

April 5th, 2020

# This Is the Victory That Has Overcome the World—Our Faith

1 John 5:4-5

## **The bad bad news**

The world today only has bad news. Every headline, every news story, every politician, every nation, every individual today is being inundated with bad news: plague, earthquakes, unprecedented unemployment, catastrophic economic fallout, death. The whole world is feeling these things. It's not isolated to one people group, but 7 billion people on planet earth are simultaneously experiencing what Job said "Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble. He comes out like a flower and withers; he flees like a shadow and continues not" (**Job 14:1-2**). The world is afraid today. Hearts are failing with fear. Knees are growing weaker. Hands are hanging limp.

## **The bad good news**

Even if things recover, if a vaccine is found, if economies recover, if poverty is abolished, if the whole world were ushered into a utopian age, the world will still only have bad news. That is what the book of Ecclesiastes is about. Solomon had everything that his heart wanted. He was wiser than any living man, wealthier than entire nations, he could accomplish any feat, indulge every pleasure, defeat any army, and yet he lamented "Vanity of vanities!...all is vanity and a striving after the wind" (**Song of Solomon 1:2, 14**). He discovered that the best this world system could offer was Nihilism—the philosophy that says everything is meaningless. The eye is never satisfied with seeing, the ear never satisfied with hearing. God has planted eternity into the heart of man, and nothing in this world can fill that bottomless hole.

### **Believers are *overcoming* the world!**

That is *precisely* why the Christian has inexpressible, unspeakably good news. In fact, the Christian is the *only one* who has good news in the world today. Please look with me at v.4, John says “For everyone who has been born of God *overcomes* the world.” To *overcome* means to conquer, to overpower, to carry off the victory, to win. This is the verb form νικάω nikaō. It is in the present tense, meaning that this conquering—this overcoming—is occurring right now, in actual time, in the present. Believers are *presently* overcoming. Dear congregation, the bad news in the world today is not overcoming you, you are overcoming it.

### **Believers *will overcome* the world!**

But John isn’t satisfied to leave it there. He continues “And this is the *victory* that has overcome the world—our faith.” The word *victory* is the same word in the noun form νίκη nikē.<sup>1</sup> In the ancient world, “the Greeks...had a goddess named Nike, the goddess of victory who aided Zeus in his battle against the Titans.”<sup>2</sup> As a noun, the word points to a future completed state of victory. Believers will one day have *complete* victory. Loved ones, a day is coming when your victory over this world will be completed, your warfare *will be* over.

### **Believers *have already overcome* the world!**

But John isn’t satisfied to leave it there. He uses the word *again* in the same verse. End of v.4 “And this is the victory that *has overcome* the world—our faith.” Same Greek word νικάω nikaō, *but* this time it is in the past tense.<sup>3</sup> Believers *have already*—past tense—*overcome* the world. Satan has already been

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<sup>1</sup> This is where the shoe manufacturer Nike got it’s name.

<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1-3 John*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 2007), pg. 174. “Against that pagan backdrop, it was stunning for the New Testament to assign to Christians the invincibility associated only with the gods.” *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> To be precise it is in the Aorist tense. But “...there is no direct or clear English equivalent for this tense, though it is generally rendered as a simple past tense in most translations.” Source: [https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/1jo/5/1/t\\_conc\\_1164004](https://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/1jo/5/1/t_conc_1164004) Accessed April 4, 2020

defeated (**Hebrews 2:14**). Death has already been swallowed up in victory (**1 Corinthians 15:54**). Our victory is so infallibly certain, that the New Testament frequently describes us as already seated in Heaven. **Ephesians 2:6** He "... raised us up with him and *seated us with him* in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus." Again it describes us as already being *glorified*. **Romans 8:30** "...those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also *glorified*." Again it describes us as already in possession of "...an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (**1 Peter 1:4**). Have you been born of God? Have you believed that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Then you *have already overcome*. "[You] are beyond the reach of [all an any] danger."<sup>4</sup>

### In Christ you are invincible

John is *not* denying that are days are full of troubles. John is *not* denying that we are in a cosmic spiritual battle with enemies so fierce that if we saw them we would shrink back in terror. Neither is John saying that we have the power within ourselves to overcome. No. John is saying we are overcoming, we will overcome *and* we have already overcome *because* nothing can defeat Jesus Christ — the Son of God—to whom we belong *by faith*.

