

Reading: 1 John 5:1-12

Theme: The Victorious Overcomers

As I started typing up this sermon the European cycling, swimming and athletic championships were on, but more importantly was the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the start of the Battle of Amiens - the turning point in the Allies' victory in World War One and marked the beginning of the end of the First World War. In ancient Greece, before a battle or a sporting contest, an altar would be built or visited and at it prayers were made, usually also a drink offering poured out to the goddess of victory (Νίκη = Neekay). If they were victorious then praise and further drink offerings were made to her. These ones would be called the victors (νικᾶω).

As interesting (*or boring*) as those facts are, the word νικᾶω is the verb John uses here in v4-5 – overcomes, the overcoming ones. Yet the victory he wrote of had nothing to do with any Greek goddess but is linked to the Lord Jesus and incredibly it is written of and about every believer! We may not feel we are the victors, overcomers, but according to the word of God that is the reality of who and what we are in Christ. Sadly, we can be robbed and cheated of the joy and blessing of who, what and where we are in Christ. This is not a sermon of glib triumphalism, but I want to lay before us, to remind us of who, where and what we are in Christ. Let's note 3 things briefly from v4-5:

1. Know the Opposition.

We are called to be those who overcome, who are victorious over the world. The “*world*” is our opposition, enemy and foe. The Bible uses this word “*world*” in a number of different ways - the natural world which God has created i.e. the planet earth, all in and on it; it also means all the rich diversity of peoples on earth; but is used here and elsewhere in this letter, as that which is against God, His ways and His people and it is controlled by a real devil.

We are to realise (and remember) there are 2 kingdoms existing at this moment, side-by-side and are locked in constant battle. The kingdom of the world is ruled, governed by the devil and he will use all he can against God, His ways, purposes and people. The kingdom of God is in this world and it is developing, growing and ongoing. If we are a Christian we have been taken out from the kingdom of darkness and are part of the kingdom of light. Do not for one instance imagine that the devil and his forces hate us now because of that, for they always hated us - even when we were part of their kingdom, but now it becomes open and apparent.

The world will always seek to prevent people knowing and enjoying God. At times it will let God be taught about and yet only be presented as an ogre or a fairy-tale character, or things will be presented to warp and twist peoples view of God. The world may even stir up persecution - physical, verbal and even social against Christians. It will want people to think its thoughts and even try to get Christians to conform to its agendas and ways. Yet the world is not that which is only outside of us, for its influences are within us too. Such is in place from the moment we're conceived - for we have a fallen, sinful and sin biased nature. We will tend to live for self, our pride, our selfish ambition and not live for God's glory. We, even as Christians, know-how lax we are able to be concerning things of God and we can become indifferent and careless to God's word, to prayer and may even be reluctant, yet justify our reluctance as wisdom, to speak up and out for our God.

We are to realise we are at war against the world, the flesh and the devil - all at the same time! The world is everything outside and within us that is doing its utmost to prevent us living to and for God. It will use terror tactics as well as subversive tactics. This is our opposition - the world ruled and governed by the devil, his principalities and powers and he has a 5th column in our own hearts

and lives. This is the enemy, the foe, the opposition and we are to overcome and conquer these!!

2. Know the Heroes.

If you have read Tolkien's "Hobbit" or "Lord of the Rings" or seen the films, then you may have heroes from them. We may have read the history of great, epic battles and know of personal heroism. We may admire such heroes, even like to meet them. My paternal grandfather met Lawrence of Arabia, viewed him as a hero and even named his only son after him!

Now I'd like to introduce you to the heroes John writes of, to allow you to know and admire them, to appreciate who they are and what they are going through to be overcomers. So, look around us in the church, for you and I, if we are Christians, are these heroes, are the ones who are overcoming, who are being victorious. We are described here in v4-5 as such. You may think I'm joking! We may not feel like it most of the time, or even now, but that is because we do not recognise ourselves for who we really are and perhaps it's due to us having a wrong view of how to overcome the world.

