

Victory in Jesus

a sermon in the series
Life in the Son

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at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.
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I John 5:4-5

“For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. ⁵ Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

The story of Christmas is more than a miracle baby born in a Bethlehem stable. It has practical, far-reaching implications. One of those implications is that it is the means by which we overcome the world. Jesus came into this world as a Savior to rescue rebels who carried in their hearts the seeds of hell. John has already said this to us in the fourth chapter of this same epistle, verse 13,

“And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.”

So Jesus is our Savior. But oh, how sad it is to limit what Jesus has accomplished by coming into the world to just the forgiveness of sins. Redemption is far more than salvation from hell and eternal punishment, it entails so many wonderful blessings that I believe it is our responsibility to find out as much as possible what those blessings are, not just justification, not just forgiveness, not just escape from penalty but many more wonderful things result from Christ coming into the world. The truth is that human intelligence is far too limited to explore all of the many blessings, infinite wealth, glory and pleasures that have been given to all who follow the Master.

On one occasion Jesus put it simply this way; that He had come to give life and life more abundantly. In our text today John lists one of the purposes of Christ being sent to us—victory over the world. He didn't just come so you could overcome the next world after this life; He came that you might be able to overcome this life in this world.

There are three questions I want to pose to you today, number one, how is the world an enemy? Number two, what is the kind of faith that overcomes the world? And number three, how does this kind of faith overcome the world?

I. HOW IS THE WORLD OUR ENEMY?

Needless to say John's already answered this question in chapter two. Listen closely, this is the command we are to live by.

“Do not love the world,”

Then he qualifies it,

“or the things in the world.”

Then he gives the consequences if you do.

“If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

At first reading it might not sound too drastic, but I say it's the most drastic thing he could have said to you and me. If you love the world the consequence is the love of God is not in you and you will not experience the love of God. I cannot think of this. It's the horror of horrors to even imagine what life would be like without the love of God right now. It would be hell.

“¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

A. What is the World?

If loving the world is wrong then I need to know what that means. How does John define the world? Does it mean you can't watch TV or wear the latest fashion? Is it sin or worldly if you're wealthy? Is it wrong to drive a luxury car? Should you only listen to church music on your iPod or MP3 player? Is worldliness spending too much time playing video games or surfing the Internet? Is worldliness wearing short dresses? But how short is short? How do we define worldliness or the world? How do you know if you love the world if you don't even know what the world is?

Let me tell you first of all what it isn't. It is not the earth he's talking about. We often call this planet on which God has so graciously placed us 'the world' and I guess in the realm of language it is not inappropriate to say that. He made it and when He made it He said it is good, so this terrestrial ball must not be what John is referring to. So what is the world?

I think it's humanity in general. Humankind. It's the philosophy or the system of belief that rules every person that is not born of God. This philosophy is buried within every human heart. What is that philosophy that John would say is the world? It is the belief that you can live, and live a good life, without God. That is the world.

It is a system of belief that says you can survive in disregard to God. And by the way, you don't

have to be agnostic or an atheist to be worldly. Even Christians can buy into that philosophy. Some of you, my brothers and sisters have bought into that philosophy and are on spiritual decline because we have wrongly defined the world.

We start trying to define it by rules and regulations, by external measurements of one kind or another, by religious behavior that we stereotype as godly and behavior we stereotype as worldly. John says it's not measured externally, but it's in the heart, which will produce certain external behaviors, but why deal with the fruit when that isn't the problem? It's the root, and the root is within the heart of every person born. Anytime you live--I'm talking to Christians also—in disregard to God and His will for you, you are loving the world. Period. No exceptions. No qualifications. You can rationalize qualifications and exceptions, but John doesn't make any. This is what the Apostle John means by this word *world*. It means to be opposed to God, and even Christians can be opposed to God.

Thinking yourself sufficient for whatever you think you need is opposition to God. And it can be either hostile or it can seem as innocent as eating a piece of fruit from a lone tree. The world's system, John says, consists of three things from the second chapter verses 15 through 17: the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

Even though the world, humanity, is divided over politics, economics, even religious systems and ideas, every man, no matter his nationality or political or religious persuasion, is united in the quest for the same things--the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. It's engrained in our nature. Every man, every woman believes in the pursuit of happiness, it's even in the Declaration of Independence. It's engrained in the very fabric of this society. But is it biblical how we pursue happiness? This is where the question of worldliness comes.

Every person is moved by the desire of what they deem beautiful to their own eyes and everyone is filled with pride and wants the acceptance of people. Until you acknowledge you really want people's approval you will never be able to grow in holiness. It has to be confronted—it's in every one of us.

