in its initial, and, shall I say, its elementary form, to have life. It is a very great reality, it is a wonderful thing to possess eternal life in Jesus Christ, but that is the beginning of the Lord, that is not the end of the Lord. The end of the Lord is that that life should be full, complete, where no death is at all. You and I are between the two. We have received life, and that fulness of life, that life which is perfect is the end of the Lord for us. It is a matter of the measure of life, and the effectiveness of life, and the triumph of life. We have it, but there are many who have eternal life who are not living in the victory of that life, in the fulness of that life, in the glory of that life, and are not a mighty witness against the power of death.

There is a church at Ephesus, and there is much good there, much that is commendable. It has life, eternal life, as a gift through grace, but the Lord has to say right into that church, "*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life ...*"; that is, there must be those who are not influenced and affected by the tendencies and influences which are operating amongst the Lord's people generally, who stand clear of all those influences and those tendencies and overcome them. You see what they were at Ephesus, and you see what they were in the five churches that came under a measure of condemnation. Whatever the conditions may be, and the tendencies, the overcomers are those who are not affected thereby, who stand clear of them, and, standing clear, come to the place where their testimony is a testimony of life operating mightily against death. It is something more; eating of the tree of life, coming to the fulness of that life in Christ, the end of the Lord!

What a story there is wrapped up in the course of things from the beginning to the end. We will come back to Job. Job starts where Mordechai left off; that is, in other words, the church starts where the Lord Jesus finished; a Man in the glory. Job is someone under the eye of God, with much that is a pleasure to Him: "*Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in all the earth?*" The Lord would say that about His church viewed from the divine side, viewed from the standpoint of Christ, 'Hast thou considered my church, that there is none like her in all the universe?' This is His conception, His valuation of His church which He loved and for which He gave Himself. But now the very fact that that church is so dear and so precious to the Lord, the very fact that His people are held in such esteem by Him, rather than being the cause or the justification for her protection, is the very reason why she is called into a mighty vocation. The Lord said great things about Job, and the assault of Satan upon Job, prompted by the Lord, was not, as the whole story makes clear, because Job was under condemnation in any way — that is the Devil's twist — but the explanation is this, that there is something being done, there is a ground which Satan has encamped upon which has got to be taken from him in the universe.

You see, it is a universal situation. The sons of God appear before God, and Satan appears with them. You are on the rim of the universe in this matter. It is not some little thing here of a personal character, one man on the earth. This is a universal thing of importance to the Lord, and the challenge of Satan is to the Lord, and the Lord accepts the challenge of Satan and makes the battlefield of that challenge Job. And so outside of Job's knowledge altogether, there was a spiritual drama being enacted in this universe with tremendous interests of the Lord. This is the point: Can you find in this universe that in which the faith of God is found, such faith as persists, as endures when everything declares that God is failing, God is anything but kind, good, loving, wise and gracious? Everything declares, all circumstances seem to proclaim, with a loud voice, that God is not for but against, God is not vindicating, God is not standing by, God is not upholding, God is not defending, God has not espoused the cause of them that put their trust in Him. Their cause seems to have been forsaken of God. Can you find in this universe that in which there is a faith in God in spite of all that? Can you find faith in the earth? It is all right to have faith in heaven, where there is no conflict, where there is no battle, where Satan has no power, but in this world, where he has so much at his command, can you find faith there that endures?

Mark you, the point of emphasis is the *endurance* of faith. You can have faith for five minutes, but the faith that endures is the point. You have seen the endurance of Job, and the end of the Lord. That is the challenge in this universe, and God has been foreshadowing this thing all the way through history.

Then there was Joseph. Through dungeon days, and years; rejection, misrepresentation, slander, forgetting, humiliating, degrading, everything; and where is God in all this? Where are those visions, and where is the Lord? There is no sign of the Lord. Joseph endured in faith.

Then you come to Mordechai. Where is God for His people?

