

Subject: *Straight Talk about Overcoming the World*

Scripture: *1 John 5:1-5*

We come now to the fifth and final chapter of this letter. The purpose of John's letter is to define and describe true Christian faith and life. There is so much counterfeit Christianity in the world. We must be able to tell the difference between the counterfeit and the real thing for the sake of our church and our own souls. There is a lot at stake here. As he comes to the final chapter John reminds us that some things always go together:

- 5:1 – believing Jesus is the Christ and being born again
The world speaks of a born-again Christian. Is there any other kind? John says “No.”
- 5:1 – loving God and loving God's children
- 5:2-3 – loving God and obeying God's commands
His commands are not grievous (burdensome). His commands may be difficult, but they are not drudgery because He gives a loving heart that wants to obey.
- 5:4 – being born again and overcoming the world
- 5:5 – believing Jesus is the Son of God and overcoming the world

Since we have already dealt with some of these matters in previous sermons, I want us to focus on what John says about overcoming the world. We find the phrase “overcometh the world” three times in verses 4-5. John describes Christian victory in a statement of fact (vs. 4) and a question (vs. 5).

I like to win, don't you? Most people like to win. The old saying is: “It doesn't matter if you win or lose; it's how you play the game.” That's just not true. I remember when David played football at Avoca Elementary. We went to the games and one year they changed how they did things. When the score got too lopsided they turned off that part of the scoreboard so that all you could see was the clock and not the score. Some people thought it was too hard on the losing team to see a runaway score.

1. Overcoming the world is a birthright and blessing

Who are the overcomers? They are believers. They are born of God. They love God and other believers. They obey God's commands. God's people are identified by many names in the Bible. We are believers, Christians, children of God, children of light, brethren, sheep, saints, soldiers, stewards, witnesses, ambassadors of Christ, branches in the vine, members in the body, living stones in the temple, God's beloved, disciples, servants, a royal priesthood, the salt of the earth, vessels of honor, the righteous, and overcomers.

Overcomers are victors, winners, or conquerors. Nike shoes and sportswear are popular around the world. *Nike* is the Greek word for victory in verse 4. A form of that word *nike* is translated “overcome” in these verses. God wants us to live in victory and walk in victory, not in defeat. He wants us to overcome and not be overcome by our enemies. The word “overcome, overcomer” is one of John's favorite words. Of the 28 times it is found in the NT, John uses it 24 times.

In the seven letters from Christ to the churches in Asia Minor (Rev. 2-3), all seven letters refer to true believers as those who overcome. Victory over the world is not only a birthright of every believer, it is a birthmark of every believer. Overcoming is evidence that a person is a true Christian.

The reason why we overcome the world is because we are united to Christ. He overcame and therefore we overcome in Him. In Christ we overcome Satan (2:13-14). In Christ we overcome death (1 Cor. 15:54-57). In Christ we overcome the world and all other enemies.

- **Romans 8:37** *Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.* We are super-conquerors. We overwhelmingly conquer. We are absolutely and completely victorious. In Christ we are invincible.
- **2 Corinthians 2:14** *Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ.* We are always on the winning side in Christ. The image Paul used here was that of the victorious general who would lead his men in a triumphant march through the city after the battle was over. We are conquerors because we have a King who has already won the battle.

2. Overcoming the world is a struggle and challenge

Just because we are overcomers doesn't mean it is easy. Jesus overcame the world, but it wasn't easy. It was a hard-fought battle for Him and it is a hard-fought battle for us.

- **John 16:33** *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.* When you get onboard the Christian life you soon find you're not on a pleasure cruise; you're on a battleship and the seas can be dangerous.

The world is our enemy and we are still in the battle. The world is not the planet and not the people, but the evil world system controlled by Satan who is called the god of this world and the prince of this world. The world system is opposed to God, His Word, and God's people. The world system is sophisticated, powerful, evil, deceptive, and deadly. Lost people are not our enemy. They are victims of the enemy. We must overcome the world or be overcome by it. There is no other option: defeat it or be defeated. Jesus said we are in the world, but not of it. This world is not our home and not our friend.

We have learned that Isis is not a country or political state, but it is a radical and dangerous ideology. But the ideology of the world reaches everywhere in the world and is far more deadly. We can understand how dangerous the world is by how God describes it:

- **1 John 2:15** *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.* The world can be loved.
- **James 4:4** *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.* The world can be friendly.
- **Romans 12:2** *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* The world can shape our thoughts, values, and habits.

In his classic story, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan called the world "Vanity Fair." He used the word fair in the sense of something attractive or appealing. Vanity means worthless or empty. John Bunyan understood that the world is on the one hand attractive and appealing, but at the same time it is worthless and disappointing.

3. Overcoming the world is a reality and certainty

We should pay attention to the language in verses 4-5. We find two statements and a question. These are statements of fact, not suggestions. John says that a Christian overcomes the world (not should, or may). He does overcome it. In verse 5 the question is asked who can possibly overcome the world except a person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God, that is a Christian.

The word “overcome” means absolute victory for all to see. The tense of the verb is present which means it is ongoing and lasting. Christians have victory in three ways:

- This is a common victory (all Christians are overcomers)
- This is a convincing victory (the outcome is never in doubt)
- This is a continuing victory (it begins when we are saved and continues until we get to Heaven). We don't wait until we get to Heaven to experience victory. We have victory here and now every day. We may have setbacks and lose every now and then, but overall we are winning. A football team may have a few penalties or turnovers and still enjoy a solid victory over the other team.

I like being on the winning team, don't you? If you want to overcome the world you must be born of God and believe that Jesus is the Son of God. A verse in the Gospel of John puts those two things together:

- ***John 1:12*** *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*

Are you willing to receive? Are you willing to believe?