Overcoming the World

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Preacher: Nick Lauer

[0:00] Well, good morning, church. It's good to be with you all this morning. Let me invite you to turn to our sermon text, which is in the book of 1 John, chapter 5, verses 1 through 5.

That's page 961 in the Pew Bible, if you want to follow along there. I encourage you to have it open while we look at this text this morning. 1 John 5, verses 1 through 5.
All right, let me pray, and then I'll read for us. Father, as we pause for just a moment this morning on the cusp of attending to your word, we acknowledge that without your Holy Spirit and without your presence, Lord, we can do nothing.
That's of lasting spiritual value. That's of lasting good in your kingdom. And yet we also rejoice that you, our ascended Lord Jesus, have poured out your Holy Spirit without measure, and you delight to work and fulfill all your good promises to the praise of your name.
So we ask for you, God, to come and make good on your promises, to speak through your word, to sanctify your people, to grow your church as we listen to your word this morning.
[1:44] And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. All right. 1 John chapter 5. Apostle John writes this. He says, 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? Well, if you've been following our sermon series this summer, you'll notice that this paragraph of 1 John covers a lot of familiar territory, doesn't it?
We find again here in these short couple of verses that John highlights yet again these three marks of genuine Christianity that he's been just weaving throughout this book.
The three marks of belief in Jesus, that He is the Christ, the Son of God, come in the flesh. The other mark, the second mark, of love for the people of God. And then the third mark of obedience to God's commands.
[3:14] John has been weaving throughout this book the message that it takes all three of these woven together to really be a sign of genuine faith in Christ.

Take any of these three away and you don't have real faith. Now, up to this point in the book, John has been especially warning against a lack of love for one's fellow Christians.
For almost a chapter and a half, maybe more, John has been saying that it's possible to believe all the right things, even keep many of God's commands, but without love, it's not genuine faith at all.
A loveless Christianity is no Christianity at all. And John restates that important truth in our text in verse 1. 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.
In fact, the way, if you have an older version, it might translate that verse a little more literally to say, everyone who loves the begetter loves those who have been begotten of him.
[4:23] But in the rest of this paragraph, John wants us to see that the opposite is also true. He wants us to see not just that loveless Christianity is no Christianity at all, that we need to love and keep the commandments.

He wants us also to see that loving without keeping God's commandments isn't really love. If we say that we love someone, but we don't keep God's commandments, it isn't really love.
Look at verse 2. By this we know that we love the children of God. How? How do we know if we really love them?
When we love God and obey his commandments. So John's going to show us two things in this short paragraph of the letter. First, he's going to show us that obedience is the mark of real love.

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Obedience is the mark of real love. But he doesn't just leave it there. He goes on then to show us, second, that faith is the power of joyful obedience. So that's what we're going to cover this morning.
[5:35] Obedience is the mark of real love, and faith in Christ is the power of joyful obedience. Let's spend a little time considering that first point. Obedience is the mark of real love.

We have to admit that verse 2, it hits us as a bit of a surprise, doesn't it? I mean, how would you fill in that blank? By this we know that we love the children of God.
How do we know? What is it that demonstrates or exemplifies our love for our fellow Christians? How would you fill in that blank? Now the world, of course, can make us think that real love is nothing more and nothing less than just total affirmation, right?
Whatever you want or desire, that's what you should have, and if someone loves you, they won't stand in your way. The worldly understanding of love sometimes just falls into utter permissiveness. But of course, it doesn't take long to realize that this path of complete permissiveness eventually leads to heartache and ruin, doesn't it? I mean, there are real limits that we have to embrace.
[6:46] As much as I would like to, I cannot eat a diet of nothing but cheesecake and Diet Coke. I mean, I could probably go for a few days, trust me, especially if it's Japanese cheesecake.

Have you ever had this stuff? It's delicious. But eventually, you know, it's just not going to work. And my family would simply be participating in my foolishness to pretend that I could ignore those limits and genuinely flourish.
So loving someone inevitably at times will involve saying no. Real love isn't mere affirmation. Sometimes real love means disagreement or correction, even rebuke.
So what is the mark of genuine love? If we disagree with the world's definition, what do we typically put in its place? Well, perhaps our minds go back to chapter 3 of 1 John.
Remember there, in that part of the letter, John defines the nature of love as sacrificial service. Do you remember that? We identify needs and we meet those needs with the resources that God has given us.
[7:59] 1 John 3, 16 through 18, he says, By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's good and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth. Now there are probably few other paragraphs in the New Testament that give us as concise a picture of genuine Christian love as that one.
But we do need to be careful. We need to be careful because it's very easy for us to really be operating with the world's understanding of love, but then just kind of baptize it with a Christian veneer.
We think we're exercising Christian love, we think we're genuinely loving our brothers and sisters, but in reality, we're just operating in the mode of mere affirmation or mere permissiveness.
We may be sacrificially meeting their needs, but in reality, we're just doing it out of that same kind of operating system of permissiveness.
[9:11] How do we know if we are loving in deed and in truth? Well, this is where John chapter 5 helps us when he says, by this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments.

You see, the commandments of God are like the pathways of love. If we live in those commands and if we encourage others to do the same, then we are on the sure road of loving each other in deed and in truth.
after all, God's commandments are God's commandments, right? And John has just told us in chapter 4, verse 8, that God is love. And if God is love, then His commandments must be utterly loving.
They are the sure pathways of love. Now let's apply this in two ways then. First, if obedience to God's commands is the mark of love, then it's never loving to encourage someone or affirm someone in disobeying them.
You know, if you saw your best friend about to pour vegetable oil in the gas tank of their car, you know, what would you do? I mean, you'd probably say, hey, you know, that's probably not a good idea.
[10:36] I don't think your engine is going to run on that, right? But then if your friend turned to you and said, but you know, it just feels so right to just pour it in there. I think it's going to work.

