

THE VICTORIOUS LIFE

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." I John 5:4.

What does the Word of God mean by overcoming the world? It recognized the conflict between the spiritual and the physical life. It warns us that many of God's children have fallen, that better men and women than we are have lost in the struggle with evil, and that we are not sufficient within ourselves to win the victory over temptation. However, God's Word holds up the possibility of victory for each one who will depend on Christ. In spite of the presence of evil, as well as our own inherent weakness, we can be strong and victorious in and through Christ. As Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me" (Phillippians 4:13).

God intended for His children to be victorious, so in grace He has made provision for them to be triumphant. The Christian life is not a summer picnic, but is a ceaseless warfare. It is a stern conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Martin Luther also said that Christ places us with our backs against the wall so that we may fight and win victory after victory. The goal of victory, which is ever before the Christian, is not cheap or easy. It involves discipline, surrender and sacrifice. Spiritual victory will not come without setbacks and suffering.

What is the world? The world is human society, as it is seen organizing itself apart from God, and in forgetfulness of Him. Or, to express it in another way, the world is the sum total of all outward things which are apart from God. It is everything, however innocent in itself, which comes between your soul and God. We cannot escape from the world, but it is a certainty that we can overcome it. Many earnest souls have tried to get away from the world by seeking refuge in the cloister, but it has followed them there. God does not intend for us to get away from the world, but he does expect us to overcome it. We shall be exposed to its appeals, to its fascinations, to its blandishments, and to its temptations, but we need not be overcome by it. It is in the world that we are to accomplish our mission, to let our light shine for the Lord, to introduce precious souls to Christ, and to glorify God.

If the world is not being overcome by us, then it is clear that we are being overcome by it. When is it that the world is conquering you? It is overcoming you when you are induced to accept its views and maxims instead of the principles of God's Word, when you are influenced by the opinions of men and by the spirit of the age.

The world is conquering you when it is petrifying all your longings for God, when it chills all of your aspirations upward, and when it steals out of your heart the very inclination to pray to God and to listen to His instruction. The world is conquering you when it fills you with love of earthly things, and leads you to set your affections on things below. The siren of the world is always appealing to us, telling us what it will do if we obey its behests. There are the promises of profit, popularity and prestige. While they look attractive, they will produce headache, heartache, disillusionment and sorrow.

I. A Praiseworthy Ambition.

Occasionally you will hear somebody talking about being on top of the world. What modern expression more accurately defines what you and I are after? It is where we want to be.

You may call it health, happiness or wealth, but it all simmers down to this -- we want to be on top of the world and not underneath it. And yet, we are seldom there. Instead of being on top of the world, we are loaded, burdened and crushed by chance and circumstance. We are harnessed and bridled instead of sitting in the saddle ourselves. Often we are driven by our work instead of driving it. It is not only adversity that defeats a person; prosperity often does it also.

In the language of today this text says, "This is the way we can get on top of the world -- rule instead of being ruled, conquer instead of being defeated." Let us try to learn the secret of doing this.

This text was written by the Apostle John near the end of the first century. In 70 A. D. Jerusalem had fallen. Christians were scattered far and wide. The days of persecution had begun long since. The monster Nero had had his day. It was dangerous even to be a Christian.

Christians had proved to be good rations for the lions, so the lives of all the Christians were in daily peril. They had been driven to the underground vaults, the catacombs, for their gatherings for worship and fellowship. Think of adding all those woes and perils to the already crushing circumstances of life, the battling of disease, hunger, and doubt. Right in the midst of such a world John wrote to his fellow Christians in somewhat this fashion: "We are not whipped; we are not beaten; we are conquerors; we are not the slaves of fate; we are the masters of life; we have overcome circumstances; we are on top of the world, and not beneath it. And the secret of our triumph is faith."

The conquest of the world may be considered to be the highest object of human ambition. In this verse "the world" is a title for that portion of human life and society which is alienated of God, through being centered on material objects and aims, and therefore hostile to the cause of Christ.

Sometimes the world brings its power to bear on us by direct assault. At other times it assails us by offers of compromise, and by appealing to our own desires and interests. It seizes the opportunity of attacking us when we are worn out by so many cares, duties and troubles. Its influence is continuous and persistent. If the world is not being overcome by us, then we are being overcome by it. To overcome the world's temptations and to live a victorious life is indeed a praiseworthy ambition.

II. A Possible Attainment.

John here connects the new birth and Christian victory. He tells us that the destined end of supernatural life is conquest. There is no doubt as to the place where John learned his lesson. He heard Christ talking about an hour before Gethsamene, and heard Him say, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." The years that had passed since Christ made that statement had taught John something of its meaning, and had made him understand how the Master's victory might belong to His servants.

