

1 John 5:4-5 Sept 20

1 John 5:4-5 (NKJV)

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.

5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This morning we are going to look at overcoming the world. I hope that it will both challenging and encouraging to us.

When we read the word, overcome, we are reading a powerful word. In our text it is a word used of **one who, by Christian constancy and courage, keeps himself unharmed and spotless from his adversary's devices, solicitations, assaults**

Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament.

We can see right off the bat that this will be **challenging**. When is the last time you lived a week that would be perfectly described by this word- "**Overcoming**"? I would have to lie to you to say that I have ever had a week like that. I can point to some specific struggles. I can point to trends in my life. Yes, there are signs of overcoming. But I cannot say that my experience reflects anything perfect. I am guessing that if you are looking at your own life you are seeing the same thing. So we can see this text is going to be a **challenge** to us.

But I think it will be helpful for us to see how this overcoming works itself out. We will look at how we do it. And that will be profitable for us I think.

But before we pursue that, let's look at this.

We did not spend much time on the first verse of chapter 5, except to talk about how it fit into the flow of thought. Let's look at it again.

1 John 5:1 (NKJV)

1 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God,

This is important. It is fundamental to our beliefs. And while I am certain it is a review of what we already understand, it is too important to go without saying.

John 1:12 (NKJV)

12 But as many as received Him (Christ), to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

John 14:6 (NKJV)

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.

Acts 4:12 (NKJV)

12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

The point is simple. No one is **born of God**, no one is **made right with God**, apart from **faith in Jesus as the Christ**.

Foundational belief is not just that Christ existed on this planet. The belief is based upon the Apostle's testimony of this Christ. **Jesus is the Christ** and everything they said about Him is true. And the way they explained the way that Christ obtained our salvation is true as well.

There is no salvation apart from faith in Jesus.

None of the world's religions will get a person saved. Even election must be accompanied by faith in Jesus. I suspect that that even babies will be saved by having some kind of opportunity to express faith in Christ in God's Sovereign arrangements. We are not told how. But there is much that we are not told in scripture.

The thing we do know for sure is that there is no salvation apart from belief in Christ.

And those who do place their faith in Christ in such a way of complete dependence upon Him, those people are born of God.

Now, to continue on in our current text, I think it is important to first establish the flow of thought in our text.

Remember last week we looked at the fact that the commands of God are **not burdensome** in verse 3. Well look at the first word in verse 4. It is the word "**for**". This means that this verse is explaining something that was before it. It is giving us **the reason** that the commandments are not burdensome. And the reason is because **whoever is born of God overcomes the world**.

So in order for a person to understand what God requires and to greet those commands with delight, a person has to be in a **different state** than they were born in. They must have **new life** in them. They must be in a different realm. If they are in their **natural state**, receiving the commands with delight is impossible. But if a person is born of God, then receiving God's command with delight is not only a possibility but it is ultimately an **inevitability**. Can one imagine people in eternity who are unwilling to do what King Jesus wants? It is even difficult to imagine such a state and still call it heavenly.

So whoever is born of God overcomes the world.

Now let's look at this overcoming of the world. Do you see what this tells us? The reason that we have difficulty delighting in God's commands is **the world**. The world stands in direct opposition to the will of God. In fact one of the

simplest definitions of the world is **The world is anything that is standing between us and glorifying God.**

Remember when we looked at this earlier in 1 John?

1 John 2:15-17 (NKJV)

¹⁵ Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

¹⁶ For all that *is* in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world.

¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

Remember how we looked at the fact that the word “**world**” is not talking about the creation of God or the good gifts that God has given us. The world is a mindset that is against God. It even takes the good things that God has given us and turns them into idols.

When the world empowers our thinking, it can take the wonderful things God has given us and receive the things **in opposition** to God instead of in thankful gratitude to God. God gives us food, clothes, housing, money, spouses, children, a physical body, health, a good mind, anything at all, and we can turn every one of those things into something **we love more than God**. Our hearts truly are idol factories. But the problem described here is the influence of the world. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. It all stands against our overcoming. It stands against our glad acceptance of God’s rule in our lives.

