

May 10, 2015

“Overcoming the World”

Easter 6-B 1 John 5:4-5

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Have you ever known someone who's been just trampled by the world? I've know some folks, through the years, who've been roughed up, broken down, and defeated by the world out there. Some people can't ever get their act together, can't catch a break, can't escape the black cloud that follows them. I've known quite a few people like that, and you probably have, too. It always saddens me to see a valuable human life that's been pounded down and destroyed by the world.

I had a friend years ago, Dave. He came from a good family. He was raised in a solid Christian home, with lots of advantages in life. But he made some bad choices along the way, hung out with some sketchy friends, fooled around with drugs. Dave's life fell into a fast downward spiral, and ended in a violent death.

It happens in our neighborhoods, doesn't it? It happens in our circles of friends, and even in our families.

The world we live in is a sin-filled world. It's a dangerous place, a troubled and evil domain. The world we live in is increasingly immoral, and even anti-Christian.

And, yet, the world we live in is still God's world. There are strong and nasty forces out there, and they can put our safety and security in peril. But our God is stronger, mightier, greater than all the world's forces. Our God holds the whole world in his hands, and he has the final say in the world.

And God has something to say to us today about the big, bad world we live in. God's Word has an important message for each one of us today. The Lord wants his people to overcome the world. God's plan is for people like us to overcome the world, not to be overcome by the world.

1 John 5:4: *"For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world."* What does that mean? Every Christian is guaranteed an easy time in life? Everyone in God's family gets an exemption from the world's hassles and heartaches? I didn't get that guarantee, did you? I didn't receive that exemption, and you didn't, either.

But that's not what "overcoming the world" means. *"For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world."* And then comes the next sentence (1 John 5:4): *"And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith."* Our faith!

Overcoming the world doesn't mean being successful all the time, or being constantly safe and sheltered. Overcoming the world means rising above the traumas, the disasters, the temptations, the illnesses, and even the self-inflicted wounds we will experience in this world. *"This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith."*

I witnessed the truth of this Scripture verse down in New Orleans, in the months and years after Hurricane Katrina did so much damage there in 2005. I went there with a church group several times. We helped clean up and rebuild homes and church buildings; but we also got to know some amazing people. These were folks who had lost everything. Their homes were destroyed, their cars and toys and computers were ruined, their jobs were lost, their neighborhoods were wrecked, and many of their neighbors lost their lives. And, yet, many of these survivors talked to me about how good

God was, how blessed they were, how they felt the hand of God on their lives despite all their misfortunes. These were people of faith, people who believed in the Lord. *“This is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith.”*

And let’s read the next sentence (1 John 5:5). *“Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”*

Putting your faith in Jesus Christ does not mean you live in a bubble where you’re safe from the world’s troubles. There’s no such thing as a Teflon Christian. Some of the world’s woes and dangers will come our way and will stick to us.

But putting your faith in Jesus Christ does mean that you believe in a Savior who conquered the world. Faith in Jesus means believing in the one unique person who’s resisted every temptation to sin. It means believing in the Son of God who sacrificed his life to pay in full for all our sin. Faith in Jesus means believing in the one who was crushed by the world on the cross, but who rose triumphant and victorious from the grave.

Faith in Jesus means, for me, that I can live my life in this world knowing that Christ’s love for me is stronger than any other power over me, and knowing that Christ’s plan for me will prevail. Faith in Jesus means, for you, that you can live in this troubled world with courage and with purpose, trusting that your God is ultimately in control. A hymn writer put it this way, speaking of the world we live in: “Tho the wrong is oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.”

Do you believe that? Do you have that faith? *“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?"*

Knowing Jesus, believing Jesus, hanging on to your faith in Jesus – that's the key, friends, to overcoming the world. It's not your health. It's not your happy marriage. It's not being popular at school, having the best job, or joining the best Lutheran church in all of North Carolina. It's your faith in Jesus Christ that will see you through this world!

I received an email bulletin this week from the Lutheran Hour Ministries. This fine organization has staff and volunteers all over the world proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They're active right now in 21 of the 50 countries worldwide with the highest rates of Christian persecution. Some of their workers have been met with threats and violence in places such as Syria, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Kazakhstan, and more. "Yet," the bulletin says, "we do not draw back. The Lord gives us strength to press on in his name."

That's overcoming the world, isn't it? That's overcoming the world, by keeping faith in Jesus Christ. May the good Lord give you such strength today, and whenever you need it, to press on in his name. Overcome the world! Amen!