

Faith that Overcomes the World

1 John 5:1-21

Key Verse: 5:4-5, "...for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

We have now come to the concluding chapter of 1 John. What have we learned and received? John declared, "God is light," and, "God is love." John talked about false Christs and false teachers, as well as true born-again believers in Jesus, and what they are like. True believers do not continue in a life of sin. Rather, they walk in the light, confessing their sins. Real Christians do not live in hatred for their brothers and sisters. Rather, they love their brothers and sisters, because they know and live in God's love for them. Born again believers delight in God's commands, rather than delighting in wickedness and sin. Above all, true believers believe in Jesus and live for him, not for their lust or pride.

In this concluding chapter, John declares that faith in Jesus Christ is the victory that overcomes the world. Let's think about what he means by this in 2 parts: First, faith in Jesus is the victory (1-12), and Second, three Christian Assurances (13-21).

I. Faith in Jesus is the Victory (1-12)

Look at verse 1. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well." The two repeated themes in this short letter or sermon are—faith and love, and these two concepts and realities are inseparable in true Christian faith and life.

This is important. Sometimes Christians, including ourselves, over-emphasize faith, to the exclusion of love. We could say this is big-headed Christianity, or big-mouth Christianity, which emphasizes what you know or what you say as a Christian. And, it is important what you know and what you say as a Christian. But if our Christianity stops there, it is weak and powerless faith. Rather, John has already said that we are to love, not with words, but with actions and in truth.

Sometimes people only talk about love, without faith. They say things like, "Isn't the main point of Christianity or all religions to love? Therefore, why do you need faith in Jesus? Why not just preach and practice love?" This sounds reasonable to our ears and to our common sense. Didn't Jesus come mainly to teach us to love one another, and to get along in this crazy world? Like the Beatles' song, "All we need is love. Love is all we need." The Beatles' generation of the 1960s, sometimes dubbed the hippie generation preached a lot about love and peace. Their motto was, "Make Love, Not War." Sounds good, right? But there was no message of repentance or faith in Jesus or obedience to the will of God. The movement encouraged throwing off moral restraint in favor of free sex, drugs and dabbling in non Judeo-Christian religions (these is not my words but right out of <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hippie>). So, their message of peace and love led largely to irresponsible and immoral lifestyles. Or, as another example, adherents to others religions or to no religion at all, accuse Christians of being closed-minded or narrow or elitist, accusing Christians of claiming to have a monopoly on the truth. They discard faith in Jesus and his claims and emphasize only his teachings. But that's not fair to Jesus and the New Testament writers. One cannot dissect Jesus' claims and life from his teachings. One early American President cut and pasted his own Bible to throw out the parts of the Bible he didn't like or agree with to keep those parts that he liked. So he made a Jesus of his own liking and a Bible that didn't challenge his life or thinking.

Apostle John makes it clear that faith in Jesus and real love for God and for people go hand in hand. They cannot be separated. What does he say we must believe about Jesus? Here in verse 1 he says that an identifying mark of a true born-again believer in Jesus is that they believe that Jesus is the Christ, that is, the promised Messiah who fulfilled all of God's promises in the Old Testament books. Jesus is the

promised Messiah who came save the world. Jesus is the Son of God whose blood was shed to take away our sins, the sins of all who trust in him, love him and obey him. John 1:12 bears this out. It says, "Yet to all who did receive him [that is, Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...born of God."

John also says, "everyone who loves the father, loves his child as well." This has two biblically sound meanings. For one, whoever loves God the Father will love his One and Only Son Jesus Christ as well." Why? Because God the Father loves his One and Only Son Jesus Christ more than all. In fact, they are eternally inseparable. Another meaning is that whoever loves God will love his children as well, that is, Christians. John could be saying this as a rebuke and red flag to those who had left the Christian fellowship and were hating Christians.

Look at verses 2-3, "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome..." Jesus taught his disciples, "Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me" (Jn 14:21). Jesus is not looking for lip-service Christians, who can talk the talk, but don't walk the walk. Jesus says that true love for him is to do what he says. It is to do what he wants. It is to pursue his heart and character. And when we fall or fail, we don't quit or make excuses or blame others. Rather, we confess our sins, and get back up and keep following Jesus.

