

Title: “Overcome”

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Matthew 17:6-8

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Service Readings: Exodus 24:8-18, 2 Pet 1:16-21, Matt 17:1-9

Overshadowed by the voice of God, Peter was brought to his knees. The realization of our sin causes us to do the same, but Jesus comes to us at His table and offers us peace. He says “Rise, and have no fear.”

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

If you ever go skydiving, it is all fun and games until your parachute doesn't open. And if that happens you come, quite literally, face to face with the reality of your impending death as you watch the ground rush up to meet you. Your highest high becomes, in a sense, your lowest low. Fear envelops you because you know that something quite bigger than you is about to kill you.

I wonder Peter felt that same level of fear when God began speaking from the cloud. Until that point, he was, quite literally, having a mountaintop experience. Jesus knew the famous Moses and Elijah. And Peter knew Jesus. So that made Peter part of this “in crowd.” He must have been overjoyed to think that his teacher, the one he recently confessed as the Christ, the son of the living God, considered him cool enough to be there with them. But when God spoke in that thunderous voice, it brought Peter to his knees. His mountaintop experience came crashing down so immediately that it caused him to fall to the ground in great fear. In that moment was the realization that God was God and he was not. In that moment was the realization that he was unworthy to stand before God, to be in his presence. In that moment was the realization that there was simply nothing that Peter could do to improve his standing. It was simply too late to take back the sins that he had committed, too late to reconcile with his neighbor, too late for anything. God was there and, at least in Peter's mind, was preparing to hand out judgement. Peter knew the God from the Old Testament scriptures and so he probably assumed the worst. Now there is a lot to unpack here and a lot to correct. For Peter had forgotten a few things in those moments, but let's set him aside for now and talk about you and me.

Now, you may have never gone skydiving with a defective parachute but you can imagine the fear that you would experience in that situation. And I think that it is a good analogy for our own daily walk on Earth. Have you ever been living your life, maybe even living your own mountaintop experience when out of nowhere you feel the crushing weight of a sin? Or maybe, probably more realistically, is there a weight that you have been carrying with you for many, many years? A guilt taking residence deep inside of you that grows ever so slowly as the years progress? If you have, then you can see yourself in Peter's shoes, not just with fear but with a misunderstanding of who Jesus is and what he has come to accomplish.

You see, we live in a fallen world, and we are fallen people. And that means that we all will fall as we journey throughout this life. As Paul says, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." We sin. We repent. We sin again. But we cling to the promise of forgiveness that Jesus offers us... at least that is what we are *supposed* to do; that is what Peter was supposed to do. And if he had done that, he would not have feared being in God's presence. But he failed to lean on Jesus, to understand the fullness of what he had just confessed about him. He had spoken with his lips but it seems that he didn't believe it in his heart! And so in his mind he was there on the mountain, standing alone and at the mercy of an all-powerful, all mighty God. And when he came face to face with him, he came face to face with the reality that there is something that is much bigger than him, much more powerful, and much more righteous and that there is nothing... simply nothing that he can do to control the outcome of any judgement that is destined his way. He is completely at the mercy of his creator. And he falls to his face because he knows that the punishment he believes is about to be handed down is a punishment that he clearly deserves. And this is all true. He does deserve what he believes he is about to receive. But he forgets that he also believes in Jesus. He fails to fully understand that although he lives in a fallen world, Jesus has come to conquer it, on his behalf, so that he can stand righteous before God and receive the judgement that Jesus deserves, not the judgement that he does.

And we, of course do the same thing. We fail to remember in our times of distress, that Jesus has already conquered our sin, suffered on the cross for it, and received the full weight of judgement. He did it so that in these moments of despair we can live in the comfort and assurance that our sins have been forgiven and blotted out. A new covenant, a new promise, has been made in Jesus. The father has promised to forgive the sins of those who place their faith in his son. God promises to be merciful towards our iniquities and remember our sins no longer.

So if Peter failed to remember Jesus in that moment, and if we do the same, what is the solution? Peter found his solution on the mountaintop, standing with Moses and Elijah and we find ours at the table. Different locations, but the exact same solution. Peter had known that the answer was Jesus. He had even testified to this fact. And yet, in that moment of fear he released his grip on Jesus and clung to himself. But in doing this he let go of the only one who *could* save him. And in doing that, he sees himself at the feet of God, all alone and without any defense. What happens, next? Let's re-read this portion of Scripture. I'll start just before God speaks.

⁵ [Peter] was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son,^[a] with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear."

Jesus comes to Peter. That is what happens next. Jesus comes to Peter. He doesn't wait for Peter to realize that he has let go of him. Instead, he comes to Peter and touches him. Physically touches him. This detail is important. Jesus reached out in bodily form and touches Peter. He then says, "Rise, and have no fear." You see, Peter had the right fear of God – he who is bigger and more powerful than he can ever imagine, but he had the wrong understanding of Jesus. God revealed his bigness, his power and might, but not in the words from the cloud. Instead, he did it in the condescension of Jesus. All of God's power and might is contained within Jesus. And that is who God sent to Peter to comfort and reassure him that God is pleased with him because he has placed

his faith in Jesus. And Jesus son reached out to Peter, placed his hand on him, and comforted and reassured him. "Rise, and have no fear." This is what he said for he knew that in him Peter would not find death but instead find everlasting life. It is no wonder, then that Peter releases his fear and looks up into the eyes of Jesus. And is it any wonder that all he sees is Jesus, alone? For what else is needed but him who offers comfort and reassurance?

Jesus comes to us as well. He tells us that he is with us to the end of the age, but we don't have to come to him. Instead, he comes to us at his table. Now, it may look like simple bread and wine, just as Jesus may have looked like a simple man to Peter, but just as Peter experienced the fullness of God in Jesus, we too experience that same fullness. We may not see Jesus in physical form, but we see him in the bread and the wine. When you come to the table receive Jesus in bodily form and he reaches out to you just as he did for Peter. And we, too hear him say, "Rise, and have no fear." And when we hear that we too can look up from the table and towards the one who offers us comfort and reassurance. We can look up and know that it is Jesus, and him alone, that brings us peace.

What is going on in your life where you need him to come to you? He is here and he offers himself to you. He brings with him comfort and reassurance and he does it through the forgiveness of your sins. Come to his table.

Please pray with me.

Lord God, you are all mighty and all powerful. But you also are all loving and have sent your son to be our savior. Through him you have created a way to everlasting life and we thank you for that. Amen.