

Overcoming the World Unto Eternal Life

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Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 00] 1 John 5, verses 1-12 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.

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.

Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? And this 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. For there are three that testify, the Spirit and the water and the blood, and these three agree.

[1 : 22] If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater. For this is the testimony of God that He has born concerning His Son. 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 is born concerning His Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. This is God's holy and authoritative word. I read a Christianity Today article recently that noted that online evangelism ministries, like the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Global Media Outreach, and Crew, that they account normally for about 200 million gospel presentations on the internet per year.

But they have recently, since the onset of the pandemic, have seen an explosion of clicks on search engines. For their ads about finding hope, overcoming fear, such things.

And they say that they've seen a 170% increase in their web traffic. And that's because fear, which is a spiritual malady, spreads even more virulently than the virus itself.

[2 : 55] And this presents a great opportunity for us as Christians to offer the hope of eternal life found in Jesus Christ alone. And we as Christians do not fear suffering, because Christ our champion has already suffered.

We as Christians do not suffer death, do not fear death, because Christ our champion has already overcome death. And because Christ suffered and died, but was raised from the dead in victory on Resurrection Sunday, we have assurance that our suffering and our death will not end in defeat, but it will end in victory and eternal resurrection life.

And this passage we just read in 1 John chapter 5 reminds us of this truth, that those who overcome the world by their faith in Jesus Christ can be assured of their new birth and eternal life. So first we're going to talk about the new birth in verses 1 to 5, and about eternal life in verses 6 to 12. John begins with a reassuring statement in verse 1.

So if you've been with us through this short series in 1 John, you know that John has been emphasizing throughout the letter that faith in Jesus Christ and love for our brothers and sisters in Christ are the twin test, kind of two-pronged tests of whether or not our conversion is genuine, whether or not we really belong to God and are born of God.

[4 : 36] And here he is referencing those two things again. First, everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. So this is the first test. Christ is not Jesus' last name, but it's his title, which means anointed one, referring to the fact that he is the messianic king, the prophesied

king that was to come to deliver his people.

And if you believe that Jesus is this king, the son of God, Jesus is the Christ, then you have been born again into God's family. And there is no exception to this.

Everyone who believes this truth, that Jesus is the Christ, has been born of God. This is the first part of that twin test of genuine conversion. And those who have been born of God love their heavenly father, because that's their father.

And so in the second clause, John refers to Christians as those who love the father, and then gives the second part of the twin test of genuine conversion. Everyone who loves the father loves whoever has been born of him.

The word father in verse one of our translation, the English standard version, actually isn't there in the original Greek. The word that is there literally means the one who begets, which of course is a reference to the father.

[5 : 55] But this literal rendering highlights the tight connection between the one who begets and the one who is begotten. He's saying everyone who loves the one who begets loves whoever has been begotten of him.

And since John already told us in that first clause that it's those who believe that Jesus is the Christ are the ones who are born of God. Those who have been born of him that he's referencing here are fellow believers.

Those who believe that Jesus is the Christ. And this is how we know this is the second part of the test, how we know that we are genuinely born of God and love our heavenly father, it's that we love our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

I'm blessed to pastor a church that loves me and my family really well. And one of the ways that your love for me is evident is the way you love and care for my children.

Serving them in children's ministry, smiling at them, taking interest in them, patiently bearing with them when we are over at your house or when you're over at my house. And that means a lot to me because I know that your love for our kids is an expression of your love for me and Hannah.

[7 : 07] And in the same way, John is saying here, How can you claim to love the father yet hate his children?

How can your love for your father not express itself naturally in your love for his children, your brothers and sisters in Christ? And so then how are we to know that we are indeed loving those who are born of God?

How do we know that we are loving one another? Verses 2 to 3 answer that question. By this we know that we love the children of God. When we love God and obey his commandments.

For this is the love of God that we keep his commandments. Now John's statement here is surprising because he reverses his usual pattern of exhortation, saying that we know that we love God by the way we love one another.

You see how that's reversed here? And this time he says that we know we love one another when we love God and obey his commandments. So at first glance, then his argument seems perfectly circular, which is a logical fallacy.

[8 : 15] But that's not what is going on here. John is actually adding a new wrinkle to his argumentation. He's adding that our genuine love for one another is evidence not merely in a human affinity, a social bond that every human being, whether he is a Christian or not, craves and creates naturally in life, but by a love that is rooted in love for God and obedience to his commands.

In other words, it is a spiritually minded, God-oriented love. The love for one another that proves that we belong to God's family is not a love for men apart from God, but a love for our brothers and sisters that is centered around the love of God.

