

**Overcoming Evil With Good**  
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We are in a sermon series on hearing God called The Voice. I had a sermon all prepared for today on that and then I heard the Voice! I felt the Lord leading me to preach something different in light of all that's gone on this week in our nation and especially in Dallas.

So I'm preaching a message entitled Overcoming Evil With Good. My text is Romans 12:21

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

My heart is broken over the condition of our nation.

My heart is broken over racism and division.

My heart is broken for the families of the police officers who were killed and for the families of African American men who were killed.

There is much pain and anger and hate in our nation right now. And it's our job as the church to address that.

It's our job to pray, intercede and do spiritual warfare.

It's our job to be light in darkness!

It's our job to speak the truth in love.

It's our job to be ministers of reconciliation.

Here's the amazing thing to me. I grew up in the time when there was segregation of races in America. I've seen the changes that have happened in the last 50 years.

You would think that in the year 2016 with the first African American president that we would be past all this. But we're not. In fact, these days the issue of race is in the news more than ever. It seems like we are going backwards rather than forwards.

When I grew up, there was individual racism and institutional racism.

That meant there was a white area of town and a black area.

There were white schools and black schools.

There were separate drinking fountains and restrooms.

Black people could not sit with white people a movie or restaurant.

Black people had to sit in the back of the bus.

This was wrong, unjust and evil. African Americans had to fight for their rights as human beings and fellow Americans.

In that struggle most were cursed, many were beaten and some were killed.

Yet out of that movement for Civil Rights came a voice crying in the wilderness – a voice saying we will fight and we will overcome – but we will not fight with the power of violence – we will fight with the power of love because hate is too great a burden to bear.

That voice was Dr. Martin Luther King's. He was raised in segregation. He attended segregated schools. He drank water from "colored only" fountains. He sat in the back of buses. He was excluded from "whites only" public places.

Yet, he faced hatred and racism with peace and love. He was spit on and beaten and eventually killed. He was called every foul name in the book. He received thousands of death threats. His home and church were shot at and bombed. His church was bombed and innocent children were killed. He was beaten with billy clubs, hit in the head with bricks, punched in the face and stabbed in the chest. Despite all these personal attacks, he did no harm and he never returned violence with violence. This is how you overcome evil with good!

Dr. King understood the truth of Romans 12:19-21

*Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

The evil of segregation in the United States was overcome by good. It was overcome by those who stood up for God's truth and who did it in a godly way. They overcame with the power of love and forgiveness.

You never overcome evil with evil. As Dr. King said, "Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

Violence only results in death and destruction. That shows that it has demonic origins. Jesus said this about the devil in John 10:10

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

So - if our actions – no matter how noble our intentions – result in death and destruction – they are not of God – who wants to give life.

By the way – you might think you would never kill anyone – but the Bible says that death and life are in the power of the tongue. You may never physically kill someone – but how many have you wounded with your words?

We will never overcome evil with demonic-inspired actions! We can't try to make people pay when they wrong us. How do we try to make people pay? We either pull away from each other or we strike back. We hide or we wage an all-out war. Both responses are wrong and they don't accomplish anything good.

James 1:19-20 says

*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteousness that God desires.*

If you think you are going to accomplish anything good with your anger, you are wrong!

Yes – there is a place for righteous anger.

Yes – there is a place for peaceful protest.

Yes – there is a place for civil disobedience like Rosa Parks refusing to sit in the back of the bus.

But when anger turns to violence – nothing good will ever come of that!

Not only will nothing good come to our nation or to other people – but also nothing good will come to the one who turns to violence! Proverbs 10:6 says

*Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked.*

Proverbs 21:7 says

*The violence of the wicked will destroy them, because they refuse to do justice.*

Violent people end up destroyed – and they destroy themselves! But righteous people who do things God's ways are blessed by God! We choose the place of blessing! We choose to overcome evil with good! Romans 13:10 says

*Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

1 Corinthians 13:5 says

*Love is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.*

In other words, love forgives. How long is the record book you're keeping? Thank God that He doesn't hold everything against us. Psalm 130:3-4 says

*If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness.*

Since God forgives, so must we. Forgiving does not mean we have no memory of being wronged, but we choose not to hold it against the person anymore. So, keep

the books clear with everyone - those you have wronged and those who have wronged you.

When Dr. King was a student at Crozer Theological Seminary, a white student pulled a gun on him and threatened to kill him. The student eventually backed down. Dr. King refused to press charges and he and the white student eventually became friends.

In 1956, Dr. King's house in Montgomery AL was bombed. A large crowd gathered threatening to retaliate with violence, but Dr. King convinced them to respond with love and forgiveness. He said, "We cannot solve this problem through retaliatory violence. We must love our white brothers, no matter what they do to us. We must make them know that we love them. This is what we must live by. We must meet hate with love."

In 1958, Dr. King was at a book signing in Harlem when a woman stabbed him in the chest with a 7-inch letter opener. The blade came within a fraction of an inch from his heart. The doctors' said if he had sneezed, he would have died. Dr. King remained calm as his assailant was subdued. He sat there with the blade sticking out of his chest. He had to go through emergency surgery to remove the blade. Yet he did not press charges against the woman. He said, "Don't prosecute her; get her healed."

OK – I just gave you three examples of a man who was threatened, bombed and stabbed, yet he did not try to get revenge. He understood the radical power of love and forgiveness. Despite all these attacks, Dr. King said these words:

"Forgiveness is not an occasional habit, it is a permanent attitude. We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love."

There is power in love and there is power in forgiveness. If you want the power of God in your life and that means you must do things God's way. That includes forgiving others who wrong you.

