

That You May Know

*And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.
(1 John 2:3 ESV)*

*We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.
(1 John 3:14 ESV)*

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God,
that you may know that you have eternal life.
(1 John 5:13 ESV)*

The Faith That Overcomes The World

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1 John 5:4-12

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! I hope you brought your Bible with you and that you are able to open it now to 1 John 5:4. We read all the way through to 1 John 5:5 last week, but as you have no doubt figured out by now, John often creates a little bridge that leads nicely from one topic to the next and that is exactly what he has done here. Right after his “hymn of praise to heavenly love” John transitions smoothly into a conversation about the FAITH that has overcome the world and it is to that faith and to that conversation that we turn our attention this morning. Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 4:

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

⁶This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.⁷ For there are three that testify:⁸ the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.⁹ If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son.¹⁰ Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.¹¹ And this is the testimony, that

God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:4–12 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

There is a FAITH, John says, that is STRONGER THAN THE SIREN’S SONG. There is a faith that enables a person to turn away from the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride of life. There is a FAITH that causes us to BECOME the children of God RIGHT NOW and that allows us to enjoy the presence of the Lord forever.

So what faith are we talking about here; that’s the focus of this portion of the letter.

The Faith That Overcomes The World

The first thing John says about this FAITH that overcomes the world is that it:

1. Affirms the true Divinity of Jesus

You can see that in verse 5:

“Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5 ESV)

This is GROUND ZERO for the Christian faith. If you don’t believe that Jesus is The Son of God – of the very same substance and essence as God – then you aren’t even in the conversation. This is where it begins – and that is WHY John began his Gospel right here. He said in John 1:1:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1 ESV)

This SHUTS the door on whole branches of Christian heresies. D.A. Carson says here:

“Stretch our imagination backward as we will, we can find no point in time where we may agree with Arius, who, speaking of the Word, said, ‘There was once when he was not.’”¹

So if you THINK that there was ever a time when Jesus was NOT – then you are NOT a Christian, that’s what John is saying. This immediately disqualifies the Jehovah’s Witness, the Mormons and the Muslims. All of those religious systems CAN and DO conceive of a time when Jesus was not.

Therefore, according to John – none of those systems reflect THE FAITH that overcomes the world. You have to believe in the Jesus who was WITH GOD and who WAS GOD from the very beginning.

The second thing John says here about the faith that overcomes the world is that it:

2. Affirms the true humanity of Christ

That’s what John is saying in verse 6 – though we may need a little help to get at it. He says:

This is he who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not by the water only but by the water and the blood. (1 John 5:6 ESV)

Now what in the world is John talking about here? We’re bumping up against an expression here that obviously made perfect sense to his original hearers but seems very odd at first glance to us. What does it mean that Jesus came by the water and the blood? Well, there is a very long chain of Bible commentators – stretching all the way back to St. Augustine – who understand John here as making a shorthand reference to his own Gospel. In John 19:33-35 – in a passage that these people would likely have heard read DOZENS, maybe even HUNDREDS of times before, John said:

But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.³⁴ But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out **blood and water**.³⁵ He who saw it has borne witness—his testimony is

¹D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 114.

true, and he knows that he is telling the truth—that you also may believe. (John 19:33–35 ESV)

That FACT obviously made quite an impression on John. He actually pauses the narrative in order to say: I SAW THIS and I am telling you straight up that I am not lying. I SAW BLOOD and WATER come out from the body of Jesus Christ as he hung and died upon the cross.

Now why did that make such an impression on John?

I think the answer would have to be that John was harbouring some doubts AS TO THE HUMANITY of Jesus right up until the moment of his death.

We forget that.

We think as modern people that it would have been hardest to believe in the DIVINITY of Jesus – but think of all the things that John saw Jesus do. He saw Jesus walk on water. He saw Jesus heal the sick and raise the dead. He saw Jesus receiving worship and deference from MOSES AND ELIJAH on the Holy Mountain so John had absolutely no doubts whatsoever as to the GLORY, MAJESTY and DIVINITY of Jesus Christ.