Some Christians and churches teach that the way to overcome the world is to leave it, to withdraw, be reclusive, enter into a monastery or a commune. Then once there, we will, by self-discipline and self-will, be able to learn to deny ourselves, to keep the rules and regulations strictly and we will be triumphant. It sounds great and wonderful, but it has some real drawbacks:

We would need to be a really a special kind of person, for ordinary people seem doomed to fail. Because of this, throughout history, it created a two-tier class system - those who lived in such ways were venerated and regarded highly. This is based on a superficial view of the world being outside of us, but ignores the biblical truth of it being within us too. Through this some monasteries etc. became centres of

excessive sin. Outwardly discipline was shown, but it could do nothing to remove or deal with sin in people's hearts.

It is also unscriptural, as nowhere are we told to do anything like that at all. Our Lord Jesus lived in the world and was accused by such legalists of being ungodly because He associated with - ate, drank and had time for 'sinners'. The Lord's example and teaching of NT is never "withdraw" from the world, but to be in it, not of it and influence it for good.

We are told 3 important truths about these heroes, these overcomers:

A. They are born of God: I have met a number of people over the years and they seemed no one special and only as I got to know them better, did I find out they were extra ordinary people. Everyday Christians seem no one special, may often even seem a miserable bunch, but we are special, most remarkable because of what has happened to us - we are born of God. The only ones who can overcome the world are those who are born of God. Such ones have a new life and disposition through the work of God the Holy Spirit in them. Once, they were part of the world, now they have new natures, are new creations in Christ, are more and more viewing things as the Lord Jesus and as God the Father does. They may well ask "*What would Jesus do?*" Yet even before that they might question "*How would Jesus and God view this?*"

They are born of God and as such they delight in obeying God's commands, which are now Statutes of Liberty, not burdensome or a heavy load, or that which restricts and weighs them down and spoils their lives. Being born of God causes us to recognise and own God's commands as right and not burdensome. A person of the world resents - secretly, if not openly - God's commands and authority and finds them grievous and burdensome. If we find God's commands a bore, a chore or a burden, then we are to question if we are born of God, for we may be trying to do our best to be right with God and

yet we are not going God's ways. The overcomers are born of God and:

B. Exercise faith: because of what God done in them - they are born of God, they now have the facility, the resource of faith. Note the order - born of God, which is an unseen, sovereign work of God in the soul and then they are enabled, given the facility of faith and are able to live by faith. The world is powerful and would not release any one to live as we should, but by the new birth we have the power of faith and available to us is a power and strength outside of us – God's might by His Spirit. Now we realise that we are not on our own and we are linked directly to another realm - the spiritual realm. This is not the exercise of a vague notion of faith but we note it is:

C. Faith in Jesus as the Son of God: this faith is centred and rooted on the Lord Jesus - who He is and what He has done. This faith has already overcome the world. In v4b "*has overcome*" catches the force of the Greek correctly - as it has and still has overcome the world. In trusting the Lord Jesus, we are transferred to the victory side - we will note this again, yet we are still involved in the day by day battle in our lives. It is said that after the success of the D-Day landings on 6th June 1944 that the battle of for Europe was a mopping up battle as hundreds of thousands of men and pieces of equipment poured into Europe. Yet it took just over 11 months to achieve it - VE Day on 8th May 1945. When General Wolfe won the battle of Québec, he conquered Canada for the British, but it was still another 70 to 80 years before Canada was fully under British control and rule. In our salvation we have overcome, but we are still those who are to be overcoming - which is the tense of the 1st overcomes in v4 and of that in v5.