### *The Big Idea...*

If you have received Jesus Christ *as He offers Himself*, then you are beyond the reach of any danger—you have already overcome the world

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<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XXII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 254

- ☆What Is ‘the World’ That We Are Overcoming?
- ☆Why Does Being ‘Born of God’ Cause Us to Overcome the World?
- ☆How Does ‘Our Faith’ Overcome the World?

## I. What Is ‘the World’ That We Are Overcoming?

### What does kosmos mean?

Three times in our text, the Apostle John tells us that we will overcome the world. What does he mean by *the world*? It is the word κόσμος kosmos and John uses it in two very particular ways in this letter.

### **Kosmos = those enticements that seduce us away from God**

The first way he uses kosmos is **2:15-16**. Please turn there. He says this “Do not love *the world* or the things in *the world*. If anyone loves *the world*, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in *the world*—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from *the world*. Clearly John is using kosmos to mean those enticements, those sinful pleasures that stir up desire and seduce us away from God. In the parable of the soils in Matthew 13, Jesus talks about the seed that falls among the thorns. This seed does not take root because “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (**Matthew 13:22**). That’s the first meaning John gives us of world: those things that arouse your sinful cravings in order to seduce you away from God.

### **Kosmos = those agents that actively oppose Christ and His people**

The second way John uses kosmos is in **3:13**. John talks about the warfare between Cain—who belonged to the evil one, and Abel who followed God. Cain killed him because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s were righteous. He then applies this to us in **v.13** “Do not be surprised, brothers, that *the world* hates you.” The *world* here means the evil one and all those under his

power who actively oppose Christ and His people. 5:19 says “We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”

### **Kosmos = whatever leads us away from God<sup>5</sup>**

Those are the two main ways John uses *kosmos* in this letter: 1) The *world* means those enticements that seduce away from God and 2) The world are all under the power of the evil one who war against the kingdom of God and His Christ. Calvin sums up by saying that the world is “whatever leads us away from God.”

### **Kosmos = whatever makes us feel that God’s commands are burdensome<sup>6</sup>**

But John gives us something more precise than just general notions of how the world leads us away from God. Please go back to our text. v.4 starts with the word “*For*” —meaning John is continuing a train of thought from v.3. v. 3 says “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And *his commandments are not burdensome.*” And then John says “For [or *because*] everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.” John is making the world—the kosmos—equivalent with *anything* that gives the “impression or feeling...that the commandments of God are [burdensome].”<sup>7</sup> The *world* in John’s mind is whatever says God’s commandments are burdensome. Burdensome here means grievous or severe or cruel. Think about how Christian in Pilgrim’s progress had that terrible *burden* on his back. It vexed him, troubled him, weighed him down, caused him to despair. The world—the kosmos—says that is what God’s commandments are like. They are grievous and terrible, they are not to be borne. But John’s logic here is that everyone who has been born of God has overcome *the world*—that is, they overcome that prevailing spirit that poltergeist that whispers “God requires too much.” A.W. Pink says it like this

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<sup>5</sup> Calvin, pg. 255

<sup>6</sup> Much help here from A.W. Pink, *Exposition of 1 John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: A. P. & A., Inc., 1971), pg. 199

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

here “...the world...is whatever system or way of life, whatever society or companionship of men, [that] tend to make us feel God’s commandments—any of them—to be grievous.”<sup>8</sup>

### **The world in the hearts of the saints**

Think carefully how present this aspect of *the world* is always with us. When Abraham traveled to Egypt with his wife Sarah in Genesis 12, he was scared that the Egyptians would see how beautiful she was, so he told her to say she was his sister so they wouldn’t kill him. *The world* was in Abraham’s heart. God’s command—to trust in the Lord with all his heart and not to lean on his own understanding<sup>9</sup>—was too burdensome to him

Or when Peter was warming himself in the courtyard while Jesus was on trial. He denied that he even knew Christ to a little slave girl. The world was in Peter’s heart. God’s command to not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord (**2 Timothy 1:8**)—was too burdensome to him.

Or when John Mark was too afraid to continue on the missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas in **Acts 13:13**. He abandoned them and returned to Jerusalem. The world was in John Mark’s heart. God’s command to not be afraid of those who can kill the body<sup>10</sup>—was too burdensome to him.