But it appears that he was wondering, secretly, quietly, in his heart – whether or not Jesus was truly human. So when the soldier thrust his spear into Jesus' side, John takes a peek – and he probably expected to see all the stars in the cosmos shining through that tiny gash – but instead he saw the water and the blood. He saw the fluids of a dying man. He saw the humiliation and the degradation of HUMAN DEATH.

That is what John wanted to SOLEMNLY DECLARE THAT HE PERSONALLY WITNESSED as he stood by the cross of Jesus Christ.

I saw the DEATH OF A MAN.

That is clearly the primary and most immediate sense of these words in 1 John 5:6. But there may be MORE to it than that. F.F. Bruce concedes the obvious and primary meaning but then he goes a step further. He says:

“In the narrative much importance is clearly attached to this phenomenon, emphatically supported as it is by trustworthy eyewitness testimony (John 19.35): whatever else it may signify, it does (in the Evangelist’s intention) signify our Lord’s real humanity.”²

However; he goes on to say:

“The sequence ‘water and blood’ is not accidental, but corresponds to the historical sequence of our Lord’s baptism and passion. Cerinthus, we recall, taught that ‘the Christ’ (a spiritual being) came down on the man Jesus when He was baptized but left Him before He died. The Christ, that is to say, came through *water* (baptism) but not through *blood* (death). To this misrepresentation of the truth John replies that the One to whom believers acknowledge to be the Son of God (verse 5) came ‘not with the water only but with the water and with the blood’: the One who died on the cross was as truly the Christ, the Son of God, as the One who was baptized in Jordan.”³

I apologize for the long quotation, but I want you to see that. Remember, the heretics were saying that Jesus started off as just a man – then became divine at his baptism, then became just a man again when the CHRIST SPIRIT LEFT HIM, then he died finally as a man and stayed dead.

No, John says. The faith that overcomes the world believes that the Son of God was as truly and thoroughly the eternal Son of God, the CHRIST, at his death as he was at his baptism.

That is the ONLY CHRIST WHO SAVES.

The Church Father Athanasius said famously: “What has not been assumed has not been redeemed”. If Jesus – as the Son of God – did not truly assume our humanity than we are not saved.

But he did!

So we are!

² F.F. Bruce, *The Gospels & Epistles Of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 118.

³ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospels & Epistles Of John*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 119.

Thanks be to God!

John knew that everything Jesus did on this earth he did as TRULY GOD and TRULY MAN and therefore he is the only one who can heal, redeem and restore us as human beings.

It is faith in THAT JESUS that overcomes the world.

The third thing he says about this faith is that it:

3. Receives the teaching and encouragement of the Holy Spirit

You can see that in verses 7-8:

For there are three that testify: ⁸ the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree (1 John 5:7–8 ESV)

We've already talked about "the water and the blood" but what does John mean by adding here the testimony of the Spirit? The Pillar NT commentary says very simply and very helpfully here:

"The Spirit confirms to believers the truth of the message about Jesus that they heard from the beginning"⁴

So there is a connection in John's mind between the teaching of the authorized eyewitnesses – the Apostles – and the testimony of the Holy Spirit. And no doubt that connection in John's mind goes all the way back to what Jesus said to the Apostles in John 15:26-27. He said:

"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." (John 15:26–27 ESV)

So YOU (you Apostles) will tell people what you have come to understand about me and the HOLY SPIRIT will confirm the reality of that inside the believer's heart.

⁴Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 179.

We've talked about this many times – I've talked about how any time the Gospel of Jesus Christ is truly preached from the Scriptures – there are really TWO SERMONS happening simultaneously. There is the one the preacher is preaching from the text of the Bible and there is the one being preached directly inside your heart – by the Holy Spirit of God. That SERMON happens INSIDE THIS SERMON if this sermon is truly preaching the Christ of Scripture.

The Holy Spirit in your heart reaches out for the true Christ being preached in the words of the preacher.