When we try to improve ourselves, we feel greatly burdened. When we try to stop a habitual sin we feel helpless. Indeed we are—helpless. From where can we get help? Where does our help come from? It comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. It comes from the Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Good Shepherd. Listen: when we love something, we can spend much time, effort, energy, money, sweat, tears, and even blood for it. When we love someone, we are ready to sacrifice anything for them. We don't regard it as burdensome. It's our passion and joy. So do we love Jesus like this? That's a good question to ask ourselves. Because when we don't, some idol has crept in to our hearts and lives.

Since the pandemic lockdown, I've been a bit consumed by a silly word game on my phone. At first my competitors were my oldest brother in Nebraska, his girlfriend and his niece. So I saw it as a good way to connect with them. On Friday night, I received an email regarding an evangelists conference called Think Evangelism. I've often thought that God gifted me with a gift of evangelism, for it stirs my heart to see it and to do it. In light of this silly game, I realized how much time I was wasting on the game rather than investing my time in evangelism. Of course, morally, it wasn't grossly sinful. It's been a harmless diversion or distraction. Even my wife joked, "You love your word game more than me!" At this point in my message, I resigned in the middle of the games I had on my phone and uninstalled the game app. Actually, it freed me. Now, I am more free to seek and serve God as he calls me to. James 4:17 says, "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them."

Now look at verses 4-5, "for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

Of course, overcoming the world is much more than deleting a game app. It's overcoming sin on the inside and the devil and all the evils out there in the world. These two Bible verses echo a phrase: "overcome the world." Who overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. We remember Revelation 12:11 from our recent study: "They triumphed over him [that is, the evil one] by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." This is the victory that has overcome the world—because we trust in the One who overcame the devil, the world, and all its evil, by his obedient life, atoning death and triumphant resurrection from the dead—Jesus Christ our Lord! Praise and thanks be to Jesus, our eternal Victor!

Verses 6-8 speak about testimonies to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, testimonies from God. Mentioned here are the water, the blood and the Spirit. I'm not 100% sure what John is referring to, but I

know this: At the baptism of Jesus Christ, God the Father spoke directly from heaven saying, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Mt 3:17). This was God’s testimony regarding his Son. Whoever rejects it, is calling God a liar. The Spirit also identified Jesus at his baptism. The holy and righteous blood of Jesus shed on the cross testifies that our sins have been forgiven. God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son Jesus has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

II. Christian assurances (13-21)

These remaining verses give us Christians three assurances.

First of all, we have the assurance of eternal life. Look at verse 13, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.” Some scholars regard this as the main purpose of this letter. Christians can have the assurance that they have in Jesus Christ eternal life, without a doubt. The apostle said in 3 earlier verses “I write to you.”

In 2:1, “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”

In 2:14, “I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.”

And in 2:21, “I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth.”

Brothers and sisters, all the apostles sealed their testimonies with their blood, ready and willing to die to proclaim the salvation that is guaranteed in Jesus Christ our King and Savior. Christian tradition is that Apostle Andrew was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Patras, Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers, they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that, when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: “I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it.” Brothers and sisters in Christ, the apostles did not die for nothing. They died with full assurance that they were guaranteed, indeed that they already possessed, eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. This world is not our true hope or our true home. May we live and give our lives out of love for Jesus Christ.

Recently one young man connected to our church, died of a drug overdose. Another person was so affected by this that he began to preach the gospel diligently, prayerfully and earnestly. He has had phone Bible studies with friends and relatives every day, and several of them have prayed to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. I’m both inspired and challenged by his example. May we all be praying and proclaiming the salvation that we have and that is promised in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Secondly, we have the assurance that our prayers are heard and answered. Look at verses 14-15. “This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.”

A parent loves it when their child asks them for something. Especially, they love it when the child asks for something that is good for them, and that the parent’s really want to give them. For example, if a child says, “Daddy, could you buy me some classic novels so I can read them and grow in my inner character?”, I don’t think there is a parent on earth who wouldn’t get the child those books as quickly as possible. How much more does God give good gifts to those who ask him, even the Holy Spirit (Lk 11:13). Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have a great privilege to ask God our Father for anything according to his will. He hears us, and he answers all our prayers in Jesus’ name for his glory.

