

The victory that overcometh the world

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[0 : 00] Will you turn with me this morning to words which you will find in the portion of Scripture read in the first epistle of John, the fifth chapter, and we might read again at verse 4.

1 John chapter 5, reading at verse 4, For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

The word world is used in a variety of ways in Scripture.

For example, it is sometimes used to describe the physical world, the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the seas.

[1 : 14] When God says, as both in the 24th Psalm and in Psalm 50, the world is mine. That world which I created.

That world which came from mine own hand. The term is used of the physical world. But sometimes it can be used of mankind in general.

The people in the world as distinct from the physical world. We have such a passage, a well-known passage as, God so loved the world.

And of course he is referring to the people in the world. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. God so loved the world that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Or yet again, the word world can sometimes be used in Scripture to indicate the fashion of the world.

[2 : 25] Or a pattern of life, so to speak. Love not the world. Love not the things of the world. Love not the things of the world. Love not the pattern which the world sets in its behaviour.

Or again in Romans, be not conformed to the world. To the worldly pattern, which is something different from that pattern which God sets before us.

And we are warned not to be conformed to it. Or yet again, the term world may be used as describing the wicked as distinct from the godly.

The world. The world. The world. The world. The world. The world. The world. The world. The world. The world. And he is speaking of the ungodly world. The world.

Those who have no time and those who have no place for Christ. In their lives. Now in this verse before us. it is used as being this pattern of life, the fashion of the world. And overcoming the world is something which is very comprehensive, for it includes the resisting of the influence of worldly things, its temptations, its pleasures, its honors, its customs, the force of public opinion to mention but a few. Now this is not easy. It is a stupendous task and yet it is a task which we are called to embark upon, to give our attention to, to devote our energy to, to overcoming the world.

[4 : 18] And so of course it is natural that we might ask right at the beginning, how is this work to be accomplished? How is the world to be overcome? There are many people who have sought different avenues through which they hoped that they were going to achieve this goal. Let us examine a few of them this morning.

Not because they have brought them anywhere, but just in order to point out the futility of seeking to overcome the world in any but the one way which Christ himself has said before us. And first of all we notice that the world is not to be overcome by asceticism. By shutting oneself up in a watertight compartment so to speak, in the fond hope that we are going to get rid of sin and that we are going to have no contact with evil.

Needless to say it is a good thing and our Lord encouraged it. That there are times when it is good for the child of God, for the believer to get away from the world. You remember how Christ said to his disciples, come apart into a secret place for a while.

And it is good that we should get into the secret place in order that we may have communion with our God in the private sense. But that does not mean that this is to be something permanent where we are to shut ourselves away from the world altogether.

Because if this were so, the great command of the risen Christ could never be fulfilled. Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

[6 : 16] And the Lord himself, when he sets before us a pattern for life, was anything but an ascetic. We find him in his early days toiling at the carpenter's shop in Nazareth, thereby identifying honest toil with that which is spiritual and worthwhile.

And you remember how he was accused of eating with publicans and sinners. He went to a place where he was openly criticized by the scribes and the Pharisees who adopted this attitude, Stand thou back for I am holier than thou, and Christ would have none of it.

He had some message to proclaim to those who were in need. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. And we also find him joining the wedding party at Cana of Galilee, thereby identifying himself with a home where there was happiness, with a gathering where there was rejoicing.

And he brought blessing into that gathering. We are not going to fulfill our purpose by asceticism, by regarding ourselves as being so holy that we cannot mingle with our fellow men.

Remember, Christ prayed for his disciples, not that they would be taken out of the world because they had a duty to fulfill in it, but he prayed that they might be kept from the evil of this present world.

[8 : 04] And we too need that prayer. But then notice also that this goal is not to be achieved by philosophy or by learning.

There are those who say that they have intellectual difficulties, that they are not going to face up to the great challenge of the cross of Christ until they can understand things which are hard to understand.

And there are others who spend a great deal of their time in trying to study the scriptures, not for the sake of being helped by them, but sometimes to try and bring them into disrepute, to try to point out how false they are according to their standards.

And they regard themselves as being authorities, as being intellectually superior to their fellows.

And we must ever remember that it is all too true that men may be intellectually brilliant, but at the same time they may be morally depraved.

And we don't overcome the world merely by an intellectual exercise. Nor are we going to overcome the world through our own willpower.

[9 : 45] You know how it is a common practice at certain times of the year, particularly at the new year, for us to make good resolutions. Sometimes these resolutions may be made on the spot at the moment and haven't given the party much thought.

But there are people who sometimes are quite sincere when they make their resolutions. And they say things are going to be different. I'm going to overcome. I'm going to give up this. I'm going to follow this pattern of life.