### **Is the world in your heart?**

Dear congregation, do you feel the temptation during this pandemic to give in to the world’s insinuations? To start to believe that following God’s commands are too burdensome? God commands us to rejoice in the Lord even “though the fig tree should not blossom [and] the produce of the olive fails” (**Habakkuk 3:17-18**). If your bank account vanishes, will the command to “Rejoice in the Lord always” (**Phil. 4:4**) be too burdensome? God commands us trust Him even “though our outer self is wasting away” (**2 Corinthians 4:16**).

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid*

<sup>9</sup> Proverbs 3:5

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 10:28

If your health deteriorates, will you be able to say “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him” (**Job 13:15**). Don’t you see? From the perspective of the world, everything God commands of us is not only hard, not only impossible, but cruel and grievous.

Yes it's hard to deny yourself and take up the cross;  
 hard to love Christ more than father, mother, wife, children and even self;  
 hard to fight against sin—to cut off the hand and gouge out the eye;  
 hard to bear the reproach of Christ outside the camp;  
 hard to look not only to our own interests but to the interests of others;  
 hard to believe when God hides his face.<sup>11</sup>

How can we say that these commands are *not* burdensome? How can we overcome the world’s insinuation that following Christ is foolish and stupid?

Because we have been *born of God*. That brings us to our second question.

## II. Why Does Being ‘Born of God’ Cause Us to Overcome the World?

### What does it mean to be *born of God*?

John says in v.4 “For everyone who has been *born of God* overcomes the world.” What does it mean to be *born of God*?<sup>12</sup> The word for *born* is γεννάω gennaō. It’s a verb, it is an action that is taking place. It’s in the **passive voice**, meaning, the subject of the sentence is the *recipient* of the action, not the *actor*. Why does that matter? Well if it was in the **active voice**, it would mean that

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<sup>11</sup> Again much help here from Pink, pg. 203

<sup>12</sup> Jesus first used this language in John 3:3 when He was speaking to Nicodemus “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is *born again* he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus had no idea what Jesus meant, he asked “How can a man be born when he is old?” (v.4)

being *born of God* is something *we do*. The active voice is when the subject is the doer. “Johnny hit the baseball” is in the active voice. Johnny is doing the action. But if we say “Johnny was comforted”—it is in the passive voice—meaning Johnny receives the action. Being born of God is in the passive voice—it is not something we do, it is something that happens to us. **John 1:13** says that we are “...born, *not* of blood *nor* of the will of the flesh *nor* of the will of man, but of God.” Meaning you are not born of God because you came from a certain family, or because you chose to be born again, or because others made it happen for you. God alone is the one gives the birth. Listen to how John emphasizes this again and again.

**1 John 2:29** “If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been *born of him*.”

**1 John 3:9** “No one *born of God* makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been *born of God*.”

**1 John 4:7** “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been *born of God* and knows God.”

**1 John 5:1** “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been *born of God*, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been *born of him*.”

**1 John 5:18** “We know that everyone who has been *born of God* does not keep on sinning, but he who was *born of God* protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.”

### What being ‘born of God’ does not mean

So then what does it mean to be born of God? Let’s start by saying what it doesn’t mean. **First** being *born of God* isn’t simply *being made new*. I remember this auto repair shop that my family passed every Sunday on the way to church

growing up. It was called New Birth Auto Repair. I guess the promise was that they would make your beat-up car *like new*. Now it's true that the Scripture tells us that if anyone is in Christ that we are a *new* creation (2 Cor. 5:17). But we are not *merely* made new—not *merely* renovated, or renewed, or repaired. That would require only God's power. Being born of God means something more.

**Secondly** being *born of God* doesn't mean that God makes us like Adam was before the fall. Adam was made in after God's "own image, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness."<sup>13</sup> At the fall, Adam as well as all his posterity lost that. But being born of God isn't simply a recovery of what Adam lost.

**Thirdly**, nor is being born of God justification. The Shorter Catechism Q. 33 tells us that "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone." Being justified means that we stand on an entirely new footing with God: no longer counted as sinners, but counted as righteous as Christ Himself. *But* being born of God is not *merely* obtaining a new footing with God.

**Fourthly**, being *born of God* isn't simply being adopted into the family of God. Being adopted is one of the most glorious privileges a believer has. **Romans 8:15** says that we "...have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" We are no longer sons and daughters of disobedience, no longer children of the devil, but we call call God Almighty our Father! Yet being *born of God* isn't simply a statement about our new relationship with God.

