

**1<sup>st</sup> John 2: 14; “Because You are Strong”, Sermon # 8 in a series entitled “Behold What Manner of Love”, A Communion Sermon delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

We were looking, in the past message, at titles related to Christian Experience in verses 12-14. We looked at the term “little children” which we saw refers to every Christian in one sense, and younger and less mature Christians in another sense. We must never think that we have attained in this life, but we must build upon what we have already learned by prayerfully pressing on to know the Lord in a deeper, fuller sense. It is good for us if we understand that only Christ can lead us into this experience of spiritual growth. This is why the Apostle Paul prays in Philippians 3: 12, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” We also looked last time at this title “fathers” which John has said are those who “have known Him who is from the beginning”. We are to call no man on earth our father, Jesus says in Matthew 23: 9, and yet it is evident that John was using this title in an instructive sense. He is speaking of those who have real proven character and experience of what it truly means to be a Christian, and they have something to impart to younger believers. Their knowledge and experience have brought them to a level of maturity where they behave righteously and devoutly and blamelessly before others who were children in the faith. But they are also a good example to those who are termed “young men”, here in our passage.

This is where I want to take up our study this afternoon. I want to ask this question: What is true strength in the Christian young man, or the Christian who is younger in their faith? I believe that according to these verses, it is having the strength to overcome the schemes of the Devil and having the zeal and wisdom to abide in the word of God. It is, I believe, learning to see through, and look beyond, the obvious advantages of physical strength, and the keen mental abilities which the Lord may have given you, to be able to see the true source of your strength and wisdom, which is from the Lord. “The glory of young men is their strength, and the splendor of old men is their gray head,” it says in Proverbs 20: 29. And certainly this is true in a physical sense, but we need to observe something more if we would understand the spiritual sense of being strong: The older men are usually the ones who, by God’s grace, have had the experience of being tested enough that they have overcome the wicked one. And as we look around us at older Christians we can see that this is often true. The young men, we can reasonably conclude, are usually the ones who have the physical strength and stamina to endure the onslaughts of the wicked one. But their victory over the evil one will only come about by the cultivation of their spiritual strength in Christ. In any church both the spiritual fathers and the spiritual young men need to work together to accomplish great things for the furtherance of Christ’s kingdom and the promotion of God’s glory.

So this afternoon we want to look more in depth at this subject and ask the question - What does it mean to be strong as a young man, or as a Christian, in general? Our text gives us the following answers: 1<sup>st</sup> – To be strong means that you have overcome the wicked one. 2<sup>nd</sup> – To be strong means that you have the word of God abiding in you. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – To be strong means that you realize your great on-going battle with the wicked one is to overcome him again and again. I will attempt to apply these truths in relation to the Lord’s Supper which we will partake of, in just a few minutes.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – To be strong means that you have overcome the wicked one.**

In verse 13, in the middle of the verse, John says – “I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one.” The last time that I preached to you from this passage of

spiritual titles which are given to Christians who are at various levels of maturity, I took you to John 13: 31-38, and I attempted to show you that even though the disciples had been with Jesus for 3 and a half years that they still did not understand that He was to glorify God by His death. And then when He explained it to them, in terms of His going to a place where they could not go, Peter wanted to know why he could not follow Him now, at that moment. He asserted that he would lay down his life for His Master. But Peter did not know what needed to change in himself before that could happen. He was one of the “little children” in the sense that all believers are children. He would grow up in time to be a father in the church. But, it was just after Jesus had instituted the Lord’s Supper that He said to Peter in Luke 21: 31 – “Simon, Simon!” “Indeed, Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.” “But Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death.’” “Then Jesus said to him – “I tell you, Peter, the rooster shall not crow this day before you will deny three times that you know Me.”