So there are two dynamics here – and they have to be held together otherwise you get mysticism chaos. First of all there is the OBJECTIVE TRUTH contained in the witness of Scripture. That's the first witness in John's metaphor here – the eyewitness, apostolic testimony to the truth of Jesus Christ. That is EXTERNAL, OBJECTIVE testimony – and it is met and supported by INTERNAL, SUBJECTIVE testimony – the testimony of the Holy Spirit. And that is the REAL CLINCHER. In the original Baptist Confession of Faith they talked about that. They said that while there are many convincing reasons why a person might come to faith MERELY on the basis of the evidence and testimony contained in Holy Scripture – ultimately it is the INTERNAL witness of the Holy Spirit that produces real faith and full persuasion. Paragraph 5 of chapter 1 in the old Baptist Confession states:

“our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth, and divine authority thereof, is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.”⁵

Do you hear that?

When the Word WASHES OVER YOU – the Holy Spirit works within you to teach you that which is TRUE and to encourage you in your FAITH which overcomes the world.

That's why these people didn't fall away. John said that back in chapter 2. He said:

⁵ The Baptist Confession Of Faith, Chapter 1, paragraph 5.

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. ²⁰ **But you have been anointed by the Holy One**, and you all have knowledge. (1 John 2:19–20 ESV)

You've got the Holy Spirit in you. He's like a Divine Sorter and a Holy Highlighter. When the WORD OF GOD washes over you he is grabbing things and implanting things and emphasizing things – and taking some things and JABBING them right into your heart, while other things he is storing away for future use – he is doing all that inside of you. And when nonsense washes over you – he makes you like TEFLON. It doesn't stick. It just washes off on either side.

That's why you're still here John says – because you have the faith that overcomes the world.

The fourth thing John says flows right out of that. He says the faith that overcomes the world receives the whole testimony of God concerning Jesus Christ.

4. Receives the whole testimony of God concerning Jesus Christ

You can see that in verses 9-10:

If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. ¹⁰ Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. (1 John 5:9–10 ESV)

So here, John seems to be making an argument from the lesser to the greater. He is saying: “The ultimate significance here is not in what we are saying, per se, it is in what we are saying GOD SAID about the person and work of Jesus.”

That's what our testimony is about. We are telling you WHAT GOD SAID about Jesus – and whether or not you receive that will determine your eternal destiny.

God said some stuff about Jesus. He testified through the Scriptures, he spoke through the prophets about the One who was to come. He spoke through the miracles. Sometimes he spoke AUDIBLY – we think of the baptism of Jesus, when he came up out of the water, the Bible says:

“immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.” (Mark 1:9–11 ESV)

People saw that – people heard that! John the Apostle records the testimony of John the Baptist at that very moment who said:

“I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. ³³ I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ ³⁴ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:32–34 ESV)

So there is a lot of testimony going on here! God is SAYING STUFF about Jesus through prophets, through miracles, through signs that people can see and through voices that people HEARD and all of this has been written down carefully for you and the faith that overcomes the world is the FAITH THAT RECEIVES ALL OF THAT – as TRUTH from the mouth of God.

The faith that overcomes the world does not ARGUE with the Holy Spirit and it does not EDIT the Holy Scriptures.

But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2 ESV)

Old Testament and New, if you are receiving what God is saying with reverent fear and godly humility then you are saved.

And if you are not, then you are not.

There will be no editors and no debaters in the eternal Kingdom of God.

There will be no clippers or correctors in the eternal Kingdom of God.

The only people that are going to be there are those who RECEIVE and who REJOICE IN the WHOLE WORD OF GOD.

That is the faith that overcomes the world.

The fifth thing, and last thing that John says here is that the faith that overcomes the world is a faith that:

5. Receives eternal life with God through Jesus Christ

You can see that in verses 11-12:

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:11–12 ESV)

So if you HAVE THE SON – if you are locked in on the Christ of Scripture, if you are believing in the Jesus who is TRULY GOD and TRULY MAN – if you are connected by FAITH TO THAT JESUS – then you have eternal life.

But if you're not – then you don't.

