OVERCOME THE WORLD

1 John 5:1-5

Key Verse: 5:4-5

“for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”

We thank and praise God for his perfect love that was revealed in sacrificing his own Son Jesus, who died on the cross, saying, “It is finished.” The Son is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. God’s perfect love is his initiating and perfecting love. May we really hold fast to this love against all false loves and lies and any adverse life situation. May we dwell and be built up in this perfect love of God. In today’s passage, 5:1-5, John smoothly changes the topic from love to overcoming the world.

**First, Jesus is the Christ (1a).** Verse 1 says, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” Being born of God is one of significant descriptions in 1 John: in 2:29, he says, “If you know that he is righteous, you know that everyone who does what is right has been born of God”; in 3:9, “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him”; in 4:7, “Everyone who loves has been born of God”; here in 5:1, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God”; in 5:4, “everyone born of God overcomes the world” and; in 5:18, “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin…”

No one can believe that Jesus is the Christ, but only those who are born of God. “Jesus is the Christ” can be the concise message of the whole Bible. Apostle Peter is the first one who made this confession. When Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say I am”, Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” in Matthew 16:16, “You are the Christ” in Mark 8:29, and “The Christ of God” in Luke 9:20. It is written in John 20:31, “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” Then Acts 5:42 says, “Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” and 9:22 says, “Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ.” And then here in 1 John, the expression, “Jesus is the Christ” is written two times: in 2:22, “Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist…” and here in 5:1, “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God.” So in 1 John, the Apostle used the expression one time in terms of denying it and another time in terms of believing it.

Now let’s think about the message, “Jesus is the Christ.” “Christ”, in Greek, means “the Anointed”. Jesus is God’s anointed one, the promised Messiah. In the gospel story, when Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus told his disciples the way of Christ: “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life” (Lk 9:22; Mt 16:21; Mk 8:31). When Jesus indeed was killed and raised to life, the disciples did not know that what happened to Jesus was the fulfillment of the way of the Christ that Jesus predicted. So they were still in deep despair though Jesus rose again from the dead. Then the risen Jesus met two disciples on the road to Emmaus and spoke with them on the road and finally said, “How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Lk 24:25-27). The risen Jesus also appeared to the other disciples who gathered in a locked room and said to them, “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see…” and he continued, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms” (Lk 24:39, 44).

It is written in Deuteronomy 21:23, “you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse.” We know that this is concerning Jesus when we refer to Galatians 3:13, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’” God said to Moses in Exodus 3:6, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” Jesus quoted these words of Pentateuch to convince the Sadducees, who did not believe in resurrection and only acknowledged the book of Moses, that God is the God of the living and so there is resurrection (Mt. 22:31-32; Mk 12:26-27; Lk 30:37-38). From Isaiah 53, we remember Christ’s suffering and glory, in verse 5, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” and in verse 11, “After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.” And Jesus said in Matthew 12:39-40, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” The book of Jonah points to Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. And from Psalm 22:1 we read, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”, the very cry of Jesus on the cross, and a Psalm of David, Psalm 16:10, “because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay”, which Apostle Peter quoted to prove the truthfulness of Jesus’ resurrection.

Christians are those who believe that Jesus is the Christ, which is the key point of Christianity. Jesus who died for our sins and rose again from the dead is the Christ. He is our Savour and the Saviour of the world. By believing that Jesus is the Christ, we have life that is eternal (Jn 20:30). So Acts 4:12 says, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” The shorter expression of “Jesus is the Christ” is Jesus Christ. These two words can be the most important words in the whole human history. Jesus Christ is written 7 times meaningfully in 1 John: in 1:3, “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ”; in 2:1, “If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One”; in 3:16, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers”; in 3:23, “And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us”; in 4:2, “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God”; in 5:6, “This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ”; and in 5:20, “And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.” May we really treasure this precious One in our hearts, “Jesus Christ.”

**Second, love for God (1b-3).** Verse 1b says, “and everyone who loves the Father loves his child as well.” In ESV, “everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of Him” and in NKJV, “everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.” Here, John brings the family concept. All those who are born of God the Father love their brothers and sisters, who are also born of God. They have all been begotten of the same Father, and they love one another because they recognize this similarity and likeness, the common inheritance that they share together. Then verse 2 says, “This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.” We have noticed that loving one another or loving our brothers has been a clear teaching of this epistle: in 2:10, “Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble”; in 3:10, “Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother”; in 3:11, “This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another”; in 3:14, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers”; in 3:16, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to love our brothers”; in 3:23, “And this is his commands: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us”; in 4:7, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God”; in 4:11, “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” and; in 4:21, “And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.” Here in 5:2, “This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.” In this verse, three things are mentioned together – loving the children of God, surely out of loving God and carrying out his commands. Loving God and loving one another and obeying his command come together, not separately.

