

Testimonies, Prayers & Sin I John 5:6-21

Let's start this last sermon on I John, by looking at the outlines we have in the bulletin insert. The first section begins with the statement, "This is the victory that conquers the world." The previous verses point out, those born of our Creator, and who follow the Almighty's commands, are led to victory.

It's important to point out that the Greek word for "victory" is - the word, *nikh*, pronounced (knee/kay), but we pronounce it *Nike*- as in the shoe company). Perhaps it would do us some good to run out today and buy a pair of Nike shoes to remind us that we can do it – we can have victory in our faith walk with Jesus. It's more than the Nike shoe company slogan of *just do it*, which is a good slogan. But we can't just do it, as if it is in our own power to walk as we should. However, we can live life, we can *do it* through God's past victory on the cross & through His present power within each of us.

The Apostle Paul, sums up this victory concept perfectly. "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength," he wrote. I can love and I can obey and I can have faith, through Jesus, and only through Him who gives me strength." (Phil 4:13)

We need to remember that John wrote the book of I John to refute, to disprove a group of heresies that downplayed who Jesus actually is, and who were disregarding all moral restraints. John wrote to expose false teachers and to give believers assurance of salvation.

So it makes sense that John in our section goes on and talks about testimonial support. John himself was one of the 12 core, initial disciples of Jesus. He had first hand information. So he asks a rhetorical question. Who conquers the world? The one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. Then he offers up proof – the testimonies of the water, blood & Holy Spirit.

A lot has been written about what John was trying to say, but I think in this case, the clear,

simple answer is the best. The water refers to adult baptism by confession and commitment as well as the baptism of Jesus. The blood refers to Jesus dying on the cross for our sins, and possibly the blood of faithful martyrs. And the Holy Spirit's presence in the lives of Jesus followers, whose lifestyle has changed, is a testimony of those who conquer the world.

This triple witness goes beyond the requirement of Old Testament law that you need two witnesses to prove or convict. This was said to encourage the early believers who faced evil forces and persecution. To have hope to stick to the faith, and be sure in who Jesus is, John was saying, God's testimony is greater than any evil, any false teachers & any other testimony. One of John's goals for writing was to assure followers of Jesus in right theology and living. Testimony is the key word here. It is repeated 8 times and all but one in reference to God.

So he goes on to draw a contrast between believing and not believing these testimonies. Between believing rightly and believing wrongly. John contrasts the testimony that is in our own heart that God gives eternal life through his Son; or those who make God into a liar by not accepting that Jesus his Son is both human and divine. When this text is outlined this way, the message becomes clear. John isn't just putting words together. It's like he's arguing facts in a court of law.

And he punctuates his thoughts by going back to a familiar theme by saying, "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life." And he follows it up by telling us, "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, So that you may know you have eternal life." It's almost like, this is the end of I John. It sounds like a conclusion, a purpose statement.

But it's important to point out. Eternal life in Greek and in Christian theology here does not mean simply lasting forever. One of the best signs of victory, of conquering, is lasting forever. But when we think about it, lasting

forever, might be a curse, not a blessing; or a burden and not a gift.

But what John means is, since God alone possesses and inhabits eternity, and this term, eternal, should only be applied to God, then those who conquer with the Son Jesus, come to be given the life of God himself. What we are promised is that here and now there can be given us a share in the very life of God. This is Good News for us living now, right here.

It means, that in God, there is peace, now, here on earth, so eternal life means serenity. It means a life liberated from the cares which haunt the human situation.

In Almighty God there is power now, and, therefore, eternal life means defeat of frustration, victorious over circumstances.

In God there is holiness, and so, eternal life means the defeat of sin. It means a life clad, clothed with the purity of God and armed against the soiling infections of the world.

In God there is love and therefore, eternal life means the end of bitterness and hatred, right now. It means a life which has the love of God in its heart and the undefeatable love in all our feelings and in all our actions.

In God there is life, and so eternal life means the defeat of death. It means a life which is indestructible because it has in it the indestructibility of Creator God. So the Kingdom of God is here and now, not just in the sweet by and by. It is John's conviction that such an eternal life comes only through Jesus and in no other way, and it gives His believers victory. We can do it – despite false teaching and evil.

But instead of ending the book, John has some further thoughts he wants to convey. He talks about confidence and sin and prayer. We can be bold in Jesus, as we ask things that are within God's will. And we have assurance that we are listened to and heard. We can have confidence we have eternal life.

But then we get one of those confusing ideas. Mortal sin. There have been a lot of words written about what John meant. Once again, I think the simple answer, probably is best, if it's tied to who John was originally writing to. What is this sin whose end is death?

