

November 26, 2023
Faith in Exile – Good News, Bad News
1 John 5: 1-12
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Intro – Faith in Exile.

Often when I walk through the door after work I will say to Kathleen, “I’ve got good news and I’ve got bad news. Which do you want first?” Judging from your reaction, I’m guessing this question is familiar to you all as well. Just out of curiosity, by show of hands, who would want to hear the bad news first? Good news? An article posted on the website Psychologytoday.com published in 2014 stated that 78% of people prefer to hear the bad news first because “they believed they would feel better if they got the bad news out of the way and ended on a good note.” Unfortunately for us on that front, the passage we’re going to look at today does the exact opposite. Now, I should mention as a whole, this letter of 1 John that we have been going through does indeed end with the good news which we’ll see next week. But in our passage today, beginning in vs.1 of Chapter 5, John has good news for us today. However, there is also some bad news that’s important for us to hear as well. If you are able, please stand as I read the Word God. [Read Passage]

One of the greatest things in all the scriptures is that the followers of Jesus are called “overcomers.” From Gotquestions.org, a definition of an overcomer is “one who successfully resists the power and temptation of the world’s system. An overcomer is not sinless, but holds fast to faith in Christ until the end. They do not turn away when times get difficult or become an apostate. Overcoming requires complete dependence upon God for direction, purpose, fulfillment, and strength to follow His plan for our lives.” And I’ve got good news for you today, every follower of Jesus becomes an overcomer the moment he or she puts their faith in trust in the finished work of Christ. How can that be? How can we be already overcomers when we haven’t reached the end yet? My friend, more good news, Jesus has already overcome on our behalf! He has already won the victory and all the promises awaiting us in the Kingdom of God are guaranteed. So, what does that look like in the life of the believer, in the life of an overcomer? John describes it for us in text we read today.

First, John describes the overcomer as those who practice joyful obedience. John begins with a truth he has established from the beginning of this letter. “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.” (v.1) As we’ve stated before, John is refuting the false teachers of his day who were denying that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. It’s important to notice that the word “believes” is not merely talking about what a person claims with their mouth, but that that confession leads to a changed life. John has mentioned before this idea of “being born of God” in this very letter (1 John 2:29, 3:9, and 4:7) and perhaps more famously in his gospel as he records the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in John 3 about being born again. Here he tells us *how* one is born of God, “whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ.” This means believing that Jesus is the Messiah, the anointed one promised from of old. John’s emphasis in his letter has been on love, but he never wants anyone to believe they earn salvation by loving others. We are born of God when we put our trust in Jesus and on His saving work in our lives. Understand that John is not talking about a mere head knowledge of Jesus being Messiah as were told in James 2:19 that even the demons know who he is and they tremble. Instead, he means a trust in and reliance on Jesus as Messiah and for everyone to which this is

true, is born of God, meaning we are now his children with all the rights and privileges that come with this relationship.

John continues in vs. 1, “and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.” This summarizes John’s teaching in 1 John 4:7-21 we talked about last week. If we love God, then we will love our Christian brothers and sisters. You, and everyone else, can know you are in a relationship with God when you love one another. Again, John says in his gospel, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35) This is the common ground of all Christians. Not race, not class, not culture, not language, nor any other thing except for a common birth in Jesus Christ. David Guzik, from his Blue Letter Bible Commentary on this passage, said this, “To love all others in the family of God means that you do not limit your love to your own denomination or group, to your own social or financial status, to your own race, to your own political perspective, or to your own exact theological persuasion. If any of these things mean more to us than our common salvation, and the common Lordship of Jesus Christ, then something is very wrong.”