### What does it mean to be 'born of God?'

So then what does it mean? Please turn to **3:9**. John says this "No one *born of God* makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been *born of God*." This is a remarkable verse. Why can't a person *born of God* continue to make a practice of sinning *like they used* to before they were born of God? No doubt born-again Christians may

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<sup>13</sup> Shorter Catechism Q.10

and often do backslide temporarily. But John is saying that it is simply impossible for those born again to revert back to the way they were.<sup>14</sup> Why? John answers “..for [or because] *God’s seed* abides in him.” The Greek word for seed is σπέρμα sperma. It’s that “..grain or kernel which contains within itself the germ of the future plants.”<sup>15</sup>

### **The apple tree**

To use an illustration. Imagine you have a patch of soil where you want to grow an apple tree. That soil is void of any plant life. It’s just black matter without activity, without growth. In your hand you have the apple seed. What’s in it? All the rudiments—the first principles—of life. It’s the germ of the apple tree. Then you bury that seed in the soil. What happens? A whole new life begins to sprout out of that seed. Small and delicate at first, but alive none-the-less. The seed sends out it’s DNA creating branches, and then leaves, and then finally one day fruit. What was once a bare patch of soil is now contains an apple tree. Where did it come from? A seed.

### **God’s seed is in us!**

Those born of God have *within themselves* God’s own seed. Meaning, He has mysteriously and incomprehensibly implanted His own life within us. That’s what Peter means when he says in **2 Peter 1:4** “...that we have become partakers of the divine nature.”<sup>16</sup> We now share in the very life of God.

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<sup>14</sup> “The man or woman who is born of God...simply does not and cannot continue...in a life of sin. They may backslide temporarily, but if they are born of God they will come back.” Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Great Doctrines of the Bible, Three Volumes in One: God the Father, God the Son; God the Holy Spirit; The Church and the Last Things*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2003), pg. 94 in Vol. 2

<sup>15</sup> Source: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G4690&t=KJV>  
Accessed April 4, 2020

<sup>16</sup> cf. 1 John 3:1-3

## Faith is a gift of the new birth

God has given us everything we need for spiritual life—including *the very faith to believe*.<sup>17</sup> Turn back to chapter 5. Look at **v.1**. John says “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ *has been born of God*.” Believes is in the present tense both in the English and the Greek, but the phrase “has been born of God” is in the perfect tense, it is a once for all completed action. Which means this, being born of God *comes before* faith. The order is not believe and then you will be born of God. No. It’s you are born of God and then you will believe.

John has already used this uses a similar phraseology in **2:29**. Look at it with me. Just look at the last phrase: “...everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.” But here no orthodox Christian would say that if you practice righteousness then God will cause you to be born again. Then why would we reverse the order in **5:1**? Or turn quickly to **4:7**. Again look at the last part of the verse “...whoever loves has been born of God.” No Protestant would say that you must love first, and then you are born of God. No loving is *the result* of being born of God. Then why would we say that about believing? Don’t you see dear congregation? Believing in Jesus Christ is *the result* of God causing us to be born again.<sup>18</sup> Why do you and I believe the gospel? Because we were born of God.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Before God caused us to be *born of God*, we were dead. In **1 John 3:14** we read “We know that we have *passed out of death into life*, because we love the brothers.” John is giving us one of the evidences of being born of God, namely that we love the saints. But do you notice how he describes being born of God? Passing out of death into life. That’s remarkable. Before we were born of God, we were dead. Dead people can’t believe.

<sup>18</sup> Why did Lydia believe the gospel Paul preached in **Acts 16:14**? “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.”

<sup>19</sup> LCQ.67 What is effectual calling? A. Effectual calling is the work of God's almighty power and grace, whereby (out of his free and special love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto) he doth, in his accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by his word and Spirit; savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.

### “Our being born of God is the source of our victory”<sup>20</sup>

So then why is our being born of God cause us to overcome the world? Two answers. **First**, being born of God “is a permanent work and nothing can ever bring it to an end.”<sup>21</sup> **1 Peter 1:23** says “...you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable.” The new birth is imperishable, indestructible, invincible, because God’s own life is imperishable, indestructible and invincible. It is a very denial of the doctrine of the new birth to say that a person can lose it if they backslide or fall into sin. “As if one can be born again and die and be born again and die an endless number of times!”<sup>22</sup> If you are born of God, you can never die again *because* God can never die. His life is in you, therefore you can never perish.