It's those internal motivators that have produced this worldly system John is talking about, and technology has not made it any better. It may have sophisticated it, but it hasn't changed it, it's still the same. Everyone says I deserve to be happy and the way to happiness is by doing what I think is necessary in order to attain happiness. That is the world and believe me, brother, you can get wrapped up in it quickly.

Worldliness is to live like the world in disregard to what God has said. So, does that mean that God wants us to think of ourselves as scumbags and never have anything we see? To live like a monk, never indulging any desire for fear it's evil, is that the biblical response? Of course, you know that's a rhetorical question and the answer is of course no, not hardly. What does he want then? If we're not to love the world and the things of the world, what's the answer? John tells us. First John 2:15, what he wants is that you do not settle for less. God wants more for you. This

prohibition is not the end of happiness; it's the way to it. It's the way to obtain it. His desire for you is to give you so much more than the world or anyone else in this room can give you.

The opposite of love for the world is here in our text. What is the opposite, what does he contrast it to? If you love the world the love of the Father is not in you. That's the opposite. If you're pursuing the world you're not pursuing the Father's love for you. If you're pursuing the Father's love and experiencing it then you have found something so much better than the world. That's what John is saying. It's not to shut down your joy, it's to increase it multiple times. The opposite of loving the world is loving the Father.

Sometimes you can hear a preacher say something so much that you think you've got it. Well, you might know this but that doesn't mean you've got it. Listen carefully, the love of God is so much better than what the world or the things the world has to offer us. It exceeds any pleasure you have ever experienced and if your heart is guided by the love of God then God can sometimes trust you with material or physical things of this world. You all came in an automobile, didn't you? No one walked to church. Well, I take that back, I did. Other than my family, and me no one walked here. You have an automobile made by men in this worldly system we discussed. You live in homes, you wear clothes, you buy products. You'll exchange gifts in a few days. God doesn't say these things are evil, but the love of them, the pursuit of them—the belief they are the means to happiness rather than the love of God—is.

B. The World is Very Seductive

I want to talk to Christians, we who are saved. We really don't get how deadly poisonous the seduction of the world is because we don't live on guard against it. We live too haphazardly in a hostile environment where at every turn something can sting us, bite us, corrupt us, and send us on a way to desertion from Christ. If I really believed that I would live guardedly, but most of us don't because the world is so seductive it not only seduces every non-Christian, it seduces believers and we, if not careful, will be on the same pathway of worldliness that unbelievers are on.

Again, I want to say this for emphasis, most of you have heard it—all you have to do to spiritually decline is nothing. You do nothing. You don't guard your heart, you don't run to God in fear of sin, you don't seek His presence, you just do nothing and the slippery slope of worldliness begins.

I want to read to you something from C.J. Mahaney, it was so good concerning this. Listen closely and apply it to your own heart.

“The distinctions between Christian and worldly conduct—once so clear—have blurred beyond recognition. The slippery slope from drifter to deserter has, in only a few years, grown increasingly slick. This rapid loss of clarity has culminated in crisis. Today, the greatest challenge facing American evangelicals is not persecution from the world, but seduction by the world.”

—C. J. Mahaney

The world will seduce you and persuade you that you know what's best for you more than God. That's where it begins, a small choice, a small decision that seems harmless and probably even reasonable. It's logical, it makes sense, it passes the analytical test, but God was never consulted. It's to indulge in these three things, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, and totally ignore what God says about those things. If you don't believe it can happen to you let me just mention one person's name. Don't worry, I'm not going to mention yours. It's Demas. Do you remember Demas?

This guy worked side by side with the Apostle Paul, he was a preacher, a Gospel worker, one of Paul's faithful associates, one of his preachers-in-training. Can you imagine being Demas and be mentored, disciplined by the Apostle Paul? One day Paul writes sad words, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world." Can you imagine the pain the Apostle had to have felt as he put his quill to the parchment the day he wrote those words? It didn't begin immediately or probably even drastically for Demas, it began very small and continued to build. That's what the world is and that's what worldliness will do. But that's not the emphasis of this message, praise God.

II. WHAT KIND OF FAITH OVERCOMES THE WORLD?

This is part of the promise, this is one of the reasons that Jesus died for us, that we can overcome such a seductive and even deadly world.