Eternal life is in Jesus – the Jesus of the bible. The Jesus that John has been speaking about. So if you are in HIM then your eternal life has already begun. The Jesus of John's Gospel said that kind of thing all the time. In chapter 5 he said:

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. (John 5:21 ESV)

Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. (John 5:25–26 ESV)

In chapter 6:40 he said:

For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:40 ESV)

So Jesus can give eternal life to whomever he chooses – and he does that – he gives that to people, the very moment they believe. Jesus said that in John 14:23:

“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” (John 14:23 ESV)

So if you LOVE JESUS – if you embrace him as your Saviour AND LORD – then everything changes for you - immediately. The Father loves you and claims you as his child and he comes even now and begins to live inside you and to make his home within you.

So if you are in Christ then your everlasting life has already begun and it will continue beyond the day of your death and on into eternity; forever – that’s what John is saying in this passage. And that has been the substance of Christian hope since the very beginning. The Venerable Bede writing in the 8th century says here – commenting on this text:

“John says that God has given us eternal life, and remember that he was saying this at a time when he was still in the flesh and subject to physical death. But God gave us eternal life in exactly the same way as he has given us the power to become his children. Right now we live on earth in the hope of his promise, which we shall receive in its fullness after we die and go to be with him.”⁶

That is the faith that overcomes the world. A faith that looks BACK on all that God has done for us in the life and death of Jesus Christ. And a faith that looks FORWARD to all that is ours NOW and to all that we will enjoy IN CHRIST and WITH CHRIST for all eternity.

That is the faith that overcomes the world! That is the faith that is stronger than the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes and the pride of life. That is the faith that is stronger than the Siren’s

⁶ The Venerable Bede in *Commentary on the Catholic Epistles* as cited in Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary, (London: Apollos, 2020), 196.

Song. And that is the faith that you've been hearing about from me, John says, since the beginning.

Here is the path, walk ye in it.

Zooming Out (Note to Visuals: This heading is for me. Not to appear on the PowerPoint)

That's the passage – but what's the point?

Sometimes we get so excited decoding these 1st century phrases and seeing all these intricate connections in the text that we forget to ZOOM out and actually look at the picture on the puzzle that we are assembling. What is John saying here? And why he is saying it? What's the point?

Well thankfully, John tells us in the very next verse. He says:

I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13 ESV)

That's it – that's the point. I just want you to know that you are on the right path. If you are believing in the Christ of Scripture and if you are experiencing the internal ministry of the Holy Spirit – then you are in the place of power, you are on the path of presence, you are on the ROAD that leads to eternal life.

Do not turn either to the left or to the right.

Ride this narrow road all the way home to glory.

That's the point.

In every generation there are offramps that lead to death and ruin. In every generation there is a voice calling on us to LEAVE BEHIND the Gospel we've been hearing about from the beginning.

In the 20th century – when we were building cars and inventing airplanes and atomic bombs there was a voice telling us that no modern person could believe in the miraculous and supernatural and divine aspects of the old, old Gospel story. We needed to leave that stuff behind.

That was the 20th century offramp of Liberalism. We got rid of the Virgin Birth, the miracles, the healings and of course the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

How'd that work out, by the way?

If you want to know how that worked out just go up to any mainline Protestant church in this city and peak inside the window on Sunday morning. Tell me what you see. On most Sunday mornings? You see nothing! No life, no fruit, no future.

That is what lies down these other roads – so before you think about taking the 21st century offramp – the one where we shave off everything the Bible says about sex, gender and authority - you need to revisit the lessons of recent history.

There is no future down any of these other roads. Just a guarantee of death and ruin.

Don't do it.

You're already on the road that leads to eternal life – this is where the POWER IS, this is where the PRESENCE IS and this is where the FUTURE IS.

So CLOSE YOUR EARS TO THE SIREN'S SONG.

This is the path. Walk ye in it! This is the way, the truth and the life!

So stay. Remain. Abide. Abide in Him and he in you and you will bear much fruit. NOW; in the FUTURE; and FOREVER because THIS is the faith that overcomes the world. Thanks be to God! Let's pray together.