Notice how John strengthens this argument in verse 2. John’s statement is the opposite of what we would expect to read. We would expect it to say we know we have the love of God by loving the children of God. This was John’s point in the previous chapter. But here, John switches things up and shows us how important loving each other truly is. This is how we know that we are loving the children of God: “when we love God and obey his commands.” Just as one cannot love God without loving his children, so also it is impossible to truly love the children of God without loving God first. One flows out of the other. Just as much as our love for the people of God reflects our love for God (as expressed in 1 John 3:10, 17), so our love and obedience to God is a demonstration of love to the body of Christ. Again, David Guzik, “It is sometimes said that the best thing a father can do for his children is to love his wife and their mother. Even so, the first way for a child of God to love his brothers and sisters in Christ is to love God and to obey Him. And, if you love the parent, you will love the child. It all works together.”

And John describes what loving God looks like in v.3, “keeping his commandments.” Clearly, John had the words of Jesus in mind, “If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15). Loving God is not simply saying that we love God in the same way as believing in God is not simply saying we believe. It’s not trying to find an experience or emotional connection with God. No, John says definitively, loving God means doing what he says. This is quite a declaration considering how many people claim to love God but do not do what he says. John’s point is we cannot claim to be Christians who love God and not do exactly what he tells us to do.

But notice that loving God is not just obedience. There is a qualification to our obedience at the end of vs. 3, “his commands are not burdensome.” His commandments are not a burden because when we are born again, we are given new hearts, hearts which now want to please God. As part of the new covenant, the law of God has been written on the heart of every believer as was prophesied by Jeremiah in the Old Testament. (Jer. 31:33) Can you say this is true in your life? Do you see the commands of God as not being a burden?

God’s commands are good for us. His commands are given for our own best interests. When we have been born again, obedience is now our desire because we love God. If we feel like God’s commands are a burden, then it should identify that there is a problem in our hearts. It shows that we see God’s commands as a duty rather than love. It shows that our obedience is not coming from our love for God but coming from an obligation that we think we must meet. God is not calling for obligation but for love. Overcomers are those who joyfully obey the commands of God. They love God and want to be pleasing to God by loving others.

We find more good news in vs. 4-5, as John makes his next point that the overcomer overcomes the world through victorious faith. John's point here is if whatever is born of God overcomes the world, then, if we are born of God, we will overcome. And John hones in on exactly how we have overcome the world: our faith. Since believing on Him is the key to being born of God (1 John 5:1), the key to victory is faith, a consistently abiding and ongoing reliance and trust upon Jesus Christ.

The story goes of a missionary who had lived among the Inuit peoples of the most northern parts of North America. When attempting to translate the scriptures into their language it was discovered that they didn't have a word for faith. One day while thinking this over, the missionary observed a villager testing out some ice nearby to see if it was safe to walk on. After the villager decided it was safe, he put his entire weight onto the ice and walked across. The missionary quickly described what he saw and they came up with the words to describe faith to the rest of the people, placing one's total self on something and trusting it will hold you.

This is the kind of faith John is describing here and it's this trust and total reliance on Jesus that gives us the victory. John continues and repeats his words in vs. 5, this time phrased in a question, "Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" The life of abiding faith and trust in Jesus Christ is the life that overcomes.

And what are we victorious over? What do we "overcome?" The world. John is not speaking of the world in a physical way as if we are overcoming people who live here on the earth. Rather, John is using the term "the world" in a spiritual sense to describe its sinful desires and passions. The Apostle Paul says in Eph. 6:12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." John instructed his readers in 1 John 2:15 that we cannot love the world or the things in the world because it is evil. This is the overcoming that we are experiencing in Christ. We defeat this evil world and achieve victory over its temptations and desires through what... our faith in Jesus. Through Christ we are able to turn our affections away from the world and to the Lord Jesus. We need to remind ourselves of these encouraging words. We can overcome our failures, our weaknesses, temptations of any kind, and sins which "so easily entangle us" as the Book of Hebrews describes in ch 12:1. But we must rely upon our victorious faith in Christ. It is not just saying, "I am going to do better," or "I'll just try harder." These efforts often end in failure because we are trying to fight by ourselves, which not only does not work but cannot work with any lasting affect. Rather, we need to rely upon the Lord for our strength. We need to grow in our love for the Lord which will move us away from the love of this world. We need to transfer our affections and passions to God and away from the flesh. John makes clear there is no other way to be victorious in this life and the life to come than by our continuing and abiding faith in Jesus.