We find in scripture that the world is **outside of us**. It’s influence exists tempting us into things we should not do or to not do those things that we should do. The system of the world also exists to punish us for obedience to Christ, when the devil finds that to his best advantage and when God allows it. But the harder thing to us is that the world exists **inside** of us as well.

Scripture calls it **flesh**. It is a **selfish orientation** that we gravitate toward as we simply exist. It would be nice if all our enemies were external to us. But we know by experience that this is not true.

Have you ever determined to spend time in prayer, and within minutes you are thinking clearly evil thoughts? This is just one of a million easy examples of how the enemy is internal and external. The world is an internal and external pressure. That is why the efforts to escape the world by isolating one’s self from worldly influences will never work. Asceticism in all of its forms is worthless. It always results in a **legalism** with the **hopes** that the rules will **keep worldliness outside of us**. And worldliness as a principle is **already in us**.

Touch not, taste not, handle not are, oddly enough a **worldly** way to fight worldliness. They look like they are spiritual. But they are not.

Romans 8:7 (NKJV)

7 Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

A Christian who is serious about following God, even if they are very ignorant at first, cannot exist long without coming to the realization that **we are in a war**. We are in a battle. The engagement in that battle is not proof we are **failing**. It only proves we are **spiritually alive**. This call to be spiritually engaged in the struggle is one of the most common exhortations in scripture. We can count on a battle because the worldly influence to resist God has remnants in our body.

Ephesians 6:10-13 (NKJV)

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

It is helpful for us to understand just how powerful this worldly influence is. It has conquered every single person who is outside of Christ. They may have human virtues, but they are under the mastery of an **anti God** spirit. And the truth is, outside of Christ **no one can beat the worldly influence**, nor do they, in most of its arena, have any desire to do so. They may not like the consequences of some of the vices. But their hearts do not have an inclination to receive **God's commands with delight**.

Now to move on. Look at the verb tenses of overcome.

We have a **past** and a **present** tense. The Christian life is odd in that many things seem contradictory. We have been sanctified, and we are being sanctified. We have been saved and we are being saved. We **have overcome** and we are called to **presently overcome**. And normally those apparent contradictions are all based on the same principle. Everything we do in the Christian life **has its basis** on what **Christ has already done for us**.

We are students who have the great fortune of taking a test that determines if we will be qualified for eternity, but our test results are already in and we

have already passed if we are in Christ. So does our taking the test matter? Everything in scripture tells us that it does. But does our success ultimately rely upon what **we** did or what **Christ** did for us? It is obviously **what Christ did for us**. We are only proving **if** what He did really counted **for us**. What we do really does matter. But what we do cannot win for us what Christ has already won. It can only provide **proof** that Christ performed His miracle of salvation in us.

So Christ has **already overcome** the world. He came in the flesh. He lived a sinless life. He died for **our sins** but had **none of His own** that needed covered. He rose from the dead to be at the right hand of His Father. Christ has overcome every ounce of the world's influence.

Now **we** are called to overcome. We are called to take action that is congruent with **His** overcoming.

Now let's look at our text more. I am going to give you a very simple outline.

1. We overcome because of new birth,
2. We overcome because we can exercise faith,
3. We overcome because we believe in Christ

1 We overcome because of new birth,

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world

Have you ever noticed how believers are described as people who have a completely different view of the world. We don't view it as our home. We see ourselves as travelers passing through. We see ourselves as not really belonging to this place or fitting in. We are aliens. We are outsiders. We are not comfortable with the customs any more.

Well this view also has to do with **overcoming**. Because we have been reborn, because we have an extraterrestrial birth source, we view worldliness differently. The world says to us, you can have this fruit **that God forbids**.

You can do this thing that will give you more pleasure than what that cold hard God has in mind for you. And we can see it from a different perspective. We are no longer locked into the planetary natural view. We have a different view from a different space.

Think about it. We are living in the **same world** as all those people who do not know Christ. It is not as though we are in any way superior to them. But they live in the same environment, the same temptations, the same appeals, the same trappings. But we see **that same thing** from a **completely different perspective**. Why? Because we are **born from above**. We have been infused with a different life. And because of it we see it all differently. That is a very important start.