In verses 16-17 the apostle encourages us to pray intercessory prayers for those who stumble in sin. We should not judge them, but rather pray for them, just as we would want them not to judge us, but to pray for us. What we should not pray about, is sin that rejects the gospel of Jesus or blasphemes the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, we have the assurance that the evil one cannot harm us. In verses 18-19 the apostle says, "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them. We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one." The devil blinds the minds of unbelievers. The devil is like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. But the devil cannot harm those who trust in the Victor, the Triumphant One, Jesus Christ.

I want to share a story about this, connected to the key verses, from Kim Meeder's book, "Encountering Our Wild God." In chapter 16 titled "Wild Courage," she tells that her grandfather taught her how to face two wild animals in the woods if ever she encountered one. If she saw a bear, she was to immediately look down, turn a quarter shoulder, and walk slowly away. This communicates to a bear that you don't want to fight and you mean no harm. If she saw a lion, that would be rare, because lions almost always sneak up behind their prey and pounce on their necks and kill even before the victim is aware of it. So which one did she encounter? Well, she found some elk antlers, a prized possession to find in the wild. She was so happy for her rare find as she held one in each hand! But she felt God was trying to give her a message by finding these antlers, a message about a battle. She heard a voice say, "Look!" Then she saw it, to her left, crouching in full attack position, 10 feet away, to pounce, a mountain lion. She remembered that her grandfather taught her to stare the lion down and never back up but make herself as big and loud as possible. She realized she had no knife or stick. But she had something in each hand—an elk's antler. She raised the antlers above her head and hissed. The lion hissed back. She prayed, "Jesus what next?" She heard, "Attack!" as his command. She let out a scream and lunged at the lion. The lion did nothing, only crouched tighter. Then she felt the enemy speaking to her: "You're not really going to drive me out. You're going to keep ignoring me, pretending I don't exist. You're going to turn your back, and then I'm going to kill you!" In reply to the devil's whispers, holy anger arose in her. She said, "Liar!" and lunged at the lion again. This time the lion dodged her and leapt away down the mountain slope, in retreat. In that moment she realized: Jesus won, Satan lost. And she cried out: "Jesus, you reign! You're still mighty to save!"

What follows are some helpful insights she made from this event, which are relevant to me and to our church, which I'll paraphrase.

Jesus has never lost a battle. So those in Jesus also win. 1 John 5:4-5 says, "...for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." Children of God can win every battle when we stand on faith in Jesus. Jesus has already won every battle we will ever face. Now is the time to live as if we believe it. God wants us to do 3 things: love God, love each other, and share the hope of his redeeming love with those who are perishing. The devil says we're not doing it right, or our past is too shady, or we have failed too many times and will only fail again. If we think and act like the devil's prey, we will become the devil's prey. But if we know and believe and claim that Jesus has won the victory, we will live in his victory. This victory is not just head knowledge; it motivates us to action.

We must take back our families from the evil one. If sin has entered your home in any way, such as through social media or entertainment or other influences, parents, take it back, driving the enemy out to defend the lives Jesus died for. Our weapon of righteousness could be our laptop or cell phone, our kitchen or office, our vehicle, or simply walking our dog in the neighborhood. We all have the privilege and weapon of prayer. The devil is like a roaring lion. The Bible says to resist him, standing firm in the faith and he will flee. Here's the question: Is Jesus first in your heart or not? Will you drive out the devil in all his forms? How is your life example? Are you leading family and friends toward Jesus or away from him?

Jesus is calling us to follow Him and to rescue those who are lost and perishing. Jesus invites us to live in his victory. Will you live in the defeat of your effort in the flesh, or will you live in the victory of faith in Jesus Christ?

John closes his letter saying in verses 20-21, "We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Dear children, keep yourselves from idols." I like the way the Message version translates these last words. It says, "This Jesus is both True God and Real Life. Dear children, be on guard against all clever facsimiles." Jesus is the True God. Idols are all just clever facsimiles. The victory that overcomes the world is our faith and love in Jesus Christ our Lord.