Then verse 3 says, “This is love for God: to obey his commands.” Here, John again makes sure that love for God is to obey or keep his commands. Loving God and loving our brothers and sisters is good, but if it is not out of keeping God’s commands, that loving has a problem. It is written in 1 Samuel 15:22, “But Samuel replied: ‘Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed a better than the fat of rams.” How early God wants obedience from his people. All of our acts, even sacrificial acts, should be out of obedience to God and his word. We remember that Jesus said in John 14, in verse 15, “If you love me, you will obey what I command”, in 21, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me”, in verse 23, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.”

And then in verse 3b, “And his commands are not burdensome.” Certainly, things done out of love are not burdensome. But if not out of love, they are burdensome. We are reminded of what Jesus said in Matthew 11: 29, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” In our Christian life, if we lose our focus on Jesus, everything is burdensome, but with Jesus, our Christian life is a joyful one though hardships are there.

In this part, we see Apostle John’s anxious mind in dealing with the matter of love one more time that the children of God be sure they love one another out of loving God and obeying his commands, and also based on their faith that Jesus is the Christ, not lacking any one of these four, so that their act of love or life of love may be on the right track.

**Third, overcome the world (4-5).** Verses 4 and 5 say, “for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” In this verse, the description “overcomes the world” or “has overcome the world” is written 3 times. Until now John used the word, “overcome” in 2:13, 15, “…I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one”, in 2:15, “…I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one”, and in 4:4, “You, dear children, are from God and have come them, because the one who is in you greater than the who is in the world.” In 5:4-5, the word “overcome” is in Greek “*nikaó*” and the word “victory” is in Greek “*niké*”, from which we have the English word, “Nike.” Actually “*niké*” was the goddess of victory, the goddess of triumph. The Greeks believed that victory could not be achieved by mortals, but only by the gods. Only the gods were ultimately unconquerable. True and ultimate victory only belonged to the gods. In the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, the Canadian women’s soccer team won the gold medal, defeating Sweden. Andre DeGrasse won gold in the 200m. His running, especially finishing speed, was remarkable, coming up to the third, outrunning those who were ahead and touching the finishing line first. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:25, “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”

What is the opposite of overcoming the world? We know that it is being defeated by the world. But in light of the flow of 1 John, to be defeated by the world is to love the world. Apostle John used the negative expression in 2:15-16, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.” Now John expounds on “overcoming the world”.

Here, once again, “the world” should be defined. We should really understand “the world”. As we learned from Genesis, this world fundamentally is a fallen world under God’s curse. The world as a whole is godless. It is a secular world, not recognizing God. As Jesus mentioned 3 times in John’s gospel, the prince of this world is Satan (12:31, 14:30; 16:11). Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:4, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers…”. And Paul also said in Ephesians 2:2, “…when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air…”. 1 John 5:19 says, “…that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” So, the world fundamentally stands against God. We know that science, law or education are genuinely good. But the matter is how it is used. When we just think of the medical science, the scientific development is amazing. Last week, Paulina had an ultrasound on her baby in 14 weeks old and sent us the picture of the baby in her womb. I could see anew the wonder of the life in God’s creation which is still going on. Also, the ultrasound can be used to see when and how to kill the baby. Medication or drugs are good and necessary in genuine concern of people’s health, but when it is combined with money and politics, there is a big problem. Law is needed to keep the order in a society. However, when human law goes to the point of being the opposite of God’s law, human law causes a serious problem, even punishing the good and rewarding evil in the alteration of the concept of good and evil (relativism). Godly students expressed their disappointment and agony in studying law. Research is really good and needed, and God gave the mind to search and research. But nowadays, pure research is very difficult to find because researchers depend on funding. They should produce the result that the funders want so that their funding may not be cut off. We all know the importance of education, but what is taught matters. Young kids absorb like sponge anything they are taught. In our time, child education seems to go too far, confusing the words “boy” and “girl” in questioning the fundamentals of there being two genders. Again, here the world is anything that opposes God. When things stand against God, denying even God’s existence, demonic power is rampant through science, law, education, etc.

And according to 1 John 2:15-16, everything in this world is described as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These things are also in us. The world is a sinful world and we have the sinful nature. The sinful world stimulates our sinful nature or desires and they are hostile to God.

As we learned in Genesis, sin entered the world through one man and it spread and, at the time of Noah, it reached the climax and God had to judge the world through the Flood. There was a new beginning through Noah and his family. But again, as time passed, the people of the earth challenged God in an attempt to build themselves a city with a tower that would reach the heavens. This time, God just confused their language that they stopped building the city. So the city was called Babel, that is Babylon. And we see also in Genesis God’s judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah by burning sulfur from the LORD out of heaven (Ge 19:24).