What we need to see from this, is that Peter thought that he would prove his deep love and loyalty for His Lord by his own natural determination. He would do something valiant for Him. But he little realized the strength of Satan to go about to prove him wrong, and to make a fool out of him in this resolution. He was going to sift Peter; he was going to test his true spiritual strength, and he was going bring to him the greatest temptations that Peter had ever experienced in his whole life, in the midst of His Master’s being arrested and taken away to trial. He would whisper to him: Do you really want to go through this suffering of being humiliated with your Master? Wouldn’t it be much easier just to forget about it and go back to being a fisherman once again? He tempted him with the thought: Why are spiritual resolutions so hard to go through with? Wouldn’t it be easier to just stay in the background, and not follow Jesus into this crowd of wicked men? Peter’s resolution had indeed been good, but he would find himself failing miserably in the midst of these temptations; he would deny His Lord 3 times. He would deny that he ever knew Him, and in this way, he would be overcome by the evil one.

Why did Peter fail so badly at that time? Truly, he knew the Lord, and he had walked with His Lord closely the whole time of Christ’s earthly ministry. But he did not realize, until that time, the greatness of the spiritual battle which the Devil would bring to bear, at that critical time in his life; the one who is trying to do something good for the Lord. You see, in order for Peter to win the battle and overcome the wicked one, Jesus had to go before him, to suffer and die, so that Peter could overcome him later on, after Jesus was raised from the dead. How important a lesson this is for every Christian to learn; that Jesus must go before us in terms of our obedience. To overcome the evil one you must learn to do it in the strength and power of the risen Christ. When I say things like this to you, I am thinking that some of you may be troubled. You are saying something like this to yourselves: If the strength to overcome the evil one is not in me, by nature, and it has not been given to me simply by virtue of my being born again, then how can I obtain it as a Christian? And I say to you: You will obtain this ability to overcome the evil one by praying to better understand the work of Christ on your behalf, more clearly.

So turn with me over John 14: 26-31 – Jesus says to them here: “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.” “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” “You have heard Me say to you, ‘I am going away and coming back to you.’ ‘If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, ‘I am going to the Father,’ for My Father is greater than I.’” “And now I have told you before it come, that when it does come to pass, you may believe.” “I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.” “But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment,

so I do.” “Arise, let us go from here.” Jesus is on the verge of going to the cross. And He is trying to encourage His disciples with the prospect of His overcoming the evil one. He would not have them to be troubled, but to pay attention to what He was telling them. If they paid attention, they would be able to endure all the things which they would pass through over the next few days, and see true spiritual strength in action.

Now I want you to focus on this truth, that the Lord Jesus was preparing His disciples for all that was coming. He and the Father would be sending them the Spirit to help them in the future, to overcome the evil one. Christ did not want them to be troubled. He did not want them to be afraid. He was going away to the cross to die, and yet He was here promising them that He would come back to them. He says that if they loved Him, they would rejoice when they heard that He was going to the Father, for great things would come as a result, for them, and for us here today. The ruler of the world, Satan, was coming to try to destroy Him and His works, but He would not be able to do it because of this one phrase that Jesus speaks. “The ruler of this world, Satan, “has nothing in Me.” In other words, there was no sin within Jesus, and thus there would be nothing for Satan to lay hold of, in Jesus’ heart, by way of tempting Him, which would succeed.

This is how Jesus overcame the evil one, and this would now lead to this next great step; of His ascension to glory. Having finished His work of sufferings on the cross, and having risen from the dead, He would ascend in their sight; up to heaven, to sit at the right hand of the Father. And from that great vantage point, He and the Father would send the Spirit to take His place and His glorious work in our hearts, so that we as Christians could become strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. This is how the Devil is overcome, by your faith in what Christ has done for you, and His intercession for you, even now; continually applying the efficacy of His righteousness and His wounds which plead for us, so that we know and understand that all of our sins are forgiven, and we are then taught by the Spirit how to do spiritual battle with the Devil and overcome. It is by putting on the full armor of God, and taking up the shield of faith, and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. We learn to watch and pray against the schemes of the Devil. We learn to watch and pray against the sinful motions of our flesh. This is especially seen in the young men, who having all of the physical strength to do exploits of preaching, and laboring for Christ’s Kingdom; raising families to the glory of God, and helping in every way to build the church of Christ, do not labor in vain, and they do not grow discouraged by the oppositions of Satan, but overcome him by the power of the Spirit and remembering all that Jesus has done for them.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – To be spiritually strong means that you as a young man in Christ have the word of God abiding in you.**