And some people indeed join a church simply because they like the relational connections and social engagements in much the same way that non-Christians join country clubs.

But that is no evidence that we are truly born of God. Christian love is not a temporal human fraternity where the other people are the focal point of the relationship.

It's rather an eternal spiritual fraternity where God is the focal point of the relationship. It's only when we are consumed and driven by our love for God that we can rightly love one another in accordance with his purposes and priorities.

[9 : 50] So let's ask ourselves, is God the center of gravity in our relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ? Or are we actually drawn by something else?

Someone else? By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments. Then John explains why he ties obedience to God's command so closely with love for God.

He says, For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. This echoes what Jesus said in John 14 verse 21, Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.

And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

Note that this is a statement, not a suggestion. John doesn't say, If you love God, you should keep his commandments.

He says that the love of God consists in keeping his commandments. They're inseparable. Genuine love for God unfailingly finds its expression in obedience to his commands.

[11:03] That's because love always shows. It shows in the care and interest you take in another person's well-being. Love always shows. It shows in your desire to please that person.

It shows in the words you say and the things you do. Likewise, those who truly love God obey his commandments. That's why it's a fallacy to say that Christianity is about love and that we don't need to worry so much about the do's and don'ts of Scripture.

That's like telling a husband, Hey, your marriage is all about love. So don't worry about pleasing your wife. No need to pay attention to her desires and preferences.

Don't worry about what she tells you. It's just about love. It makes no sense. How can you love someone without being interested in pleasing that person?

The love of God and the love of God's children cannot be near our hearts when the concerns and commands of God are far from our hearts.

[12:10] Surely at this point, some people will groan and say, Well, so then Christianity does come down to a list of do's and don'ts, doesn't it? How burdensome. How painful.

But John anticipates that objection at the end of verse 3. And his commandments are not burdensome. And he gives the reason in verses 4 to 5.

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

Notice that John keeps making these comprehensive, sweeping statements that describe every Christian without exception. 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.

And now again, everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. This is descriptive, not prescriptive. It's not what Christians should do.

[13:16] It's what all Christians do do. Everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And by the world, John is alluding to his description of the world earlier in chapter 2, verse 16.

The desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life. These are the things that are in the world. The cravings for sinful, fleshly pleasure and covetousness, love of money, materialism. But everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. This does not mean that Christians never sin. John made that clear in chapter 1, verse 8.

And the combat words that John uses, such as overcome and victory, imply that there is a battle being waged. There's a struggle, an ongoing struggle. However, when a person is born of God through faith in Jesus, there is a fundamental shift in his allegiances.

And the believer is no longer under the dominion of sin. He's no longer enslaved to sin. Because he's now under the lordship of Jesus Christ, who has overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil.

[14:27] This is what Paul speaks of in Romans chapter 6, verses 1 to 4. After having spoken of the fact that, you know, whenever sin increases in the life of the believer, that God's grace abounds all the more to meet the need and to be sufficient for all of us, he then anticipates this question.

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? That's a good question, isn't it? If all of my sins are forgiven, and every one of my sins magnify God's grace all the more, because whenever my sin increases, God's grace abounds all the more, then shouldn't I just enjoy life, indulge in all the pleasures and sins, sinful desires of this world, and let God's grace increase? But Paul answers this way in Romans 6, by no means. How can we, who died to sin, still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

We were buried, therefore, with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

This is a really important doctrine. Paul doesn't say, well, you can keep on sinning, but you shouldn't.

[15:51] Paul doesn't say that. He says, we can't keep on sinning because we have died to sin. The true Christian never thinks to himself, well, I wonder how much sin I can get away with without jeopardizing my salvation.

The true Christian never says to himself, I want to keep on sinning because to be a Christian is to renounce oneself and repent of one's sins, to turn from one's sins, and to put one's entire trust and faith in Jesus and follow Him.

We will have the privilege of baptizing Ivy later this morning and baptism in water, which is the initiatory rite of becoming a Christian, signifies and seals our union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

Our submission in water signifies our death to sin and our emergence from water signifies new life in Jesus Christ. So the thought of continuing in sin and presuming on God's grace is totally foreign to the Christian.

And this radical transfer of allegiances is what John has in view when he says, for everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world.

[17:13] It's for this reason that God's commandments are not burdensome. Christian author Dane Ortlund puts it this way in his book, *A New Inner Relish*.

Immoral people don't want to obey, so they don't. Moral people don't want to obey, but they do. Christians want to obey.

To the Christian who overcomes the world, his deepest desire is to do the will of God. God's commandments, therefore, are not burdensome.

