

BE AN OVERCOMER!



Scripture:

Psalm 16

¹Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. ²I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.”
³As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight.
⁴Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips.
⁵The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. ⁶The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.
⁷I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. ⁸I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.
⁹Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. ¹⁰For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit.
¹¹You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

John 20:19-31

¹⁹When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁰After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. ²¹Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” ²²When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”
²⁴But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. ²⁵So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”
²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” ²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”
³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



BE AN OVERCOMER!

The disciple, Thomas, is known forever as a doubter. Sometimes he is called “*Doubting Thomas*.” But what we don’t give him much credit for in history is that he overcame his doubt and declared, “My Lord and my God!” We should call him “Thomas the Overcomer,” because he overcame his doubt with the help of Jesus Christ’s presence and understanding love.

Thomas overcame his doubt through his honest encounter with Jesus, who helped him overcome by being compassionate and understanding about Thomas’s concerns. Did you notice how Jesus never once shames Thomas even though he points out that those who believe without having to see are blessed? As a result of Christ’s reassurance, Thomas bravely went out from Jerusalem in Israel and spread Christianity three-thousand miles, all the way into India where he died.

HAS JESUS HELPED YOU?

Jesus helps many people overcome doubts, fears, worries, and troubles. I’m sure we have many stories in our church family here that people can share about how Jesus has helped you overcome struggles in your own life. Just with a show of hands, if you have overcome a problem or an issue in your life thanks to your faith in Jesus, raise your hand.

That is how we live the resurrected life of Christ in our own lives. We rise despite what throws us down. We overcome the dark times, the losses, the disappointments, and the betrayals.

EASTER PEOPLE

We are Easter people who hold on to hope for a good future in the hands of God because we understand that the resurrection demonstrated how God defeated and was victorious over death. We are Easter people who, despite the suffering we may endure, know that Jesus endured even greater suffering on our behalf.

We are Easter people who trust that we can overcome the worst that life can fling at us because Jesus showed us how. Jesus rose in the midst of chaos and evil. He breathed the Holy Spirit on his disciples then, and also on us today, to empower us to overcome trials and tribulations here on earth. And Jesus reassures us that when our time comes to transition to the next stage of eternal life, he will be there with us to the end of the age because nothing can separate us from the love of God! Nothing!

Because we are what people? (Easter people!) God will hold us fast, never forsake us and provide abundant life in eternal life.

And when we can trust in these things and live as Easter people with Christ’s peace that surpasses all understanding dwelling within our souls, then we complete our mission here on earth. We demonstrate God’s love in our actions by being instruments of peace and hope that is contagious and spreads to everything we touch. (That is your purpose for living and breathing.)

Yet, it is easy to fall back into doubt. When we begin to lose our high functioning abilities, when our brains don’t work exactly as efficiently as they used to, when we start losing friends and loved ones as we age, it is easy to get caught up in fear and live anxious lives rather than peaceful ones.

How do we overcome that fear and doubt like Thomas did?

To overcome these temptations to doubt and retreat from God’s purpose in your life, First, pray every day to remind you that God is with you. Then get involved helping others so you don’t dwell on your own worries, but take on the task of helping others overcome their struggles. And last you surround yourself with reminders that you are stronger than you think you are because if others can be overcomers, then you, too, can be an overcomer.

MANDISA

That was Mandisa’s motivation for writing the album with the title song: “*Overcomer*.” She wanted to inspire people and empower others to lean on God to overcome their struggles.

Do you know Mandisa? She writes very uplifting songs even though her own life has not been easy. I first heard about her when I found the album and song called, “*Stronger*.”

But Mandisa first became famous as a contestant on the fifth season of American Idol where she endured ridicule from Simon Cowell about her weight. When she made it to the finals she

showed her own “overcomer” resilience and confronted Simon Cowell with this statement: “What I want to say to you is that, yes, you hurt me and I cried and it was painful, it really was. But I want you to know that I’ve forgiven you and that you don’t need someone to apologize in order to forgive somebody. I figure that if Jesus could die so that all of my wrongs could be forgiven, I can certainly extend that same grace to you.” Simon replied, “I’m sorry.”