Then next

**2 We overcome because we can exercise faith,
And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.**

Faith believes that which we cannot see but have been assured of its existence. It goes by a different set of rules. It would never conclude that I have never seen a miracle so miracles do not exist. Faith would not conclude that since I have never seen God, God must not exist. Faith is not limited to the experience of the senses. It trusts the revelation of God and understands and interprets life different than those around us. It looks at what God says and trusts what He says to be true, no matter what those around us might confidently assert.

This is a tremendous tool to overcoming the world. Just for instance, the world says sex is to be enjoyed without restrictions. We know that is not true. Our creator intends for our greatest happiness and that happiness is not found by going by the world's rules. So by faith we accept His commands. And we experience the joys He has for us without the additional price tags the devil adds to everything. We can overcome the world because we are not limited to our own sight. We have faith.

3 We overcome because we believe in Christ
⁵ Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Ultimately all of our ammunition to live the Christian life finds its way back to Christ. We start most of the epistles being drawn back to what Christ has done for all His people and how He has done it. Our relationship with Christ is the **basis for everything** we are to do in the Christian life. So our understanding of **who Christ is** and **what He has done** has a bearing in everything we decide and why we decide it. It is the foundation that every victory in this life is based upon. Christ is the core of our lives as believers. And believing in Christ and having our attention drawn to Christ is the beginning, the middle and the end of our overcoming the world.

This draws us to a quote that Paul made that makes this point. He says **Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)**

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

OK. So this is all true. But how do we apply it in the day to day? How can I use these truths in a way to better overcome the world? How can I make this practical?

I have often emphasized that our sanctification is largely the process of **replacing the lies** that we believe with **truths from God's word**.

Sanctification is largely done in the mind. The most significant changes we need happen, not from a **God zap** done wholly on God's part, but by the Holy Spirit drawing us to truths in God's word and helping us to see how that is different than the things we currently believe that drive our actions.

And I still believe that. I will not back down from that position. But there is more that we also have to consider in our process of standing up to the world and defeating its influence in our lives.

Faith does not only drive us to replace lies with truth.

Let's look at some scriptures that compel us also to do something else.

Proverbs 18:10 (NKJV)

10 The name of the LORD is a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe.

Here we see that the righteous run to God. This is not so much a change of mind about some belief. It is the heart's response to run to God.

We see this too in this verse.

Romans 8:15 (NKJV)

15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

And here too

Galatians 4:6 (NKJV)

6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"

There is something in us that simply calls out to God in our heart, in our danger, or in our frustration, or in any deeply felt need. And we run to Him for solace as we would turn to an earthly father or mother or friend. Sometimes that is **all** we can do. And sometimes that is all **we need** to do. We run to God. And we run to Him expectantly to meet our need in our time of need.

Let's look at what John said in his gospel.

John 15:4-8 (NKJV)

Christ said this:

4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

5 I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned.

7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you.

8 By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.

Here again we run to Christ. We abide in Him. We live in Christ. We see the mention of **Christ's word** living in us too. So we can see there is some **objectivity** to it. It is not sheer sentiment. But we are running to the Christ that truly **is**. We are resting in our relationship with Him. And He is empowering us to resist the world and to produce heavenly results, heavenly fruit.

Then look at what Paul says:

Philippians 4:12-13 (NKJV)

12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

There are times when Christ provides us the power to overcome that is not merely a result of a change in thinking. There sometimes are **infusions of strength** that come from our dependence upon our relationship with Christ. Sometimes what we need is not a result of a **change of thinking**. We need God to do for us what we could not do, even with the most transformed thinking that we could have. Sometimes we **need that** to overcome the world. Carla and I often talk about how our lives could have been tragically different. And our conclusion is always that God's grace has been amazing in our lives. He is the source of our blessings. He made sure not to test us in ways we would fail and be destroyed. He overcame some of the world's influence that we would not have had the wisdom to even ask for. He did it for us with no effort on our part.

But then there is the **other kind of overcoming** that is in keeping with that which I usually focus on.