And verse 5 tells us that those who overcome the world are those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. And this is because Jesus is the one who said in John 16, verse 33, Take heart, for I have overcome the world.

In the second half of our passage, verses 6 to 12, John then goes into more detail about the identity of Jesus Christ and teaches us that those who overcome the world by their faith in Him can be assured of eternal life.

[18:20] He says in verse 6, This is He who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ. Not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. It's difficult to ascertain what John means here by water and blood.

There's two most likely options. The first option is that water represents Jesus' baptism when He was baptized by John the Baptist.

And the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and the Father spoke from heaven saying, This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And blood represents Jesus' crucifixion.

This is the first option. In this interpretation, the water represents the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry and blood represents the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. It's a neat, appealing option.

The second option is that the water represents the life-giving water of the Spirit that flows from Jesus. And that blood represents the sin-cleansing blood poured out by Jesus.

[19:27] I'm not sure which one is right, but I think option two is more likely for several reasons. First is that John's gospel is the only gospel of the four that does not include the account of John the Baptist baptizing Jesus with water.

So it would seem odd for John to make such a big deal of that water baptism and to call it water if he's, that's what he's referring to. Secondly, John's gospel, however, uses the image of water far more than any other gospels.

And it usually refers to Jesus' spirit-imparting ministry, not his baptism. So for example, in John chapter 4, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well, whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.

The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. And again, Jesus says in John chapter 7, verse 38, whoever believes in me as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.

Right? So then water in this second option is a reference to Jesus' life-giving, spirit-imparting ministry, and blood is a reference to Jesus' sin-cleansing, sacrificial ministry.

[20 : 46] And I think this is why in his gospel account of Jesus' death in John chapter 19, verse 34, he notes specifically that when one of the soldiers pierced Jesus after his death in his side with a spear, at once there came out blood and water.

John is the only gospel writer of the four that includes that detail. So then notice how John emphasizes that Jesus came not by the water only, but by the water and the blood. John seems to be addressing the counterclaims of the secessionists. If you've been with us throughout the series, you know that in this letter, John is writing to encourage and assure early Christians of their faith because they were rattled by some who used to be among their number that denied Jesus Christ and separated themselves from the church.

And earlier in chapter 4, verses 2 to 3, John specifically warned the people of God that warned them about those who denied that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.

And later in 2 John, chapter 1, verse 7, he says again that many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh.

[22 : 04] So we can infer from these verses that these secessionists were denying the humanity of Jesus, denying the death of Jesus.

The doctrine that the Son of God, the Christ, the Savior of the world became fully man and died a human death was a point of embarrassment for some in the first century and it sparked several heresies.

For example, a prominent first century heretic named Serinthus claimed that while the Spirit of Christ descended upon Jesus at his baptism and dwelt with him throughout his ministry, but the Spirit left him before his death so that the Christ never died, only human Jesus did.

And these people, so then these people affirmed the water but not the blood. they denied that Christ had come in the flesh.

And these heretical beliefs may also have been influenced by the fact that in Greek mythology the deities have a watery substance instead of blood. It's only the half-gods or demigods that have both blood and water.

[23 : 17] And so this would have been a point of embarrassment for some people who didn't want to believe in Jesus' humanity. But John here insists that Jesus came. Jesus Christ came not by the water only but by the water and the blood.

Jesus not only lived and ministered by the power of the Holy Spirit, he also died and shed and poured out his blood as a human being. The life-giving water of the Spirit flowed from Jesus and the sin-cleansing blood of Jesus also poured out from him.

There's a great hymn, an 18th century hymn entitled Rock of Ages that puts this eloquently. It says, Rock of Ages cleft for me.

Let me hide myself in thee. Let the water and the blood from thy riven side which flowed be of sin the double cure save from wrath and make me pure.

Not only did Jesus come by the water and the blood, John adds a third witness. He says, The Spirit is the one who testifies because the Spirit is the truth.

[24 : 31] In three different places in the Gospel of John, Jesus promises that after his resurrection and ascension that he would send the Spirit of truth to his followers and that after being empowered by the Spirit of truth and guided by the Spirit of truth that the disciples of Jesus will then bear witness about Jesus.

Now, this Spirit of truth also testifies, bears witness about Jesus. For, John continues in verse 7 to 8, There are three that testify, the Spirit and the water and the blood and these three agree.

So then, intertwined with the water, blood and Spirit is Jesus' life, death and resurrection and ascension respectively. Jesus' life-giving ministry, his sin-cleansing death and the Christ-testifying Spirit.

