

MY VICTORY IN JESUS_ FAITH

As we begin this new series, I found myself musing over the kinds of victories we tend to value. We seek to win trophies, awards, medals, diplomas, and certificates of achievement. At the very least, we hope for some acknowledgment of our accomplishments, be they personal accolades, honorable mentions, or just an occasional applause from the crowd. Our desire for these measures of our worth can create a spirit of competitiveness, for we realize that if we are to have our own 15 minutes of fame, we're going to have to beat someone else out of theirs. Of course, someone else will soon come along and break our record or our winning streak. Before long, we will get bumped from the lead. Then, the trophies tend to lose their luster.

Christ doesn't promise us the kind of victories we so often long for. Yet, in Him we have amazing victories - and over the next few weeks we'll consider just how amazing these triumphs really are. Next week, we'll contemplate ***Our Victory Over Fear and Doubt***. The following week, we'll meditate upon ***Our Victory Through Praise***. Then on Easter, we will celebrate "***Our Victory Over Death***" itself.

Today, let's take a brief look at ***Our Victory that Overcomes the World***. Open your Bibles to 1st John 5. Listen carefully to the apostle's words here...

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves His child as well. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out His commands. ³ This is love for God: to obey His commands. And His commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God OVERCOMES the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that OVERCOMES the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Are we born of God? Do we love God? Do we love God's one and only Son Jesus? Do we love His followers – the children of God? Do we obey God? John doesn't mince words when he says if we don't truly love Him, we're destined to be losers in this world.

He quite clearly says: ***"Faith (in Jesus) is the Victory that OVERCOMES the world.*** What does that even mean? Earlier in John's letter (*chapter 2*) he stressed that the true children of God *do not "love" the things of the world*. In fact, he says, ¹⁵ ***"If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."*** It seems apparent to me that loving God and loving the world are incompatible. In fact, these conflicting loves cannot live within the same heart. The more we grow in our love for God, the more the attraction of the world fades.

Long before I met Nina, I “*fell in love*” with another young lady. Feelings seemed mutual and we began talking seriously about getting married. When I found she’d been seeing another guy on the sly, I was devastated, but was willing to forgive her and move forward. That’s when she decided she wasn’t ready to settle down. For about a year, I was so heart-broken I wasn’t even interested in dating anyone else. I kept hoping she’d come to her senses and come back. Like I said, that was before I met Nina – but when I “*fell in love*” with Nina, I did more than just “*fall*” in love, I “*grew*” in love with her. And before long, there was no more longing for any past relationships. None.

That’s what happens when we not only “*fall*” in love with God, but we also “*grow*” in love with Him. The more we realize how much He loves us, how devoted He is to us, and how much He sacrificed so we could be with Him, the more our faith blossoms. And that faith overcomes the world. It no longer has a hold on us. We have victory in Jesus.

John also writes in the 3rd chapter that those who are truly *God’s children don’t “practice” sin*. It’s not that they never sin, but they don’t “*make a habit*” of it. They don’t constantly and continually choose to sin. Why? Listen to vs 1-8 from that chapter:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. ⁴ Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. ⁵ But you know that He appeared so that He might take away our sins. And in Him is no sin. ⁶ No one who lives in Him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen Him or known Him. ⁷ Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as He is righteous. ⁸ He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work. ⁹ No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.

Coming to grips with how great the love is that the Father has for us enables us to overcome the enslaving power of the world. Faith in what He has done for us in Jesus breaks the spell of the world’s allurements. Then, that faith leads us into a submission and obedience that brings incredible freedom and unspeakable joy. God and His holy Word captivate us with their beauty. Following His instruction is not a dreaded chore. We actually delight in all His ways. Does this mean that everything in our lives thereafter is smooth sailing? No, matter of fact in some cases the storms of life can cause our seas to grow even rougher.

Jesus told His followers, **"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have OVERCOME the world."** (John 16:33) Did you catch that? This was before His crucifixion, so obviously, it also precedes His resurrection. So how had He **OVERCOME** the world – and why should that encourage us? Jesus was continually faithful to His Father, constantly abiding in His Father's presence, always denying Himself, and relentlessly refusing sinful desires. The most amazing thing Jesus ever did was living a sinless life. He lived a victorious life – and promises to empower us to live victorious lives as well.

Yet, the world seems to win when it draws us away from God, enslaving us, coaxing us to trust in what it offers, and causing us to despair if we think we can't have it. The world seems to conquer us when it comes between us and God, sapping us of strength, blinding us to the things eternal. But it doesn't have to be this way. In Romans 8:35-39 the Spirit of God moved the Apostle Paul to write,

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are MORE THAN CONQUERORS through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When we put our faith firmly in Christ and His victory, we can crush the head of Satan just as He did, standing up to temptations and shaking off the shackles of sin's control. We truly do become more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

As the chorus of the old hymn goes...

*"O victory in Jesus, My Savior, forever.
He sought me and bought me, with His redeeming blood;
He loved me ere I knew Him, and all my love is due Him,
He plunged me to victory, Beneath the cleansing flood."
(by Eugene Monroe Bartlett Sr.)*