**Second**, the reason those who are born of God overcome the world is because it is the source of our victory, namely faith. As A.W. Pink once said “Our being born of God is the source of the victory; our faith is the realization of it, or the acting of it out. Our being born of God fits us and qualifies us for overcoming the world; our faith really overcomes it.”<sup>23</sup>

That brings us to our third question this morning.

## III. How Does ‘Our Faith’ Overcome the World?

### Objective vs. subjective faith

The end of v.4 reads “And this is the victory that has overcome the world —our faith.” What does he mean by “our faith?” Sometimes the NT authors refer to “faith” as the objective facts of the Christian faith. In Jude 3 we read “I

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<sup>20</sup> Pink, pg. 202

<sup>21</sup> MLJ, pg. 93

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

<sup>23</sup> Pink, pg. 202

found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for *the faith* that was once for all delivered to the saints.” But John is not referring to the objective facts of the faith here. He’s referring to the *subjective faith* of believers. That’s why he says in v.5 “Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who *believes* that Jesus is the Son of God?” So he’s talking about saving faith, about you personally believing.

### What is saving faith?

So then what is saving faith? What must saving faith include? Well it must include two things:<sup>24</sup> 1) a true knowledge and 2) a corresponding reception.

#### 1. Saving faith must have true knowledge

John wrote this letter against the gnostics. The gnostics were a heretical sect that believed “that matter was inherently evil and spirit was good.”<sup>25</sup> Consequently they affirmed on one level the Deity of Christ, but they denied that Jesus came in the flesh because a good spirit would never do such a thing. John is arguing against this position in his whole letter. Here in v.5, it comes out when he says “Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who *believes* that Jesus is the Son of God?” In other words, true belief must include the knowledge that *the man* Jesus is also *the Son of God*—truly man and truly God in one person; and that His “death was both real and necessary.”<sup>26</sup> Any faith that denies that Jesus is truly God, equal with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, is Jehovah Himself, the eternal God, the only God *and* that Jesus is truly man, that He had true body and reasonable soul—any faith that denies those things is not saving faith. Judiasm, Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Islam, all Deism all

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<sup>24</sup> A third thing could be mentioned on it’s own (heartfelt desire) but I essentially included that in the second element

<sup>25</sup> MacArthur, pg. 8

<sup>26</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters of John*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), pg. 170

believe in a Jesus of sorts, but all deny what John is saying here. They deny the Incarnation and the Atonement. Saving faith requires true knowledge of these things. But saving faith requires more than just an accepting of these facts.<sup>27</sup>

## 2. Saving faith must include a corresponding reception

Again v.5 says “Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” Believes is the word πιστεύω *pisteuō*. Here it simply means to trust in. But I don’t think that’s particularly helpful *because* there is a lot of things we trust in. We *trust* our cars to start in the morning. We trust that there will be food in the fridge. Is that the kind of trust John means by πιστεύω *pisteuō*? Is there somewhere else he uses this same word with more definition. Yes. Please turn with me to John’s gospel, 1:11-12. This is John’s introduction. He says this “He [Jesus] came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed [πιστεύω *pisteuō*] in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” Here you can see that John gives us more definition. He says “But to all who did *receive* him—who believed in his name...” In John’s mind, receiving Christ *is* believing in His name.

### \*What does it mean to receive Christ?

**First**, it means to receive *Him*. “But to all who did receive *him*...” Saving faith is *not* trusting in the benefits of salvation. We have all the benefits of forgiveness of sins, of imputed righteousness, of adoption into the family of God, of everlasting life, etc. But no one is saved by saying “I receive those benefits.” Just like a marriage is not a marriage *if* the husband simply says “I receive the benefits of the marriage bed, of a shared income, of someone to cook and clean for me.” No. A marriage is “My love, I receive you, you are the object of my desire, not the benefits. The benefits are wonderful additions. But you are what I want. You!” That’s what John means here. “But to all who did receive

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<sup>27</sup> Mere assent of the facts of the gospel is the heresy of Easy Believism or Sandemanianism

*him...*” Saving faith first and foremost receiving a Person—Jesus Christ. “He is to be received...in the way that a bridegroom.”<sup>28</sup>

**Second**, we must receive Jesus *as He offers Himself to us*.<sup>29</sup> Meaning, our believing in Him must correspond with the way that He offers Himself. How does Jesus offer Himself to us?