A. What Kind of Faith it isn't

It's not a set of beliefs like we use the word, meaning the Christian faith, the Mormon faith, or the Catholic faith. There we are using the word faith to signify a doctrine or a specific set of beliefs, John is not saying that this kind of faith overcomes the world. You can be a member of Oak Grove Baptist Church, one of the best bodies I know, but being a church member and adopting our understanding of Scripture is not going to help you overcome the world. That's not what he's dealing with.

Secondly, it's not a system of morality. People look at us and say, "Well, they are people of faith because they go to church or they read their Bibles or they pray and give money to religious institutions." The faith here is not legalistic morality. We saw last week and several times through the epistle that John does stress obedience to God's commands, absolutely. We looked at that thoroughly last week. The reason he does that is because you can't have this kind of faith—whatever it is—without obedience. Wherever there is faith that overcomes the world there will be obedience to God. But listen to me, it isn't being good for goodness' sake. That's what we hear this time of year, don't we? That little ditty, "Santa Claus is Coming to Town," you better be good for goodness' sake? Listen, that's legalistic morality. Being good just for the sake of being good so that you will gain in the end is not the kind of faith that overcomes the world, that kind of faith

will damn your soul. You cannot be good for goodness' sake, it's impossible, because the first time you mess up you get worse than coal in your stocking.

God is a holy God, perfect in fact, and He said the judgment by which we will all be judged is His holy perfection and one sin is enough to damn your soul. So being good for goodness' sake is not the kind of Gospel I need.

B. What Kind of Faith it Is

It's the kind of faith that will overcome the world. It is a faith that manifests itself in radical ways. There was a time when I think we were afraid of the word *radical* and almost shunned the word. "Oh, he's a radical Christian," was a way of saying, "He is a fanatic." Today we embrace the word a little more, there have been best selling books by that title, the younger generation likes the word radical and you can't read the New Testament and not find the spirit of a radical, even in Jesus' words, "If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, pick up his cross and follow Me." That is radical, to say the least. It's so different than religious systems and legalistic morality, it is so radical because it comes by experiencing the explosive, life-changing love of God. That's why it's radical—it's out of this world. The commandments of Jesus Christ we've been seeing in this epistle are aimed at the very heart of an individual, not at your behavior. It's not to be confused with being religious. Jesus commands us to radically love.

If a man walks up and hits you on the cheek, turn to him the other cheek. That's radical, isn't it?

It is so against the nature of man, because when somebody strikes you on one cheek you have one of two reactions, either you run or you stand back and fight, depending on your temperament and character. But Jesus says you neither fight nor run, but stand there and give him the other cheek. That's radical love.

Do not return evil for evil, but good for evil, love your enemies. That is radical.

Jesus teaches us to radically love and then radically forgive. It doesn't matter what the sin or the offense, you forgive that person because that's what Jesus did as He was being nailed to a cross. "Father, forgive them."

You radically forebear, you put up with, you tolerate people's idiosyncrasies and everything they do that rubs you the wrong way. Is that radical? Every person in this room has had somebody significant in their life that has some habit, some quirk that rubs you the wrong way. I guarantee you set out to do exactly what I did—change that person. That's the natural and common thing to do, but to love them and to see that quirk as part of the creation of God and love them anyway is radical.

God told us to radically give, first yourself. You are not your own, you've been bought with a

price. We do not belong to ourselves. Present your bodies living sacrifices—we're to give ourselves. The Macedonians first gave of themselves, Paul said, and then they gave sacrificially. I was in prayer the other day and a beautiful verse jumped out that I had never before paid attention to, Proverbs 3:9-10, I am to honor God with my possessions. What I have is to honor Him, not to spend on my lusts just because I'm pursuing happiness and am bored right now. That's radical brother.

Watch this, often Christians are criticized as being fanatical and radical because the focus is always on behavior. They are the person always criticizing others because they are not acting like them. They're always challenging people and confronting them, they're the person that acts better, that has nothing to do with anyone else because they aren't on their level. And people look at them and say, "Those people are fanatics. All they want to do is talk about their religion and point out my sins." I want to say something to you. You may not understand, but I believe you'll get this in a moment—that's not the kind of Christianity that overcomes the world and the reason is that they're not Christians *enough*. They're not really fanatics. I would say they don't love enough, they don't forebear enough, they don't forgive enough, and the truth is they are not fanatical enough. Their faith is too weak right now, if they have faith at all—the kind John was talking about.

What Paducah and this area needs to see is people who are radically in love with God and who trust Jesus so much that they are different from most people who profess Christianity. What this city needs is to see you so trusting Christ with your life that no matter what happens you can still love, forgive, forebear and give of yourself. Friends, that's radical. That's fanatical and that has power in it, because nobody is like that without the grace of God motivating and empowering them. That's what happens when the love of God is in you as John says.

