

Overcoming The World

How do you overcome the world? By conquering its strongholds, breaking the glass ceilings, and becoming thrice Lord Mayor Of London? Hardly. The world, as we know it, would still be intact, and proceeding as before, if you did that. All that would have happened would be that you would have been absorbed into its processes, given your life to support it and its structures, accepted its shilling. No doubt it would give you a tomb with the rich and an obituary in *The Times*, and you would, as someone said, *have your reward*. Victory like that isn't very remarkable. You could as easily say, *the world overcame me*.

When I Am Lifted Up....

Jesus spoke ironically of the exaltation he expected, which would be the time when he would *draw all people to himself*. But this would not be an honourable raising to nobility, as when the Queen says, *Arise, Sir Richard*, but the raising of Jesus on a gibbet to die a criminal's death. This way of "overcoming the world" is certainly novel, not to say controversial; many of those present said, *the world has overcome him; he has found his master*. The reason for this is that we human beings have made do with an image of prosperity that is pathetically short of truth – a very restricted idea concerned with a big house, lots of money, and the illusion of freedom. There are so many things you might want to do, which would lose you such prosperity; in fact, you can only keep it if you play the world's game. The game is concerned with the reining-in of real humanity, accepting that market values set the price of human life, that the ultimate fact is a till-roll. Pilate knew this, Caiaphas knew it, and in his little way Judas knew it. Jesus would not play this game, and willingly lost what little he had of a stake in it: his execution was humanity's verdict. But the resurrection is God's response, contradicting humanity's verdict. It is as if he picks up the ruined body of Jesus and repeats: *This is my Son, the Beloved!* Why did he stay silent on Calvary, why let his beloved Son die crying *Why have you abandoned me?* It can only be to confirm that "overcoming the world" is not beating it at its own game, but *accepting* the loss of everything it has to offer, and then

instead, in return, inheriting true life as a loving gift from God.

Life In The Spirit

True life is something that God can give to those who ask him. It is a share in the true love between Jesus and the Father: we also call it the gift of the Holy Spirit. If you receive this gift, it means that you no longer restrict your view of happiness to the things and relationships you can enjoy when the world "loves" you. Instead, you become open to the gift of *divine* happiness, *divine* relationship, *eternal* life, *unlimited* love. We are all made for this. The question is only whether we are ready to ask God for it – despite the fact that it costs us the loss of the limited wages the world has to offer. If we are hungry and thirsting for *divine* life, then the kind that is only earthly won't do. In our inability to play this earthly game, we attract the suspicion, contempt, and eventually the hatred of the world: Jesus promised this would be so. Now: how does it strike you as an option, to baptise a baby into life as Jesus lived it? Awesome! Could you put her name down the same day for private schooling, or start a portfolio of stocks and shares for her? Kind gifts: but if it didn't feel strange, I'd say something was missing. To go for the prizes of this world whilst accepting in faith the way of the Crucified One, is a huge tension. Of course, God, in his mercy, knows how to lead us from all of our dead ends, and to turn them to our good; but no-one who is baptised should ever be surprised if God the Father's divine love and care, like all his ways, should be mysteriously unlike the world's.
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