The Lord Jesus suffered humiliation, rejection, every kind of ignominy, having started with a heavenly assurance, "*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*" And now look, on every side, from every quarter, there is evidence (if you like to call it that) that God has not espoused His cause: "*If thou be the Son*". You see the question in days of difficulty and trial. The thing which you and I may believe with all our hearts, and have no difficulty in believing, at times, according to circumstances become sometimes the things about which we have the greatest difficulty to believe. The Lord's people having been brought into that position, that for which He has given Himself, His delight, His joy, "Hast thou considered there is none like them in the universe"? God has something do in this universe yet, because Satan is still in existence. His time is settled, the victory over him is secured, but there is still something to be done, and this is not something that can be done from the outside. God cannot take hold of Satan in an outward way (if I may put it this way) as I would a book and cast it down. This is a moral matter; there has to be the ending of a moral condition in man that Satan has brought about by man's consent, and God is going to undo the work of Satan by man's consent, just as Satan did it by man's consent.

The call of the Lord, in effect, to a Job is this, Will you let me undo Satan in you, by you? Will you let Me destroy the whole power of that kingdom by you? He never put it that way, but that is what it meant.

Take it over to the Lord Jesus. It was God undoing a universe of iniquity in one Man by His spiritual experience. And now, not to add to His work, but as in fellowship with Him in this great thing, to share it, He calls a people, His church. Oh, how failing the church is! How the church has lost the significance of its very vocation! And because that is so He has to speak to the church and get those in the church who will serve Him in this, and

take them through a spiritual experience in which and by which the power of Satan unto death is being undone, the man-child caught up to the throne, and the dragon looking on disconcerted, knowing that no longer has he any power there, but that that means more than something in itself, it means something for these others. So he attacks them.

But the fact that there is a man-child, a corporate company in the throne, in whom God has effected the ending of the dragon's power, is a great service to God. We may not understand this, we may not be able to explain it. I am not trying to explain why it should be so, but there it is. From Genesis to Revelation the thing is before you, that God is out to undo in this universe all the work of Satan, which is the work of death, and that by foreshadowing He has shown us how He will do so. And then the Word makes clear that after Christ He brings in the church to celebrate His victory; but that is not objective, it is by what the church goes through.

Paul is a type of this matter, and 2 Corinthians 2:14 explains it: *"Thanks be unto God who always leads me on from place to place in the train of his triumph, to celebrate His victory over the enemies of Christ"* (Conybeare). It did not mean that people simply walked into this place and into that, and held a glorious celebration of the victory of Christ. It meant He went into hell, into the lion's den, he went into the place of death, and went through a deep experience: *"I fought with lions at Ephesus."* He went almost into the jaws of the lion, but the lion was overpowered. In every place the enemy was defeated. How? Not in an objective way, but by the spirit of faith in that man, enduring in faith. *"That which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God."*

You see what God is seeking to do, how He reaches His end. What we go through is with a universal significance; it is serving God. Our sufferings are service to God in His great eternal intention to destroy in this universe the power of Satan. *"To you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe ... but to suffer..." It is given.* Oh, we say, Blessed gift! to receive forgiveness. We receive that with open arms. To receive fellowship with the Lord! we embrace it with all our heart. To receive suffering —? But from the Lord's standpoint that is just as valuable, it is something for Him. It finds us out as to whether we want salvation for ourselves or for the Lord's sake.

This will lead you much further than I can go at this time. I have only just opened to you a little door through which to see this tremendous thing. What is the overcomer? What is it God is seeking to get in the church — if He cannot get the whole church there now, to have in the church an instrument now? Because of the endurance of faith, in circumstances which seem to say that God is not standing by, God is not vindicating, God is giving no evidence to the world that they are in any special relationship to Himself, with any special value to Him. If you like you can read it as it appears; there is nothing; — rather, if you like you can take the position of Job's friends, and find plenty of reason for taking that position. There was any amount of justification for them all to come and say, The Lord is not with you, He is against you, look at this, and look at that! Ah yes, but that suffering is the call for the endurance of faith unto something — the end of the Lord.

The Lord write into our hearts His own word, *"To him that overcometh ..."*. We can put it this way, To him that overcometh will I give that which I give to those who serve My highest purpose.