This kind of faith will overcome the world. What is it? Here it is, simple: It's to love God more than anyone or anything else. That's the kind of faith John is talking about. You believe Jesus when He said, "Love Me, I am worth more than anything this world has to offer," and you say, "Yes, I see it. I accept it. I embrace it. That's my life." And you follow after it as hard as you can. That's the kind of faith that overcomes the world.

III. HOW DOES THIS KIND OF FAITH OVERCOME THE WORLD?

A. This Faith Believes Christ is Better than the World

It takes Jesus at His word. It causes a man or a woman to lay down their life and take up the life of Christ. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 10, this is phenomenal to me and I had never seen it like this until this week when God just opened my eyes to see it. It's not profound, but it is radical and it will change your life.

Matthew 10:39, you've all heard this verse,

“He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”

We think of this verse in terms of eternity, and certainly eternity has to be a part of eternal life, duh. That's simple. But Jesus is not just talking about heaven. He says if we pursue the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life, and live by those things in disregard to what this said, you lose your life, it will be destroyed. But if you are willing to lay aside the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life and trust God and His will for your life, be directed by His Word and let Him lead you by the Spirit, trusting in Him, regardless of what you're seeing with those eyes, feeling with that flesh, and no matter how wounded your pride might be, you will find life. Notice He uses the word *find*. You will *find* life. He's not just talking about in heaven, because listen to what He said in Mark 10:29-30, very similar,

“So Jesus answered and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life.”

I believe the common interpretation is correct but I think there is more to it than that. The common interpretation is you may be deserted by your family, they may disown you, but in the end you will have reaped so much more brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers and even children as your faith reproduces in the life of others. I heard a testimony in Sunday School this morning when one of our own sisters said this body here is closer than many of her blood relatives, that is what He's talking about here. But what I think we often miss in that interpretation is this—He is saying He Himself is worth more than any mother or father, wife or children, house or land, job or career you may have to give up for the Gospel's sake, for Christianity's sake in order to save your soul from this world. “I'm worth more than all of those things, a hundred times in this life and eternal life and the life to come!” Jesus is worth it! That's the kind of faith I need today if I'm going to overcome the seduction of the world. I need to believe that when the world comes to tempt me and says, ‘Hey, this is awesome, this will satisfy,’ I need to be able to believe that Jesus is much better. I have to believe that. If I don't believe that I begin to decline and I become a deserter eventually. This faith believes God is better than the world.

B. This Faith Believes God Will Help Us Obey Him

Again, this is where God is working in my life. I can't put it into words yet, I'm still trying to understand what He's doing. So when you're just in that process it's hard to communicate it because you don't have it fully formed in thought yet. But I am—believe this or not—at a time in my life that I can trust Jesus even to help me live for Him. That all He's asking of me is not just to live for Him but to trust Him that He will help me live for Him. I know that would be so simple and elementary, but you know, some of the most blessed truths are so elementary and simple we pass over them and miss them.

In other words, what I'm trying to say is that if I trust God like this that He will help me and even my faith believes that He can work in me. He can use me. I can make a difference, brother. Why, because I'm special? No, because He is in me and promised to help me, promised to flow His power through me and I trust that. If I don't see results at that present moment that's not my responsibility, that's God's. God working in me. This faith believes God can help us love the unlovable, this faith believes God can help us radically forgive those who sin against us, even our faith believes God that in the face of pain we can see joy. And in the face of death we can find life.

I lost a dear friend November sixth this year when brother Bob Jennings died of pancreatic cancer. We've been praying for him for two years since he was diagnosed and I watched a man die with this kind of faith through the blogs that he would write, videos that he made and produced. I watched this man, taller than me, broad shouldered and strong, become a little more than a hundred pounds. And I watched his faith soar. The closer he got to death was like someone opened a prison door and his faith was so free. He just grew and you could watch it, you could hear it in his words and his writings. He could stare death in the face and he saw life, he saw freedom, he saw a liberty we don't have in this life yet. This is the faith that overcomes the world, it says you can trust God even when the doctor says the cancer is terminal and you're not going to get better, you're going to die, because it values Jesus better than anything.

C. This Faith Has No Confidence in itself

I don't have faith in my faith. This too is something God is really driving home and making more real in my life. A necessary ingredient to faith is the feeling of helplessness. I've been preaching that for years and if you've been around here long enough you've heard two words that are iconic for us: desperate dependency.