As *the exclusive* way of salvation. **John 14:6** “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

As One to be received by faith alone *apart from works*. **John 5:24** “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

He offers Himself to us **Prophet** that He might teach us (**John 1:18**).

As **Priest** that He would redeem us by the offering of His blood (**Heb. 9:14**).

As **King** that He would rule us by His Word and Spirit (**1 Cor. 15:25**).

That’s how Jesus offers Himself to us. That’s how we are to receive Him, as the all-sufficient Savior. Saving faith means receiving Him “...as the coming bridegroom who offers Himself and all that He has, to be before all others your Mediator.”<sup>30</sup>

### How does our faith overcome the world?

Alright then, how does receiving of Jesus overcome the world? John reminds us in **v.4** “And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Dear congregation, isn’t that what you need in this hour? Don’t you need

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<sup>28</sup> Petrus Van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology: Faith in the Triune God Vol. 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2019), pg. 9

<sup>29</sup> SCQ. 86. What is faith in Jesus Christ? A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a saving grace, whereby we receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, as he is offered to us in the gospel.

<sup>30</sup> Mastricht, pg. 5

a victory that overcomes the world? Some of you are terrified at what is happening in the world today. Trusting in Christ seems to be an uphill battle. Perhaps God's commands seem so burdensome to you. You realize the world is creeping into your heart. How do you fight? Realize this. Your faith has already fought. Your faith has already overcome the world. The battle in the most important sense is already over. Consider these four reasons your faith overcomes the world.

### **1. Faith receives impossible realities**

Faith in Christ means that all of the impossibilities that you one faced, you never have to face again.

He has died for our sins.

He has raised from the dead.

He removed our guilt.

He forgave our transgression.

He absorbed God's wrath for us.

He sealed our acquittal.

He accomplished our reconciliation with God.

He broke our bondage to sin.

He vanquished our enemy.

He removed the sting of death.

He rescued us from hell.

He has given us eternal life with Him.<sup>31</sup>

What obstacle from the world could possibly claim victory over you? Your faith in Christ has already delivered you from every impossibility.

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<sup>31</sup> Slight variation from John Piper, *A Hunger For God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2013), pg. 79. "He has died for our sins. He has raised from the dead. Our guilt is removed. Our sin is forgiven. Our condemnation and punishment have been transferred to Christ. Our acquittal is sealed. Our reconciliation with God is accomplished. Our bondage to sin is broken. Our enemy has been put to naught. The sting of death is removed. The destiny of hell is averted. Eternal life has been given. The Lord has come!"

## 2. Faith dyes all our imperfect works in the merits of Christ<sup>32</sup>

Someone might say, “But I feel so condemned in following Jesus. All my efforts to please Him seem to fall short.” Beloved, don’t you know that faith dyes all your imperfect works in the merits of Christ? Some of us dye our hair in order to hide our age. Don’t you know that God dyes your all imperfect works in the merits of Christ so that He is please with them? **Hebrews 11** is an amazing chapter. God trots out all these men and women and He commends all of them as being great men and women of faith. And yet have you read their stories? These people were abject failures in parts of their lives. But not a spot or stain is mentioned of those things in Hebrews 11. Why? Because faith has dyed all their works in the merits of Christ. Dear congregation, you can not be overcome even by your own imperfect works.

## 3. Faith gives us eyes to see eternal things

The problem with the world is that it only has one set of glasses. Have you ever put on someone else’s glasses before? Everything becomes blurry. We can’t look through the glasses of this world, they can only see with their physical eyes. But Paul says in **2 Corinthians 5:7** “we walk by faith, not by sight.” Faith gives us eyes to see another world, an eternal world. Why could Abraham leave everything—all his family, everything he knew—and go out to a place he had never been? Because “he was *looking* forward to the city...whose designer and builder is God” (**Hebrews 11:10**). Why could Moses leave all the pleasures of Egypt to be mistreated with the people of God? “He endured as *seeing him* who is invisible” (**Hebrews 11:27**). Don’t you see? They could see with the eyes of faith. Beloved, here is the secret to enduring this season—look to the invisible. Look to the glories that are promised you. Look to that day when you will see your Savior face to face, and know Him even as you are known. Look to all the future promises that God lays out for His people. The promise that at the sound of the last trumpet, you will be caught up with the people of God to meet the Lord in the air, and so you shall always be with the Lord (**1 Thess. 4:16-17**).