And they're quite sincere. But they haven't gone along the road very far before they realize that they have failed. And of course their failure is due to the fact that they are looking for the source of energy which is going to accomplish that end.

They are looking for it within themselves. In their own strength. In their own power they're going to do it. And they're going to have the victory and they're going to give up those bad habits.

It's not so easy. We cannot overcome the world in our own strength. Not again.

[10 : 58] We cannot overcome the world as some people might make us believe by doing penance. Penance is something which appeals to the pride of man.

It's good to feel that I'm going to do something and then I will be given absolution and everything will be will be very good. We can never overcome the world in that way.

Nor are we, and this may surprise somebody until I explain it, nor are we going to overcome the world by worship or by the observance of sacraments.

Now let me say right at the beginning that I'm not suggesting for one moment that worship is not a good thing.

Nor am I suggesting for one moment that the observance of the sacrament is not a good thing.

They are means of grace.

[12:07] They can be used as means of grace. But what I am suggesting is that there are people who are depending upon worship or who are depending upon the sacraments for their salvation.

And we read in scripture that that is not so. You see, the attendance of the house of God can become something which is tremendously formal.

And while it can bring blessing in its train, it needs something else as I shall seek to explain later on. We must not be dependent merely on the outward show.

I suppose I would be true to say that there may be some people sitting here this morning and you had a long association with this church and with this congregation, or at least if not with this church, with other churches, and you can look back over the years and you have been, have a very good record of church attendance and that is all to the good.

But tell me, have you profited by it? Have you entered into the kingdom of God as a result of coming? Or are you just living in the perpetual hope that as a result of your good behavior, so to speak, in the sight of others, by coming so regular, that it's going to bring you some blessing at the end of the day?

[13:44] That is something which we must guard against. And of course the same thing applies to the sacrament, to the sacrament of baptism and to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Remember, you remember that even at the very first communion, when the Lord's Supper was instituted, there was a traitor present.

It's not the fact of our being at the communion table that's going to save our souls. It goes deeper, much deeper than that. Nor are we going to achieve this end, namely to overcome the world, by a general belief in God.

You know that the devils also believe. And because they believe, they tremble. We are not going to attain this goal by believing merely in the Jesus of history.

The one who suddenly came onto the historical page and crossed over it and left his mark as no other person has ever done. That is true, absolutely true.

[15:00] But it is not to an historical figure that we have to look. Our quest must take us further. We must go deeper than the Jesus of history.

And so we turn from the negative to the positive aspect. This is the victory that overcometh the world, says John.

Even your faith. And what does he mean? He means that we must have faith to believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

In other words, we must believe in his divinity. We must believe in his incarnation. We must believe in the sacrifice which he offered up once and for all.

And we must believe in the triumph of his resurrection. For these are the great foundations of the Christian hope.

[16:03] God's relationship to his people is that of a Savior. His relationship to his Father is that of a Son. The only begotten Son of God.

He is to God an equal. He is to us our Savior and our Lord. And we believe that we have a divine Savior.

Therefore an almighty and all-sufficient and an omnipresent Savior. But how, you say? How does belief in this doctrine help us to overcome the world?

Well, notice the words that go immediately beforehand. Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world.

Go back to the first verse. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.

[17:03] In other words, we cannot of ourselves grasp this great truth unless we are born by the regeneration of God's Holy Spirit.

Who transforms our lives. And who gives to us this faith. Which enables us to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

And that believing we can have life through his name. And not only life, but we can overcome the world.

You see, when we are regenerated by the Spirit of God, we are possessed of a new power.

Sometimes we may not be able to name the very day or the very time when that took place.

There are those who can. They'll point back across the years. They'll tell you the very moment. And by God's grace, their hearts were opened to receive Jesus Christ.

[18 : 13] But as I've said in a previous occasion, there are others who, like Lydia of old, had her heart opened gently while she listened to the gospel by the riverside.

But when the heart is opened, this new power, this new force, this new dynamic is implanted within us whereby we are able by God's grace, and it is God's grace that transforms us, whereby we are enabled to overcome the world and to have the victory.

I am crucified with Christ, said Paul. Nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I now live, I live by faith.

And this is where faith comes in. This is the victory which overcometh the world, even our faith. The life which I now live, I live by faith on the Son of God, who loved me and who gave himself for me.

And so, whosoever believeth is born of God. And further, whosoever believeth is reconciled to God.

[19 : 43] You see, before we belonged to the world, and we could not overcome it. You remember how when Paul is writing to the Ephesian church, he says, you know you weren't always like this, you weren't always believers.

