

FAITH THAT OVERCOMES THE WORLD

1 John 5:1-21 (Key 4b-5)

This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

This is the last book of 1 John which also contains concluding remarks from John. I was also privileged to have opened the book of 1 John. Looking at what we have learned and received, I believe John has been responding to these two questions? what is true Christianity? What does it mean to be Christian practically in this world? John taught that a Christian is a person who is born of God, who live in the light and not in the dark. Moreover, they pursue to love fellow believers with same love Jesus loved us with. They believe in the Jesus of the Bible. John also warned us against false Christs and false teachers. John revealed a true believer does not live in habitual sin but rather confess their sins. They take courage because of God's firm love for them. These teachings are so relevant for us today because the world we live in is under the power of Satan. And thus Christianity itself is under attack. The culture of our world is against Christian values and God's order or God's way. So, it is important that we are reminded of what true Christianity is. However still, it is not easy to live in this world, it does not matter whether we are Christian or not, living is hard, life is hard. One way or another each one of us has something that we are dealing with, could be a family issue, your studies, your health or health of a loved one and so on. And this is because we live in this world with all kinds of our sinful issues and those of others. Sometimes it is as though we are overcome by the world and we are just going along waiting for the end to come. Now in this last book John wants us to learn how we can overcome the world and live as victors in this world.

John lays down the key ingredient, the one and only way we can overcome the world. We will learn that at the centre of living a victorious life is faith in Jesus. John also provides us with the three things that assures us or gives us confidence that we have indeed overcome the world. I pray that we may learn and receive one word from this passage and live as victors in this world. Amen!

Let us 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."** Here John reveals to us the relationship between faith in Jesus and love for God and God's children. Who are God's children? They are those who are born of God and as we have learned before that God is love, those then born of God will also love the father and the children of God. Faith in Jesus is the key and the only way to be born of God, it is from this faith in Jesus that we are transformed into being children of God. In a number of places, our past two Sunday messages were based on love. John has taught about the significance of loving one another as children of God, that to love one another is the essence of Christian life, because it then proves we are born of God and are indeed children of God. In this world there is lot of emphasis on love, that all we need is love. Even though we do not know what is love, so in turn the world relies on feelings as a guide in how to love others. Men raised in families where fathers used to be violent and abusive to the mother. Grow up believing that violence is an expression of love. John here shows that, faith in Jesus and love are inseparable, they go hand in hand. Through faith in Jesus we become born of God, in this way we can love God and other believers God's way, because we are born of God. However, how can we know that we love God and His children? What is this love?

Look at verse 2-3, "This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. 3 In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome," To love God is to love the children of God, and how can we love God? By obeying his commands. His commands are not burdensome because we love him. This is true even with human relationships. When we love something or someone we can spend so much time, effort, energy, money and even blood for it. Also when we love someone, it is never burdensome to obey them or do what pleases them, we are ready to sacrifice anything for them. Because we love them and we want to please them. So a question for us is, do we love Jesus this way? Do we pursue Jesus heart? If not, we should not quit or make excuses. But rather we should confess our sins and get back up and keep following Jesus by faith.

Contrary to the world believes, love is not centred on feelings, human effort or on the person we ought to love, rather loving others is centred on loving God. For to love God is to love others. Because to love God is to obey his commands. This all possible because we are born of God through faith in Jesus Christ. This faith in Jesus is to accept Jesus as our lord

and saviour and entrust our lives to Jesus who laid down his life for us. This is the amazing work of God when we place our faith in Jesus. We become born of God and then have genuine love for God, a genuine desire to obey his commands. If God's commands become burdensome, we should repent and look towards Jesus the author of our faith. It is faith in Jesus that transforms and revolutionizes our lives to obey God's commands. In this way we can show the world what God's love is not in theory or words but practically and overcome the world.

Look at verse 4-5, **“for everyone born of God overcomes the world.”** This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. **5Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”** Everyone born of God overcomes the world because they obey God's commands. This is the sure way we can overcome the world. John already explained in Jon 2:15, how the power of the world works, it firstly works through the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. These sinful desires work within us to make us powerless to obey God's commands. When our hearts are full of lustful desires or pride we feel very burdened to read the Bible and pray. The second way the power of world works is through false teachings and deceptions of Jesus. For John tells us that, the true Jesus is the one who came through water and blood. Jesus Christ who came into this world in human form. The three even testify about Jesus, the spirit, the water and the blood [6-8]. When Jesus was being baptised through water God's spirit testified that, this is my son whom I love. The blood also testifies about Jesus because through Jesus blood on the cross our sins were forgiven. Jesus took our place, he took our sins so that we may overcome the world through faith in Him.