The only person who was ever a complete victor over the world was Christ. The words which He spoke from the cross, "It is finished," comprised the shout of a conqueror. Every other man has been a failure at some period of his life. Abraham was noted for his faith, but he failed right there -- he denied that Sarah was his wife. He did not have faith

enough to believe that God would take care of His own. Moses was noted for his meakness and humility, and he failed right there -- he got angry. God kept him out of the promised land because he lost his temper.

Elijah was noted for his power in prayer and for his courage, yet he became a coward. He was the boldest man of his day, and stood before Ahab, and the Royal Court, and all the prophets of Baal; yet, when he heard that Jezebel had threatened his life, he ran away to the desert, and under a juniper tree prayed that he might die. Peter was noted for his boldness, and a little maid scared him nearly out of his wits. As soon as she spoke to him, he began to tremble, and he swore that he didn't know Christ. John, the beloved disciple, was noted for his meekness; and yet we hear of him wanting to call fire down from heaven on a little town because it had refused the common hospitalities.

The believer is in the world and therefore surrounded by it's influences, sentiments and ways. He has then to war against:

1. Sensuality -- "the lust of the flesh."
2. Covetousness -- "the lust of the eyes."
3. Ostentation -- "the pride of life."

The world conquers me when it succeeds in hindering me from seeing, loving, holding communion with, and serving God my Father. On the other hand, I conquer it when I lay my hand upon it and force it to help men to get nearer to Him, to get more like Him, to think more often of Him, and to do His will more gladly and constantly. That is the victory -- when you make the world a ladder to lift you up to God. That is its rightful use. When the world comes between you and God, it has conquered you. To overcome the world you must get it under your feet, stand upon it, and reach up to God. Overcome the world and make it help you to be wiser, gentler, nobler, more gracious and more Christlike, and you will get the greatest delight out of doing so.

III. A Practical Approach.

Victory over the world is not possible until one has been born again and become a child of God. Christians are born to a new life of faith, love, righteousness and inability to go on sinning in the same old way. That life is kindled in the souls of men through their faith in Christ. When we are born into God's family, we receive new life, new tastes, new desires, new motives, and new powers which enable us to overcome the temptations which were and are too strong for our own human abilities.

Our text says, "Whatsoever is begotten of God keeps on conquering the world." Faith enables us to win a continuous victory over the world. It makes it possible for us to overcome its errors, its glare, its enticements, its threats, its unbelief, its hatreds, and its persecutions.

1. We can overcome by faith.

It is by faith that we live, walk and work. Only faith can give man the power to overcome the world. Mazzini, the great Italian patriot, spoke wisely when he said: "I do not know, speaking historically, a single great conquest of the human spirit, a single important step for the perfection of human society which has not had its roots in a strong religious faith." What man can have the effrontery to stand in the

face of deeply entrenched wrong unless he has in his heart a faith which has already promised victory? I am thinking of Paul as he faced the conquest of the world for Christ; I am thinking of Martin Luther as he faced the bulwarks of the Roman Church; I am thinking of Adoniram Judson as he faced a cruel and heathen Burma; I am thinking of William Booth as he faced a sodden and drunken London; I am thinking of Abraham Lincoln as he faced that whole institution of slavery which was thoroughly unchristian. Subtract faith and you have taken away the power by which these men, and the hundreds of leaders they represent, overcame the world.

If any hard endeavor faith is three-fourths of the victory. The man without faith is whipped before he starts. The man with faith can pretty nearly say, "Fear not, I have overcome." The faith that John is taking about here is a dynamic force that leads a man to dare and do and die. Some definitions are helpful: "Faith is the daring of the soul to go further than it can see." And Principal Jack's: "Faith is the reason grown courageous." Or Dean Inge's: "Faith is a kind of climbing instinct which draws us upward and onward."

Perhaps some are thinking, "And whence comes this faith that can put a man on top of the world?" It is a gift from the heart of God, and it is kept by him who pays the price for it. With some of you faith has weakened with the passing years. You wonder why. Where it has been killed by new knowledge in one instance, it has been clouded by sin in ten instances, and starved by indifference and neglect in twenty more. You cannot have this faith that overcomes if you are living a life of sin. Faith withers and dies of neglect. We cannot have great faith if we neglect the Bible, our prayer life or church attendance.

2. We can overcome by holy living.
3. We can overcome by bearing a faithful testimony.