We are to battle on from the position of already having overcoming faith in the Lord Jesus and we are to be working it out. If we want to meet the heroes - if we are Christian, then just look in a mirror! We

may not like what we see, but then look in the mirror of God's word to see what is really true of us and what God has done and is doing for us. Recognise and remember we are in Christ. It needs to be worked on daily in practical ways and so see:

3. Know the Means.

Our being born of God and having faith in Jesus as the Son of God, has to be applied and worked out in our daily lives. Our faith is not to be a nice notion which counts for nothing; but is to make our victory over the world a practical and actual possibility. Our faith in the Lord Jesus is that which has overcome (νικᾶω) the world and given us the victory (νίκη). Faith needs to be exercised as it is not merely a feeling, but is a grace to be exercised and exercised in 2 ways - directly and indirectly, passively and actively. Lets briefly see these 2 ways of exercising faith, of the outworking of faith:

A. Directly & passively: here is the exercise of naked faith. It centres directly on the Lord Jesus, all He is and has done for us. It rests on Him and His work as all sufficient - hence it is passive - for it does not try to add our work or efforts, our denying ourselves, our actions and our cover up attempts. It rests directly and totally on Him, all He is and has done for us. In the Lord of the Rings people go to the great Fortress of Helm's Deep for safety and security when there is danger - Proverbs 18:10 says "*The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe.*"

When the world, the flesh and the devil would tempt us, attack us, cause us to fear that we will fall; go to the place of safety - rest on and in the Lord Jesus, all He is and has done for our souls. We are saved and therefore safe – not because of what we do or feel; even don't do or feel, but because Jesus has died and rose again to save us and we are born of God. We are to rest directly and sweetly here - realise we are God's beloved children (3:1) and because of that, we

are never on our own. We are to go directly to the Lord, rest on and in Him and His completed work.

B. Indirectly & actively: we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us to will and to act according to His good purpose (Philippians 2:12-13). Our faith is to be active in our lives. Jesus and His work are always the foundation we rest on - all He is and has done for us, but our faith needs to be active, pro-active in our lives and to affect our living, thinking, speaking, our desires in this active, indirect way.

The gospel truth we rest on is to act as a launch pad from which we launch ourselves into our day by day lives. Why did Jesus come into the world? **3:8b** tells us it was so sin and the devil could be defeated! Did He do it? Yes! Only He could achieve that and He did it there on the cross of Calvary. We read He led captivity captive, triumphed openly over principalities and powers and dealt with our debt of sin. He also overcame the last enemy - death - His resurrection demonstrates His complete victory and His accepted sacrifice.

He is the Conqueror and by our new birth we are united to Christ and through faith we find all His rich resources are available to us. We are to remind ourselves of this often and our being in Him e.g. national team wins and all say "*We won*". In Christ it is a reality - we belong to Him and we share His victory. We are, by the growth and activity of faith, to draw our strength more and more from Him, to abide in Him at all times. So often the devil defeats us in our minds, hearts and spirits as he robs us of the awareness, wonder and joy of who we are and the resources we have at our disposal. We feel so weak, miserable, pathetic and we are beaten even before the contest begins and we hope to be good losers! Sadly, so often we snatch defeat out of the jaws of victory - because we are resting on self, actively relying on our **own resources** and not resting on Christ and active by faith in all **His resources**.

Our faith is to be active even in our failures - when we feel wretches and miserable, full of doubts and fears. We are to remember His work in us covers all our sin and failures (1:9; 2:1-2). The work of the Lord Jesus Christ is always our resting place and is the source from which the activity of faith is to spring from. Yet we are to also look onward in faith as we see that the Lord Jesus is coming back as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. When that happens, we will be there in resurrection bodies and no matter our hardships and sufferings now, they are not worthy to be compared to the glory that will be revealed in us. We are to realise our hard work in the Lord is not in vain and we will not lose heart, but keep on keeping on and so be those who overcome.

In ourselves we are nobodies and helpless, but being born of God, by faith in Jesus as the Son of God, we are to go in our helplessness to Him and work out in our day by day lives the truth of all we are and have in Him. As we do so we will realise that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:38-39), that we are on the victory side. I pray we would all be given grace and help to work and live this out as overcomers and do so for His glory and for our own encouragement and benefit.