John goes further to reveal what is the victory that overcomes the world, look at verse 4b again, **“This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith”**, that victory is our faith in Jesus the Son of God. Through faith in Jesus we overcome the world because by faith in Jesus we are able to obey God's commands and not live under the power of sin that is taken hold of this world. By having faith in Jesus it means you already have victory. However, many times we may not feel a sense of victory. Instead we may feel as though we are losers. This is because our concept of victory is not based on Jesus teachings, but rather the world's standards. And sadly as well based on false gospel teachers. For the world, wealth, fame, good health and prosperity define a victorious life. Passing an exam, getting a good job or promotion, publishing good papers and so on serve as indicators of a victorious life. The communities we come from judge us based on these things. We are told to study at a University in order to live a victorious life, and because our victory is based on created things, they then become a key place that people rely on to have a victorious life. In this way we easily idolized these things and place our faith in them instead of on Jesus. Then our love for these things become greater than our love for Jesus, we sacrifice our time, money and health and try do whatever it takes to succeed in having them so we may live victorious lives. Such are illusions and Satan's lies, the result is ultimately death and hopelessness.

When we observe carefully, many people who are successful in the world are not actually victorious. Even we like to say financial freedom is living victoriously. Many people suffer under the power of sin and death even though they have financial freedom. Outwardly people may look victorious but inside so many people are dying a slow dearth under the torment of Satan. We have seen a couple of successful people, people we would classify as victorious take their lives. A very successful music artist, Ricky Ricks, an A rated Professor at UCT some years back who was at top of his game and well respected in the country committing suicide, leaving their families behind. It is clear they were tormented by something inside which led to them taking their lives. However, don't get me wrong, God does want to bless us in every way, but what he really wants is to give us a real life not a fake life. The bible calls it eternal life. We are not all guaranteed constant blessings in this world. If we look at the lives of the apostles some experienced imprisonment, some were destitute and even killed horribly. But they never compromised or gave in to fear. Rev 12:11 tells us that, **“They triumphed over him 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.*”** They kept their faith, did not love their lives so much as to shrink from the fear of dearth. But rather chose to obey God by testifying to the truth of God. This is the victory that has overcome the world, because our faith is 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! All praise belongs to Jesus our eternal victor. Jesus does say in John 16:33 **“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. **But take heart! I have overcome the world.**”** And it is because of this truth, that by placing our faith in Jesus we too overcome the world, not tomorrow or next week but the moment we place our faith in Jesus.

Verse 9-12 tells us about God's testimony regarding Jesus, it is the testimony He has given about his son. If human testimony is acceptable, how much more is God's testimony. God's testimony is this, look at verse 11-12, "11 And this is the testimony: **God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.**" God testifies from Himself that He has given us eternal life and this life is in His Son. And by faith in Jesus Christ we are guaranteed eternal life. That is why it is by faith in Jesus that we overcome the world. The world uses the fear of death to control people, this is one of Satan's strong weapon, fear. However through faith in Jesus we can overcome this fear because we have eternal life through Jesus. Whatever victory people may gain in this world on world standards, in the end they have to face up with death. As one actor said in the movie Gladiator, "death smiles at us all" What then is the meaning of victory, its meaningless. In Jesus we already have eternal life and so I pray that we live in this world as victors by living by faith in Jesus Christ our eternal life.

Verse 13 – 21 is essentially about our assurance or confidence as believers in this world. How then can we be assured of this victory, that we are victors in this world? What can give us confidence as we live in this world that indeed we are victorious? John reveals three things that grants us confidence of our victory by faith, first, 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." It is clear that John was writing to the believers like us today. He is affirming them that because they believe in Jesus, they should know that they have eternal life. By virtue of their faith in Jesus, they have been granted eternal life. This is why the early church was marked by believers who died because of the gospel. They were not seeking to live comfortable lives but rather seeking to please Jesus by laying down their lives for others. They could do so because they genuinely found genuine and real life in Jesus Christ. Our ministry as well has many missionary who left their nice and comfortable homes, some with nice paying jobs to share the gospel of Jesus with campus students in other countries. I believe they could do this because they found real life in Jesus. They indeed live victorious lives because they live their lives by faith in Jesus Christ.