Notably, Jesus compared the time of his coming again with the time of Noah and the time of Lot. He said in Luke 17:26-27, “Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.” According to Matthew 24:37-39, “As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.” Jesus continued in Luke 17:28-30, “It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, plating and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fir and sulfur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.” Eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, buying and selling, and planting and building are not necessarily bad, but needed as long as human life goes on the earth. But the problem is that these human activities are done without God, completely cutting God from their ordinary life. When people reject God, they only invite the dreadful judgment of God’s wrath. We are to know that as man’s sin reached the climax just before the Flood, so it will be just before the returning of Jesus Christ. He had to come to end the sinful world, ruled by Satan, the evil. We need a discerning mind to see the world and have a correct view of the world based on the words of God.

Jesus said in Luke 18:8, “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” And Apostle Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8, “…Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” And according to Revelation 12:9, the devil, or Satan leads the whole world astray/deceives the whole world.”

Then what can be our attitude? Should we be fatalistic to see the world and our lives in this world. No. Knowing all these, God wants us to be overcomers of the world. God wants us to be like Daniel and his friends, who lived in Babylonian empire but not of that empire, rather were truly overcomers of the Babylon. At the end of upper room dialogue with his disciples Jesus said, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33). Apostle Paul said in Philippians 2:15 that the believers called saints shine like stars in the universe in a crooked and depraved generation.” Paul expressed his life of victory this way in 2 Corinthians 4:7-10, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” In Revelation, we meet the tribulation saints: in 12:11, “They overcome him/the devil by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.” This is true to all the believers. And we read in 15:2, “And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victories over the beast and his image and over the number of his name.”

And Jesus promised to the overcomers “the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (2:7), “no hurt by the second death” (2:11), “some of the hidden manna and a white stone with a new name written on it” (2:17), “authority over nations” (2:26), “being dressed in white with the name not being blotted out from the book of life” (3:5), “being made a pillar in the temple of God with the name of God, the name of the new Jerusalem and the new name of Jesus written on the person” (3:12), and “sitting with Jesus on his throne” (3:21). God says in 21:7, “He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.”

Again, look at 1 John 5:4-5, “for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” Everyone born of God overcomes the world, because God’s seed or life is in him. According to 2 Peter 1:4, we have been made partakers of the divine nature.

In other words, for those born of God, each has the new self in Jesus Christ. So the inner battle begins between the new self and the old self. In this battle, we see Apostle Paul’s example in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me”, in 5:24, “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature/the flesh with its passions and desires” and in 6:14, “…the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” The world is not to be the object of mutual love, the object of mutual crucifixion to each other. And Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:14, “Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?”

“This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.” Jesus conquered sin and death and so Satan through his death and resurrection. We can claim our Lord Jesus’ victory by faith. When David defeated Goliath, victory came to all the Israelites. In the same way, our Lord Jesus wants us to have this victory as ours by faith. 1 Corinthians 15:57 says, “Thanks be to God! He give us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And Romans 16:20 says, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.” Also, faith is the channel through which God’s power comes. So faith is the victory. Jesus said in Mark 9:23, “Everything is possible for him who believes” and in Mark 11:22-24, “Have faith in God…Therefore I tell you, whatever you as for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.” Prayer is the expression of faith. Those who faith pray. 1 John 5:14-15 says, “This is the confidence we have in approaching God; that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.”

Hebrews chapter 11 is known as the faith chapter, which is the list of those who were victorious by faith: “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family” (11:7); “By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (11:8), “By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised” (11:11); “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of great value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward” (11:24-26); “By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land” (11:29); “whose weakness was turned to strength” (11:34); “Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to released, so that they might gain a better resurrection” (11:35); and “the world was not worthy of them” (11:38).

“Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” To believe that Jesus is the Son of God” is to believe that Jesus is God the Incarnate, so he is the true God (5:20). His death is the death of the Son of God as the atoning sacrifice for our sins (4:10) fully satisfied God’s righteousness. His resurrection is the proof that he is the Son of God and so he is Jesus Christ our Lord (Ro 1:4). He has ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God (Heb. 1:3; 4:14; Ac 2:35). He always lives to intercede for his people (Heb 7:25). To believe that Jesus is the Son of God is closely related to believe that Jesus is the Christ. This victory over the world comes through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We remember what Jesus said in John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” Apostle Paul said in Philippians 4:13, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” God wants us to be united with Christ in his death and resurrection (Ro 6:5). We see Paul’ further confession in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I longer live, but Christ lives in. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Paul also confessed in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” And he said in 2 Corinthians 10:5, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

And we are to know that overcoming the world includes loving God and loving one another, particularly those whom we cannot love in our own limitation.

Instead of being lovers or victims of the world, may we as God’s children become overcomers of the world through faith in Jesus Christ.