You have been quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins. And he goes on to tell them how they have been transformed, how they have been quickened, how a tremendous change has taken place.

And that's what it's all about. When we're given this new power, we can overcome and we can have the victory. And you see, the Spirit, the gracious operation of God's Spirit, makes Christ so real, that we are given a new affection.

It was Dr. Chalmers that used to speak of the expulsive power of a new affection. We have this new power within us, which expels everything that is wrong.

When we use this power, this expulsive power, our thoughts, our outlook, is changed. We're given this power to overcome.

[21 : 00] You see, we have something better. We don't want the world any longer because we have something, we have chosen something better.

The story is told of a well-known painter, that an artist, who on one occasion paid a visit to his nephew who was studying in the University of Oxford.

And when he went to his nephew's room, he was very disappointed, to say the least of it, to find the walls of his study were adorned by pictures of a very questionable nature.

He didn't say anything at the time. When he went home, he looked at a picture which he had put a tremendous amount of work into and which was just completed and which he hoped would one day be hung in the Royal Academy.

And he made up his mind there and then and he sent that picture to his nephew with a little note to the effect that when he had visited him, he had noticed that he was interested in art and that perhaps a picture of his uncle's might find a place in his picture gallery.

[22 : 18] The young man took the picture and he looked at it and he put it up in a corner of the wall, not in a very prominent place. And then he said, oh no, this picture must have the foremost place.

And then he put the picture in the place where it would be seen just whenever the door was opened. And he realized that it was completely out of keeping, completely out of place with the other pictures which adorned the wall.

And he had to take them down one by one until that picture and that picture alone had the place in his study.

And you see, that's very much what, very like what happens when Christ comes into the heart.

There are certain things which are incompatible with the profession of Christianity, with a belief, with an experience of Jesus Christ.

They just don't go together. And if we give Christ the central place, if we have faith to believe that Jesus Christ is our Lord, that he has come into our heart, that from henceforth he is to be our king, then those other things fall into their proper place.

[23 : 40] It's not a case of giving up. It's a case of Christ as a supreme person in one's life. And what a difference that makes.

What a difference it made in the experience of the prodigal when he came to himself in the far country. He wasn't going to be content any longer with eating those crusts, those dry crusts of bread which were thrown to the pigs.

No, no, he remembered his father's home. He was willing not to go back as a son because he felt he wasn't worthy of being reinstated. But he was prepared to go back as a servant because he got

his priorities right.

What a wonderful thing it is when Christ is supreme in the heart and in the life. You see, sin becomes loathsome.

The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is made so clear that we are ravished by it, absorbed by it, and sin loses its attractiveness.

[24 : 47] Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

And I know of no greater antidote to sin than to gaze at a crucified Savior. It was the world who crucified him.

It was sin that nailed him to the tree. And he is none other than the Son of God. The Son of God, wonder of wonders, who loved me and gave himself for me.

And when that truth bursts upon the soul, the love of Christ constrains us. I wonder if I'm speaking to somebody this morning who knows the bitter experience of being defeated by the world.

You've been striving in your own power to overcome it. You've made your resolutions on more than one occasion, and it looked as if you were going to have the victory, but no, you soon fell by the wayside.

[25 : 56] My friend, cease striving in your own strength. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith.

Faith to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. Faith to believe that God sent his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Faith to believe that God is offering to you the gift of his salvation at this moment. Faith to open your heart to believe him. And in opening your heart, find that you have been able to open it because you have been born of God.

And that now you can have the victory in his great name. Do you believe in the Son of God? Do you believe that in his name you can have the victory?

Have you been waiting for him for a long time? Have you been seeking for him down the vista of the years? God grant that by his grace your search may come to an end today, that your heart may be opened to receive him, that you may hear the knock of the hands with the nail prints, saying to you, Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

[27 : 24] If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and will suck with him and he with me. And when you open the door by his grace, you will find that you have found the secret of victory.

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith. Let us pray. O Lord our God, we remember that life is a conflict and sometimes a bitter conflict, for we wrestle not only against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the forces of evil, and yet we thank thee that there is a victory to be won and that that victory can be won in the name and by the help of our Lord and our Redeemer.

We pray, dear Lord, that he may be found within our hearts this day so that the pattern of life which we adopt may be a pattern which is in conformity with his mind and will, and so may we truly be able to say, not in the spirit of boastfulness, but in the spirit of true humility, the life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Help us now to sing our parting song of praise and abide with us throughout what remains of this day. Bless the service which shall follow in another language and bless the service in the evening and all the activities of this week and keep us each and all in thy safekeeping.

We ask this for Jesus' sake. Amen.