The second thing that gives confidence to our victory, prayer, look at verse 14-15, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him." We have access to God 24/7 through prayer. It is a free access no charges no fees. Every parent delights when their children asks something that the parent knows would build their child. If the child asked for a novel or a mathematics book so they grow in reading skills or in mathematics. How much more when we make requests to God that are in line with his will. God hears and he answers prayers, this is a great privilege in God through faith in Jesus.

Verse 16-17 also shows that God has granted the privilege to be intercessors, to be able to pray for our brothers and sisters who may be struggling with sin. God promises that he would give them life, if we but pray for their repentance. This is possible because we have victory in this world through faith in Jesus. We too can participate in the release of our brothers and sisters from the bondage of sin through prayer.

Thirdly, we can be confident of our victory because the evil one cannot harm us, look at verse 18-19, "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. 19We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one." Those who live by faith in Jesus Christ do not continue to indulge in habitual sin because they are born of God. God actually protects them from the evil one. The whole world is under the control of Satan, and so he constantly tempts the children of God to disobey God's commands, but he can never touch or harm them. In other words, Satan can never even control a child of God if we live our lives by faith in Jesus. The child of God is now under the power of God's kingdom and not the power of this world. However, Satan is very smart and very good, they say he is 99% good and 1% evil, little by little he infiltrated our lives, for example through social media and entertainment. In our current times I believe these are his powerful weapons he is using to waste our time and ultimately control us or reverse the renewal of our minds the word of God had accomplished. Social media and entertainment (either music or television) are the most powerful methods Satan uses, so subtle yet very effective way to lure us away from God's commands. For example, we learn about worldly love through either music or television. We then enter into relationships and marriage with the concept of love that can never sustain marriage. The bible teaches us that Satan is viciously at war with God, our refuge is in Jesus through faith.

This means that though we are free and victorious, we still should not just live as we please because as Paul said in 1 Cor 10:23, "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive." We should stand firm by living by faith in Jesus and resist Satan tactics especially over things that may not particularly be sinful, but in the end slowly by slow rob us of a time to prayer. Such things may also take so much time of our lives while we could have used that time to participate in God's salvation work. Jesus is calling us to follow Him and to rescue those who are lost and perishing. Jesus invites us to live in his victory. Because this is how he lived, he was a man on a mission to fulfil the will of God. Will we live in the defeat of our human effort in the flesh, or will we live in the victory of faith in Jesus Christ?

This passage has given me some living hope and meaning in why I read the bible, pray, the need to lead my family through the gospel, participation in church activities. Recently I have discovered how I am so behind with my peers in my department at my workplace, they have more than double my publications. This actually made me feel hopeless in research since I do not appear to be active anyway and left me with a sense of meaninglessness as an academic. I did not feel like I am victorious at all, I felt like I was in the tail, swimming against the current of the river. A sense of hopelessness actually. Though I go to campus each day I never actually accomplish what I need to accomplish, there will either be some long meeting, or end up in a long conversation about teaching and learning issues of our students. However, through this passage I could learn newly that, I am not living a victorious because I rely too much on my human strength and efforts. However, I am thankful for this passage because it reveal that I can live a victorious life and that I do not even need to pay any cost or go some mountain top in order to live a victorious life. I can live a victorious life right here if but live by faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus is my victory. That recognition or promotion will not complete my life, but rather my life is real and complete because I already have eternal life in Jesus Christ my lord and saviour. I pray that I may not be too self focused, but rather find out God's plan of how he wants to raise me as a husband, father, a campus shepherd and co-worker with other leaders by placing my faith in the accomplished work of my Lord Jesus Christ. Because I too want to follow Jesus who is already victorious and live according to His will and not my will. Amen.

In verse 20-21, John concludes by firstly telling us about who Jesus is. That this very Jesus is the true God and eternal life. That is why our victory in this world only by living faith in the person of Jesus Christ, for he is the true God and eternal life. He has conquered the power of this world and stands in victory. Secondly, he concludes by saying we should keep ourselves from idols. An idol is something we give our heart to over God, something that we depend on for our joy instead of God, something that fulfils us instead of God, something we feel we cannot live without other than God. In other words, things that have taken the place of Jesus in our lives. Jesus is the only true God, he is the real deal, whereas idols are simply illusions of the real thing. The victory that overcomes the world is our faith and love in the biblical Jesus. Amen!