Eight years later after many Grammy nominations Mandisa won the Grammy award for the Best Contemporary Christian Music Album for her album titled: “*Overcomer*.” Her title song also won Best Contemporary Christian Music Song

Mandisa was inspired by a friend’s cancer journey to write the song “*Overcomer*.” For the video she included Congresswoman Gabby Giffords, Astronaut Mark Kelly, Gold Medal Ice Skater Scott Hamilton, TV star Robin Roberts and Biggest Loser runner-up Hannah Curlee. When Mandisa was asked why she chose these role models for her video, she said, “We chose each of them because they were examples of overcomers in very public battles. It is hard to imagine anyone more appropriate than the amazing people in her video. They have all fought, and continue to fight victoriously.

Mandisa said she prays that sharing their inspirational stories throughout the video will leave people saying, ‘If they can do it, so can I!’”

WAITING AND HOPING

Remember, if Thomas had been an unbeliever, or let his doubt get the best of him, he would not have been sitting up with the rest of the disciples, hoping Jesus might show up again. But he was there, waiting, wanting to see evidence that Jesus had been resurrected.

Waiting and hoping aren’t the actions of an unbeliever. That’s someone who’s still engaged with the push and pull of his faith, who’s willing to struggle and wait and watch and hope despite his doubts. A modern day doubter like Thomas is Lee Stroble.

LEE STROBLE

Lee Stroble is an award winning journalist and Yale educated lawyer who decided to investigate his doubts about faith in Jesus Christ. A self proclaimed Atheist, Lee interviewed many scientists

and leaders around the world about evidence for their faith that he put in the book titled: *The Case for Christ* which is now a movie playing in theatres. I saw it at the Roxy last Friday night. It’s a very interesting true story and well acted!

The book and movie are about Lee Strobel’s wife Leslie and her newfound faith in Jesus that compelled Lee to try to disprove the claims of Christianity using his Yale Law background and investigative reporting skills. He pits his resolute atheism against her growing faith.

DR. WILLIAM CRAIG

One of the people Strobel interviewed for his book was Dr. William Craig, who has a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Birmingham England and in theology from the University of Munich. Dr. Craig wrote many theological books about the historical evidence and witness accounts of the resurrection including a book titled: *Reasonable Faith: Knowing the Truth about the Resurrection*.

When describing how he came to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, Craig said, “...the miraculous would be absurd if you did not believe that God existed. But if there is a Creator who designed and brought the universe into being, who sustains its existence moment by moment, who is responsible for the very natural laws that govern the physical world, then certainly, it’s rational to believe that the miraculous is possible.”

Then he talked about probability versus improbability. As a scientist, Dr. Craig said that....

“Any improbability that you might think resides in the resurrection of Jesus is counterbalanced by the improbability of the empty tomb, his many post-resurrection appearances, and the sudden change in the disciples’ behavior after Jesus appeared to them. ... None of these things would have taken place if there were no such event as the resurrection of Jesus,” which is historically clearly documented, and not just in the Bible.

It was the strong evidence of Jesus risen from the dead that inspired the disciples to transform

from scared confused ex-followers of the crucified Christ to becoming fervent preachers of the Good News who were willing to travel thousands of miles and eventually die in order to tell their testimonies of belief in Jesus.

I recommend you all go see the movie or read Lee Strobel's books. They are very well researched about how his own skepticism turned to deep faith. As a result of his effort to disprove the resurrection, he was led to faith in Christ, Lee Strobel left the Chicago Tribune and world of journalism to attend seminary and become a pastor. He has written twenty-three books and contributed to three movie screenplays. The resurrection of Jesus changed his life and now he describes his life as: "Seeking Truth. Finding God. Telling everyone."

Now as Easter people, it is up to each one of us to live the resurrected life that Jesus wants us to live and be like Lee and the disciple Thomas, and Jesus, of course.

All of us can be overcomers. Let the Church of the Roses help you be one, too.

Benediction:

My friend, Jane Perdue wrote a poem about the resurrection. Here are just two stanzas of it that I want to leave with you today:

**We're the ones you came to save.
Lord, we trust that you will guide us
When each day brings grief and stress;
Living Christ, you walk beside us
Through this shadowed wilderness.
You, O Christ, are resurrection
When an illness takes its toll,
For the promise that you give us
Is that one day we'll be whole.
So we need not fear the future
When the way seems hard to bear;
You will gently guide and lead us
To the place that you prepare.**

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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**You, O Christ, are resurrection
When a loved one's memories fade,
For you never will forget us—**