The way that a young man overcomes the evil one is directly related to what he does to cultivate his or her spiritual strength. Spiritual strength will come from exercising yourself unto godliness. Psalm 119: 9 – “How can a young man cleanse his way?” “By taking heed according to Your word.” “With my whole heart I have sought You; oh let me not wander from Your commandments.” “Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.” Here we find that a young man, in order to be strong in the Lord, must learn to cleanse his way. He must learn to think about the difference between what is true and what is false, and hold to the true. He must take heed, he must pay attention to do according to all that God has written in His word, for then he will make his way prosperous, and then he will have good success. (Joshua 1: 8) Let us apply this, each to our own life. You must think about what is good and what is evil in terms of what you are doing with your time. You are to redeem the time because the days are evil. You will pray to become more discerning about what is the most profitable way to spend your time.

Don't think that you are really growing strong as a Christian until you know that you really love abiding in God's word. Ask yourself – Do I really love to pick up my Bible to read it, for there, I know that I will find food for my soul and treasure for my heart? Do I long to seeking to find new nuggets of truth there day by day? The only way that you will really know your Bible it is if your read it, but God would have you to be a spiritual miner and mine the depths of spiritual ore out of it so that your soul is encouraged and strengthened and you are made joy and satisfied with His word. Do think deeply about what God is saying to you through His word? Is it your greatest joy to apply the truth to your life? The evil one would lead you to think that your greatest joy is found in sin and compromise. He will tempt you in subtle ways as well as obvious ones. He will attempt to give you alternative ways to wisdom and success which are those ways which will leave God out, and His word behind. Satan is always questioning the word of God and trying to get you to question it. “Has God said?” “God knows that in the day that you eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you will become wise like Him.” That is how he tempted Eve, and that is how he still tempts thousands today, both unbelievers and believers. He would have you to disbelieve the word of God, or neglect it in favor of worldly considerations.

And so, in order to overcome him you must learn to cleanse yourself from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord. And cleansing yourself from the defilement of spirit is cleansing yourself from worldliness and all atheism and agnosticism; all false philosophies of the world. The way that the young Christian finds success in cleansing their way is by “taking heed according to God's word. The word is not only to be read, it is to be abided in. And when this is done and then that person deliberately orders their life according to God's dictates in it. Let me ask you whether this is something that you as a Christian are doing? Do you have private devotions in the word? Do you so read and meditate in His word that God is speaking to your heart through it, and you are interacting with Him over all the truth which He would give to you each day. Are you a tree planted by the rivers of water; that is, the Spirit's opening your understanding so that you will be wise in the way that you think, and in all of your behavior? To really learn and grow you must abide in God's word. To really overcome Satan and his schemes you must take up the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. To cleanse your way as a young Christian is to deliberately go about to free it from the kind of pagan literature and worldly movies and entertaining music videos; things which may interest you very much, but which will carry you away from God's word to your own self-pleasing way of thinking. You can only overcome the evil one if you will leave the things behind which he promotes which will divert your attention from the word of God. Come down front now and I will have a few more words for you before we partake of the Supper.

**3<sup>rd</sup> – To be strong means that you realize your great on-going battle with the wicked one is to overcome him again and again.**

The way that this verse 14 of our text is worded, is in terms of attainment – John has written to you because you have overcome the evil one. This attainment is the mindset of humility; seeing yourself as needing to be taught by Christ how to overcome him, you hold fast that mindset. You are not deceived by false doctrines, and you are not being led astray to the spend the majority of your free time in entertainments of the world, which pleases your flesh; instead you are abiding in God's word. This is where the Lord's Supper comes in, as a means of strengthening you in all these good convictions that we have spoken of today, which characterize a spiritually strong young man. It is Christ who has overcome the evil one at the cross, and He came into the world to destroy the works of the Devil. Let us pray as we partake of this Supper to see our utter dependence upon our Lord to overcome the Devil in the thousand temptations that he will bring to us over the course of our life. Let us remember that there is more than enough strength in our Lord Jesus to overcome Him, but let us not take that grace for granted.