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<sup>32</sup> Mastricht, pg. 39

The promise that God is going to wipe away every tear from your eye, that death will be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore (**Rev. 21:4**). Look with to the invisible.

#### 4. Faith unites us to Christ

John says just a few verses away from our passage in v.11 “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is *in his Son*.” This life is *in* his Son. It’s *in* Christ. The main reason our faith overcomes the world, because faith unites us to Christ, so that we are one with Him. He is the vine, we are the branches. He is the foundation, we are the spiritual stones of His house. He is the Head, we are the body. He the groom—we are His bride. Every image that Scripture uses to refer to our relationship with Christ is one of union with Him. Our life is in Him, joined to Him, bound to Him *forever*. Which means that this world can never overcome us because it can never overcome Him. **John 16:33** “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Beloved the reason why by faith you have the righteousness of Christ is because you have Christ Himself.

Christ’s righteousness is yours, because Christ is yours.

The reason why you will have joy at His right hand and pleasures forevermore, is because you have Christ Himself.

Christ’s joy is yours, because Christ is yours.

Beloved, you possess Christ, the highest and best good. He is worth more than everything in Heaven and everything on earth. He is the Good Shepherd, the Bread from Heaven, the Light of the World, the Resurrection and the Life, the Alpha and Omega, the Beloved of the Father, and He is yours by an indissoluble union. How can the world ever overcome you?

## The evils of unbelief

Oh but consider the evils that accompany unbelief. ‘Without faith we are still enemies of God. Without faith we have no access to Him. Without faith we can never please Him. Without faith, we have no fellowship with Jesus. Without faith none of God’s promises are Yes and Amen. Without faith we are still in our sins, still under the wrath of God, the curse of the law, eternal condemnation. Without faith we are shut out of every hope of salvation.’<sup>33</sup>

If that’s you, why would you remain in such a state? There’s no greater evil than hearing the gospel and rejecting it. The Scripture says “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.”<sup>34</sup> Turn away from this great evil unbelief if you have never done so. All of your sins can be forgiven. But the greatest thing you receive is Jesus Himself.

## Application

I want to answer two vital questions that I think are especially pressing in these troubled times.

### **Question 1: How does my faith overcome the world, if my faith is weak?**

If you have a weak faith, let me put your heart at rest. Faith isn’t the bit that we throw in, and then God throws in His bit, and together those combined bits provide us the victory. Calvin says it like this “faith receives from Another that by which it overcomes.”<sup>35</sup> Oh that is so helpful! Faith is not a power in ourselves, it is holding out our hand and receiving power from God. If you feel weak in faith, don’t you realize that is a necessary condition to belief? Nobody believes and exercises faith when they feel strong. The person who is well

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<sup>33</sup> Much help here from Mastricht, with slight variation, Mastricht, pg. 24

<sup>34</sup> 1 John 5:10

<sup>35</sup> Calvin, pg. 255

doesn't go to the doctor. Likewise the person who thinks they have it altogether has no need for faith. Faith is recognizing that what you have is bankrupt and weak and unable to rescue you. Faith inherently comes from a position of weakness. It's saying I can't Lord, but you can. So the reason why your weak faith can overcome the world, is because it has nothing to do with you. It has to do with Him whom you are trusting. It's His strength, not the strength of your faith.

### **Question 2: How can I grow my faith?**

Some of you perhaps feel like you make so little progress in growing your faith. Maybe because you don't know how to grow it. In order to grow your faith you must, you must, you must go to the Word. **Romans 10:17** "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." That is not just a verse for the lost, but for the saved. If you are a Christian, your faith still comes from God's Word. So here's what you do, in whatever situation that you find yourself in: fear, anxiety, despair, uncertainty, whatever it may be, go to the Word, and seek for a promise that applies to your situation. Don't you see? You have to go to God Himself. Reflect on His attributes. Reflect on His promises. Go to Christ. Look at His work of redemption. Review what it means to be elect, predestined, called, justified, sanctified, glorified. That's how you grow your faith. **2 Corinthians 3:18** says that as you behold the glory of the Lord (in His Word) you are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.