All three bear united, concerted witness to the identity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. And in both the Old and New Testaments, a judgment or verdict could be upheld only by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

So John's telling us here that there are three witnesses that testify concerning Jesus and that therefore this testimony is dependable, reliable.

[25 : 51] We should believe this testimony. And this testimony, the testimony of these three should be believed all the more because they are the testimony of God.

John writes in verse 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.

In our courts, we believe the testimony of sinful men and women who frequently lie even under oath. But then, if that's the case, how much more should we believe the testimony of God who never lies?

God who can't not lie. bears witness regarding his Son through the water, blood, and the Spirit. And John continues in verse 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. To deny the divine testimony through water, blood, and Spirit is to make God out to be a liar.

[27 : 05] Then, in verses 11 to 12, John returns to what it is that God has testified concerning his Son. He says, This is the testimony that God gave us eternal life and this life is in his Son.

Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. Have you ever wondered why all these Christians who claim to have eternal life and offer eternal life keep dying?

Right. Well, it's because when Scripture speaks of eternal life, it is not referring to an unending extension of life as we know it.

Actually, if you think about it, it's such an interminable life in this sinful world, in our broken flesh, would not be desirable at all. Rather, John says, This eternal life is in his Son.

Whoever has the Son has life. This is why later in verse 20 of this same chapter, John says that God's Son, Jesus Christ, is the true God and eternal life.

[28 : 21] Jesus is the eternal life. To possess him is to possess eternal life. This is why Jesus says in John 11, 25, I am the resurrection and the life.

Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. Our mortality is a consequence of sin. Physical death is merely a symptom of our underlying spiritual death.

death. We are all by nature objects of God's wrath under the sentence of eternal death. And that is why God the Father sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Jesus gave up his breath on the cross as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. He took upon himself our sentence of death. The Son of God, eternal life.

Think about that. Eternal life, the word of life descended to the dead. But the life of the Son could not be bottled up in a tomb.

[29 : 29] God the Father raised him from the dead so that whoever believes in Jesus, though he die, yet may live. This is why Christians do not fear death.

Resurrection Sunday reminds us that death does not have the final say in our lives. In his brilliant book, *The Screwtape Letters*, many of you have read, C.S. Lewis writes imaginatively of a series of correspondences between Uncle Screwtape, who is a senior devil, and Nephew Wormwood, a junior devil.

And in these letters between them, Screwtape offers Wormwood all kinds of evil, devilish advice to make sure that his nephew Wormwood successfully ensnares his human subject that they call patient.

And the goal is to lure their patient to hell. And in one of these letters, Screwtape rebukes Wormwood for his novice preoccupation with death.

And he says this to Wormwood, When I told you not to fill your letters with rubbish about the war, I meant, of course, that I did not want to have your rather infantile rhapsodies about the death of men and the destruction of cities.

[30 : 51] Insofar as the war really concerns the spiritual state of the patient, I naturally won full reports. And on this aspect, you seem singularly obtuse.

Thus, you tell me with glee that there is reason to expect heavy air raids on the town where the creature lives. This is a crying example of something I have complained about already. Your readiness to forget the main point in your immediate enjoyment of human suffering.

Do you not know that bombs kill men? Or do you not realize that the patient's death at this moment is precisely what we want to avoid? He has escaped the worldly friends with whom you try to entangle him.

He has fallen in love with a very Christian woman and is temporarily immune from your attacks on his chastity. And the various methods of corrupting his spiritual life which we have been trying are

so far unsuccessful.

At the present moment as the full impact of the war draws nearer and his worldly hopes take a proportionally lower place in his mind and daily increasing in conscious dependence on the enemy, which is God for them, he will almost certainly be lost to us if he is killed tonight.

[32 : 06] This is so obvious that I am ashamed to write it. I sometimes wonder if you young fiends are not kept out on temptation duty too long at a time, if you are not in some danger of becoming infected by the sentiments and values of the humans among whom you work.

They, of course, do tend to regard death as the prime evil and survival as the greatest good. good. But that is because we have taught them to do so.

Do not let us be infected by our own propaganda. Those who overcome the world by their faith in Jesus Christ can be assured of their new birth and eternal life.

in this pandemic, it's so easy to be preoccupied anxiously with our survival, to get caught up in the fear of death.

But in the ultimate state of things, it is not physical death that is ultimate. It is spiritual death that is ultimate. And if we are saved, if we have eternal life, if we have the Son, then there is nothing for us to fear.

[33 : 27] Because we have been united by faith with the one who was raised from the dead. And that assures us that even though our bodies die, they will too be resurrected at Christ's return.

As 1 Corinthians 15 taunts, death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?

The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.