Now I'm speaking to everyone today. We've all been wronged. We've all been hurt. We've all been called names. We've all been betrayed. That's why all of us need the supernatural power of forgiveness.

When we don't forgive, we are usually trying to hurt another person. But we are actually hurting ourselves.

So, we really need to understand what forgiveness is. Forgiveness does not mean ignoring your hurt or saying the other person was right. Forgiveness does not mean you have to trust an untrustworthy person. Forgiveness does mean to erase, to give up resentment, to wipe the slate clean, to release from a debt, to cancel punishment.

In other words, we must not hold anything against others.  
 Forgiveness is the highest, most radical expression of love.  
 Forgiveness is giving up the right to hurt you for hurting me.  
 Forgiveness is giving up the right to make you pay for what you did to me.

One reason people don't want to forgive is that they want the person who wronged them to pay for it. They say, "If I don't make them pay, who will make them pay?" Well – God will.

One of the most amazing examples of forgiveness I have ever seen occurred in a courtroom in Charleston, South Carolina in June, 2015 when Dylann Roof had to face the judge to make his plea. Just a few days earlier he walked into the Emanuel AME Church and shot and killed nine people.

Two days later - at his arraignment – the families his victims were allowed to address him in court and what they did shocked everyone! They forgave him! One family member said – "I acknowledge that I am very angry. But one thing that DePayne always enjoined in our family ... is she taught me that we are the family that love built. We have no room for hating, so we have to forgive. I pray God on your soul."

As Christians, we are not called to revenge but to reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18 says

*God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.*

The key to forgiveness and the key to overcoming evil with good is remembering how much God loves us and how much He has forgiven us. Jesus has forgiven us such huge debts, so how can we hold anything against each other? Instead, Ephesians 4:32 tells us:

*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

How has Christ forgiven us?

Freely you have received forgiveness – so freely forgive.

You've been forgiven repeatedly, so forgive repeatedly. Luke 17:3-4 says

*If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him.*

Some of you have had terrible wrongs done to you. Someone may have betrayed you – hurt you – cheated on you – abandoned you – divorced you – abused you – ignored you – rejected you – lied to you.

Those things hurt.

And you've got a choice today.  
 You can choose to not forgive. You can hang on to the offense.  
 But if you do, you will be choosing to stay in pain.  
 You will be choosing to give the power to the person who hurt you.  
 You will also give the advantage to Satan.

Or – you can choose to overcome evil with good by choosing to forgive.  
 Forgiveness does not change the past, but it will change the future and it will change you!

You see, Jesus did not say, “Love people when they're loveable. Love them when you feel like it. Love them when it's convenient. Love them as long as they are meeting your needs.” Jesus allows no excuses. He says, “Whatever they do to you, you love them anyway!” That's the radical way He loved.

Think of the day he was crucified. He was beaten, mocked, a crown of thorns was pressed into His head and He was nailed to a cross. He did nothing to deserve any of this. Yet He chose to love His accusers anyway. He chose to love those who crucified Him anyway. He chose to forgive them anyway. In fact, right in the middle of being nailed to the cross, He cried out “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

He didn't return evil for evil, but He silently turned the other cheek. How did He do that? 1 Peter 2:23 says

*When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats. Instead, He entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly.*

Jesus overcome evil with good because He entrusted Himself to Father God – the judge of all men.

I'm telling you right now, none of us can do this in our own strength. We all fall short in loving others. But we can no longer excuse it. We need to cry out to God to change our hearts and ask for God to love the unlovable through us and forgive the unforgivable through us! That is how we overcome evil with good!

When we are hurt – it is natural to want to hurt back. But Jesus taught that we should not respond according to our natural instincts. We should respond in the opposite spirit.

This is what it means to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus! And you can't do any of that in your own strength. The only way to do any of these things is to die to self and be filled with the Spirit.

And it's only when we deal with what's in our own hearts that we can make an impact on our world.

If the church does not face the problem of racism by dealing with it within the church and taking authority over the spirit of racism, ethnic conflict will keep spiraling out of control. The longer we wait to confront this stronghold and shut the door to it, the more powerful it will be!

How do we shut the door to racism? We overcome – not by man’s kind of violence – but with God’s kind of violence. That’s found in Matthew 11:12 where Jesus said:

*And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.*

Some people misunderstand what this verse means. We can gain better understanding by looking at different translations like the NIV which says –

*...the kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it.*

God is telling us how His kingdom is advanced. It doesn’t just happen. Some people think – “If God is in something, it will just happen.” No it won’t! Faith without works is dead. Advancing God’s kingdom takes work and requires force because Satan works and uses force to hold it back.

That’s why we must get violent with the enemy. We must war! Fight! Overcome! But we must always remember that our enemy is not other people! Our enemy is not black or white. Our enemy is not the police force. Our real enemy is not any person at all!

Ephesians 6:12

*For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.*

So let’s get violent! Let’s go to war - But let’s fight our true enemy!

We can pray. We can do spiritual warfare and bind racism and loose reconciliation – but always remember this principle: we overcome by acting in the opposite spirit. Romans 12:21 says

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

You overcome evil with good by:

- Loving those who are hateful
- Forgiving those who wrong you

- Doing what's right when others do wrong
- Blessing those who curse you
- Giving to those who withhold from you
- Building up what others tear down
- Uniting what others divide
- Healing what others hurt
- Dying to yourself so that others receive life

That's how you overcome evil with good!

So - let's pray and do spiritual warfare!

Let's resist the spirits of racism and hatred and violence and death.

Let's overcome that evil with love and acceptance and peace and life!