John's final point in this passage, and even more good news for us, is the overcomer has an assurance of a proven faith. Since our faith overcomes the world, then we need to know exactly what we must believe to build our lives upon. John is going to give us the foundations for faith, what we need to believe concerning Jesus.

Vs. 6 says that Jesus is the one "who came by water and by blood." There are number of different ways this has been interpreted. But we must keep in mind the false teaching John is fighting against. Again, John is fighting Gnostics who taught that Jesus was inhabited by the Spirit of God at his baptism and then the Spirit of God left Jesus at his crucifixion. With that in mind, it seems best to understand "Jesus Christ coming by water and blood" as a reference to his baptism and death on the cross. The Son of God who came into the world at the birth of Jesus

was the same one who was baptized and received divine approval from the Father. He is the same one who shed his blood on the cross to redeem humanity. This is Jesus, the Son of God.

Then John adds a third witness that testifies to this truth, the Holy Spirit. Vs. 7-8, “For there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three agree.” These three things come together in total agreement to prove that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. The Spirit testifies to the truth. Listen to the words from John’s gospel:

“I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.” (John 1:32–34)

The water, which refers to the baptism of Jesus, also testifies to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God.

“And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:16–17)

Further, the blood, which refers to Jesus’ death on the cross, again testifies to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God.

“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, “Truly this was the Son of God!” (Matthew 27:50–54)

These are all consistent witnesses in telling us who Jesus is. Jesus’ life, death, and the Holy Spirit who indwells every believer all tell us the same thing. Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And if that were not enough, John adds that our faith is based on the most reliable testimony possible, the witness of God himself. He says, “If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater,” essentially saying every one of us, every day, believes in the word of someone we regard an expert in various things. Whether it be a mechanic, a sales rep, or a plumber or electrician. How much more should we have confidence in the witness of God when He tells us who Jesus is. God has given his testimony about his Son and God cannot lie. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself: When we believe on Jesus, we receive the Holy Spirit as a confirmation of our standing before God. Romans 8:16 puts it like this: “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our Spirit that we are children of God.”

God has declared through three important witnesses that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the water, the blood and the Spirit. Therefore, the one who believes in the Son has the testimony of God with him. What is this testimony of God that is so important to have? John

states it in verse 11, “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” This is God’s message to us; that eternal life is a gift from God, received in Jesus Christ through faith. He who has the Son has life and that life starts now and lasts for eternity. This is the good news of the Gospel.

By now you must be thinking, “This all sounds like good news, so where the bad news?” God has indeed given us eternal life but that life can only be accessed through the Son. To deny the life, baptism, and death of Jesus is to deny eternal life and be separated from God. This is the bad news and the point John makes in verse 10. Anyone who does not believe the testimony of God concerning Jesus you are essentially saying God is a liar and we forfeit eternal life. If we do not give our lives completely to following Jesus, then we are looking for another savior, one who is unable to save. Life is only found in Jesus Christ. If you are here today and have not yet put your faith Jesus, totally surrendering your life to him, then all the good news that we talked about today about be overcomers and the promise of eternal life does not apply to you. Vs. 11 ends with the worst news of all, “whoever does not have the Son does not have life.” But the good news is you can change that today. You can cry out to him today to save you and he will be right there to welcome you into his family. The bible says in Romans 10:13, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” If you would like to talk to someone about this we would love to sit down and talk with you. But you respond to the Lord has he leads you.

In our passage today John points out three things that make us overcomers over the world and its sinfulness. First, we joyfully obey the Lord because we love him and desire to live lives that please him. Second, we are victorious through our faith in Christ. And third, by believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God we have eternal life because life is found only in him. This is indeed good news and it requires faith, faith in exile.