You can't desperately depend unless you're helpless, but that's becoming more real in my life. How? Because God is really showing me how helpless I am. Some of us need more convincing than others. Some of us are just more proud than others. I am thoroughly persuaded that you cannot have strong faith without also a corresponding strong feeling of helplessness.

For example, if something is medically wrong with me and I go to the doctor and after his exam he tells me I need surgery. Friends, I've never been in the hospital except to visit other people. When I go visit other people and they start telling me their ailments, I start getting woozy and a little queasy, if the doctor told me I needed a surgery that would be a big deal, even if it were to operate on an ingrown toenail. I'm a big baby when it comes to these kinds of things. Are you hearing me? I'm telling you I've got to have faith to get through something like that. Let's say the doctor sees I'm apprehensive, he can tell I'm getting nervous, he can see the sweat pop out on my forehead, my eyes rolling back in my head, I'm about ready to pass out on the table, and he starts to assure me, "Hey, I've done hundreds of these, it's not a big deal, you don't even have to go to the hospital—we can do this right here in the office. Just trust me, it will be fine."

What will help me to trust that man? When I really know I can't operate on myself and when everything I've done to solve the issue doesn't work and he's the only remedy. When I know I can't operate on myself, I then will trust the doctor. So faith in the doctor means helplessness on my part. I can't do it therefore I trust him. Listen, faith believes someone else has to do it for me. That's what faith is—the awareness, the persuasion that somebody else has to do this. I can't do it. I can't go to Africa and be a missionary for Jesus, that's ridiculous, but God called me so I've got to lean on Jesus completely. I can't witness at the office, they will mock me and laugh me and ridicule me and I can't handle that, I'm a people pleaser, so I have to lean on God in order to be a light.

Last week at the conclusion of the message several of you were affected. One person came to me in the middle of the week and said, "I want to thank you because I am feeling so helpless." They hadn't even heard this sermon yet. And I said, "Yes!" I know that's God. I know that's faith. What that person said to me is that faith is already there because that's the key ingredient to faith. Faith says I can't but He can. So you feel helpless today? You've got more faith than you realize. I can do nothing! I really can't.

How do you get this kind of faith? See yourself as absolutely helpless to do God's will without God's grace. Another thing it's called—death to self. The greatest enemy to faith is not doubt; the greatest enemy to your faith is self-trust, self-confidence, self-reliance. As long as you have your own wisdom and understanding and strength you cannot and will not fully trust God. Therefore it's the responsibility of God because you cannot even feel helpless without Him. It's God's responsibility to tear you down, to wear you out, to break you until you can say, "Of my own self I can do nothing." That's what God is doing in us. Why? Because He wants you to overcome the world and this is the necessary ingredient, faith.

Faith says "I can't" and believes it. You say, *but wait a minute, pastor, I have surrendered, I have surrendered myself to God so many times.* Yes, but are you resting? See, faith is not only feeling helpless, but it's also resting. As long as you see yourself as something necessary for God's will being accomplished then God cannot be all and He cannot do His full work. Faith begins when desperation starts, despair of self, a ceasing from everything but God alone produces a rest in God. It's a great thing when a man comes to rest in God's omnipotence for every moment of His life.

(I feel like this first part is a little unclear but I can't figure out how to fix it.) As I conclude, please don't think of faith as only necessary for the big things of life, but trust and rest in God for your issues with anger, un-lovingness, selfishness, worldliness, and temptation. Deal with those things you're saying are not so important. God says the issues of the heart are more important than electric bills or the house payment, see, what you're calling small God has said, "I'm sufficient, but as long as you think they're small you'll think you are sufficient you'll never trust Me for it."

Brother, you can trust God with your heart. Yes, He's going to work and sometimes He uses a chisel and a sledgehammer, but thank God He loves me enough to not let me stay this way. The great object of faith is to trust God not because of what my heart feels but on the strength of

the Word of God only because He saved me. Faith that overcomes the world does not look at self; it only looks to God to only do what He can do. It cannot be happy with anything less than all of divine omnipotence working on your behalf.

That's why there is much cause for celebration this week; this is the Savior that came into the world so that we can live like this—overcoming life. This is the gift of eternal life that I possess now. Listen closely, this is the gift of eternal life, it is all of divine omnipotence in me. That's eternal life. All of God in me. Any other definition is not true salvation. The gift of eternal life is all of divine omnipotence at your disposal working through you. No wonder shepherds celebrated that night. The angel that spoke to them was certainly right on when he said, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, great joy!" Not only will He help you gain eternal life, but He will help you overcome this life now.