It finds its source in our **understanding** of the person and ministry of Christ. It actively engages our minds in seeing our situation through the eyes of the gospel. Some say we are **preaching the gospel to ourselves** in light of our current situation.

If we think about our situations in light of the gospel it adds great clarity.

First, **why did Christ come?** Well.... sin. And the problem was so great that **He** was the only solution to the problem. So when we look at our situations we realize sin is a huge problem and Christ is the only solution. We are being

foolish to think that the sin we are facing is somehow **surprising** and limited only to the **situation** we are in. It is worldwide and that is exactly what Christ came to save us from. This gives us tremendous insight into the real problem. I was watching a video on facebook the other day by some psychologist who seems to honestly believe he found the solution to evil in the lives of humans. His solution is all found in a **different psychological construct**. I thought that now this is clearly a doctrine of demons. That dog is barking up an empty tree. Sin is the problem. Christ is the cure. And nothing else is going to work. Then we see that Christ **overcame** this world that He came to **overcome**. He lived a perfect life. And we can see how it was done. We do not need to accept the devil's lie that sin **cannot be resisted**, that the **world must win**. No. Christ showed us that this is not true. So no matter what sin we are encountering in ourselves, we know that **in Christ it is conquerable**. We need not fail. We need not sin. There is a way out and it is **through Him**. Then we are next given to understand that we have been born of God. We have actually been given the same resurrection power as Christ. We are in Him. And epistle after epistle works this out for us. Because we are **His**, we are no longer in **sin's domain**. The sin power plug has been unplugged. Satan has influence. He can advertise. He can seduce. He can use trickery. He can threaten. But **HE HAS NO POWER**. Satan cannot make you do anything. And as we replace those things **our perceptions tell** us with the **truth of the gospel**, we find our attitude changing in regard to our circumstances. Christ has truly set us free from the law of sin and death. We are in Christ and greater is He who is in us than He who is in the world.

But what if we fail. And our accuser comes to us in hopes of destroying us. I want to quote Martyn Lloyd Jones here:

There are times when I fail because in my folly I do not run into the strong tower, because I try to fight in my own strength, and the enemy defeats me. Now this is most important. At that particular point there is nothing that is so liable to happen to me as that the enemy will come and and say something like this to me: Ah well, you have failed- you have fallen. You have sinned against the Lord. You have gone back. What is the use of talking about your faith? Look at yourself. And there I am, overwhelmed with a sense of failure and frustration, and I wonder whether I have a right to turn to God and to pray. I have let myself down. I have let God down. I have let Christ down. And I feel utterly hopeless with a sense of despair and futility.

Now there is nothing more precious at that point than to know that Jesus is the Son of God and that He tells me that though I have sinned, though I

have failed, as we have already found it in this epistle, If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. My little children, these things I write to you that you do not sin. And if any man sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins. And not for yours only , but also for the sins of the whole world. There is nothing then that so enables me to overcome as that deliverance from sins and failure, from that sense of despair that tends to overwhelm me when I feel I have gone down and cannot rise again. The blood of Christ will cleanse me, and I rise up and go forward on my journey.

Isn't that an encouragement to us. Yes we want to overcome the world. Yes we have no excuse when we do not. But even so the grace of God has a remedy for our sad state. Praise God.

Now, as we are preaching this gospel to ourselves, as we are fighting the good fight, we are also given the promises about the outcome. We are told that any price we pay will be worth our while. The rewards are amazing. So it is worth keeping up the fight to overcome the world in our lives. And as we do this, we will find, more and more, that the demands of Christ on our lives become **less and less burdensome** and **more and more a delight**.

So let's end by asking ourselves this question. Are you overcoming the world in your life? Or are the commands of Christ burdensome to you. Christians overcome. You cannot avoid that in New Testament scripture. If our lives are not ones heading in the direction of overcoming, we need to consider, are we born again? Whatever is born of God overcomes the world.

If we **are** overcoming, lets keep running to Jesus, keep abiding in Him, keep trusting in Him, and keep believing what He says. And if we fall, we need to take God at His word and get **back up** and get **back at** living the overcoming life.