In the context of I John, he could be referring to those who refuse to accept Jesus as human and divine, as the Son sent from God to save the world and humanity. I John is about countering the heresies around good and evil and the role and person of Jesus Christ. He could be saying the mortal sin is the Gnostic heresies that confuse the purposes our spirits and our bodies were made for. This leads to misunderstanding salvation, Christ's true humanity, thinking the human body is evil and can be treated harshly, plus this idea leads to licentiousness. So the most deadly of sins is to deny that Jesus really came in the flesh, and this sin is the sign of the Antichrist. (I John 4:3)

Another concept of the term, "mortal sin," that I think is worth noting is the question that you have heard me say at times, which is: "Are our feet headed toward Jesus or away?" I can't believe that John was saying followers of Jesus don't sin. We all know that's just not true. We know ourselves and each other too well. John himself says, "All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that is not mortal." The fact that we sin, and keep sinning after choosing to follow Jesus we have evil in us, is why we need a Savior.

But I think there is the biblical sense, that if we go down a path, and then keep walking down that path, and then deliberately head toward choices of destruction, that doesn't build life. Possibly at some point, it becomes a mortal sin. And I think it's usually a mortal sin, not by God's choice, but by our continued deliberate walking in the wrong directions.

I suspect John is writing that, if we keep up the heresies he is addressing, then we are taking ourselves away from Jesus, and that leads to death. The Bible tells us that at some point, God gets fed up with the wickedness and

godlessness of human kind, specifically those who suppress the truth and act like God is a liar. Especially when God has testified, what truth is and who Jesus is, and what his redemption is all about. (Romans 1)

This reminds me of a lawyer, a doctor, and a preacher who went hunting together. When a prize buck ran past they all fired at the exact same time and the buck dropped. The problem was that there was only one bullet hole and they didn't know which of them shot it. They decided to take it to the taxidermist, hoping he could figure out who could claim the trophy.

The taxidermist said, "Let me look at the deer. Sometimes I can figure it out." He asked a few questions, examined the deer carefully, and then declared, "The preacher shot this buck!" Amazed, the other two asked how he knew it was the preacher. Stooping down he pointed out the wound, "See here. It went in one ear and out the other."

I suspect by now, even though it's taken us a few months since we studied the rest of I John, that you have a sense at how frustrated and angry John was with the false teachers who were corrupting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He was working hard to make sure that Good News does not go in one ear and out the other. John wants to make sure he's hit the target so he gives his readers these final blasts. He does not want to them, us, to get sidetracked from the true principles of Christian faith.

John is direct! Clear, simple, uncompromising. He's dogmatic and direct! He's politically incorrect, willing to offend to get the truth about Jesus across. In contrast, have you noticed that we live in a culture that disses anything that's dogmatic? In our politically correct climate, there is no tolerance for exclusive truth claims. It seems to me that we have more and more knowledge but less and less certainty. It's too easy to cave into alternative facts, to go along to get along.

It's almost become a sort of religion that people can't have their own opinion – without some one ready to jump down their throat. And facts are used as weapons on each other. This religion of "certain uncertainty" is causing many to bail on their beliefs, leading some to become spiritual shipwrecks, morally bankrupt.

Robert H. Lauer wrote: Long ago, William Law warned that the world is now a greater enemy to the Christian than it was in apostolic times: It is a greater enemy, because it has greater power over Christians by its favors, riches, honors, rewards, and protection than it had by the fire and fury of its persecutors.

But John is testifying to what he knows to be true. What do we know for sure? Can we be certain of anything anymore? We need to read our Bibles in order to know what it is that God wants us to know. We need to be open to the Holy Spirit. We need to be a real community, sharing ideas and facts and working to discover what is true. By one count John uses the word know, 33 different times in 1 John.

2:3 - "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands."

3:14 - "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death."

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."

5:13 - "I write these things so that you may know that you have eternal life."

5:19 - "We know we are God's children."

5:20 - "God has given us understanding so that we know him, Jesus, who is true."

An agnostic professor condescendingly confronted a little girl who believed in Jesus. "There are many throughout history who have claimed they were God. How can you be sure

who told the truth? Which one of these men can you believe.”

The girl responded without hesitation: “I’d believe the One who rose from the dead!”

During the French Revolution, there was a determined movement to abolish Christianity. One fine, clear night an atheist was loudly proclaiming his doctrine to a poor countryman. “Everything,” he said, “will be abolished. Churches, Bibles, clergymen; yes, even the word ‘God’ itself. We shall remove everything which speaks of religion!”

The countryman gave a quiet chuckle. “Why do you laugh?” said the other. The peasant pointed to the stars and replied, “I was just wondering how you and your crew would manage to get them down!” Great answer.

A person who trusts Jesus Christ as the Son of God, with a trust that moves them into Jesus Christ, that causes them to follow Jesus Christ, is born of God and is able to overcome the world. Continuous believing in Jesus is basic to the Christian’s overcoming walk. We can live victoriously because within us is the Living Witness. This helps us follow John’s last warning – “Keep yourselves from idols.”