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I read some articles on the internet. All my friends are doing it. You know, you're really the one who's out of step here, right? Well, you know, even if your friend responded that way, you'd probably still say if you're a good friend, look, I know that's what a lot of people are saying and I know you saw it on TikTok, but trust me, the engine's not going to work on vegetable oil.
You see, the commands of God, they're like the blueprint of love. They tell us exactly how the human heart is created to work best. So it's never loving to just go along when a fellow Christian is disobeying God's commands.
Now, of course, there are helpful and unhelpful ways to approach a fellow church member who is stepping outside of God's commands, right? Listen to how the Apostle Paul describes the right approach in Galatians chapter 6.
In Galatians 6, 1, Paul says, brothers and sisters, if anyone is caught in any transgression, and caught there means like stuck or trapped. So if you come across someone who seems to be stuck or trapped in disobeying God's commands and transgression, he says, you who are spiritual, that is, filled with the Holy Spirit, should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.
[12:08] Gentleness. And then he says, keep watch on yourself lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.

So notice what the right approach is. The right approach is marked by gentleness, right? We want to restore our brother or sister, not condemn them. And it's marked by humility.
We recognize that we too are tempted. We're not above this battle, this struggle. And according to Paul, it's also marked by compassion. We're willing to bear one another's burdens.
We're willing to do what it takes to come alongside our brother or sister and help them get out of whatever mess they're stuck in, even if it takes some sacrifice on our part. So this is one application of what John's saying here.
If obedience to God's commands is the mark of love, then we need to be willing to do this gentle work of correction and not merely be affirming when a brother or sister strays from God's commands. But there's another application.
[13:12] If obedience to God's commands is a mark of love, then the pursuit of personal holiness is a critical component to loving your fellow Christians well.

In other words, if you want to love well, then pursue holiness, Christ-likeness, pursue obedience in your own life. The 19th century Scottish pastor Robert Murray McShane famously said, the greatest need of my people is my personal holiness.
Speaking about his role as a pastor, the greatest need of my people isn't his great preaching, isn't his wonderful pastoral care. Those are great.
but his personal holiness. Now, this 19th century pastor wasn't being conceited when he said that. He knew that the greatest gift that we can give to each other in the family of God is our sanctified lives. For when we are pursuing holiness, it is then that we speak the truth in love.
[14:31] It is then that we give generously. It is then that we're patient and kind and humble and steadfast and faithful and gentle. But more than that, when we pursue personal righteousness, personal holiness, when we seek to obey God's commands, then our lives begin to begin to become like reflections of the love of God.

our lives begin to shine forth with the character of God. Remember, the commandments of God are God's commandments.
They're the pathways of love. And as we live in line with his commands, we begin to radiate more and more of the character of God. And then the aroma of Christ, the great lover of our souls, begins to fill our life together.
And that, friends, is an end in itself. To enjoy the glorious display of Christ in each other.
Like the sunlight that shines through the stained glass windows that kind of shines with a hundred different colors. This is the church that's pursuing righteousness and holiness.
[15:49] It shines with the glory of Christ. And that means as we pursue holiness, we become more than just examples or encouragements to one another.

Of course, we are that. But more than that, we're not just a moral example for others to follow, but we become a foretaste of the glory of Christ together.
A foretaste of the glory of Christ that will one day be revealed in full when he returns. Remember the beginning of John chapter 3? John says, Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when he appears, we shall be like him because we shall

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see him as he is.
And then John adds this, and everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself even as he is pure. Looking forward to that great day when Christ is revealed in glory and we participate in it, we long to start now.
So obedience is the mark of real love for one another. Not just love for God, but love for each other as well. But that leads to a question, doesn't it?
[17:08] A question of where we get the power to actually live out God's commands. Where do we get the power? Where do we get the energy to not just begrudgingly go along with God's commands, but to joyfully obey them?

Because we have to admit that at times, at times, God's commandments don't feel like the pathways of love, do they? At times, God's commands feel burdensome.
But John is reminding us that it doesn't have to be that way. Let's pick up our passage in verse 3. John writes, 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?
Faith in Jesus Christ, John says, is the power of joyful obedience because through faith in Christ, we overcome the world. Now, what exactly does that mean?
[18:30] We overcome the world. Well, earlier in the letter, you'll remember that the Apostle John described the world like this. He said, all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life, it's not from the Father but from the world, and the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Okay, so when John talks about the world in this book, he's talking about human life lived according to our merely self-centered or human-centered desires.
That's the world. Human life lived, human society arranged according to our merely human-centered desires.
and that becomes like a vortex that leads ultimately to a place, John says, of wanting what you don't have, that's the desire of the eyes, and boasting in what you do, the pride of life.
And it becomes like this never-ending pendulum back and forth at the one end suffering from a feeling of radical insignificance, always wanting, always wanting because there's always someone who's richer or smarter or prettier or more talented and feeling like you need it or you want it and you're so radically insignificant.
[20:05] But then, because you can't live there for long, you swing the other way to a feeling of radical superiority, the pride of life because surely you're at least better than that person or that person or that person or that person and back and forth you go.

the desires of the eyes, the pride of life, from radical insecurity to radical superiority.
Back and forth you go. But how do you overcome it? How do you get free from the constant need to build your identity on what you own or what you've accomplished?
How do you overcome what John calls the world and all the world's desires that run counter to God and make God's commands seem so burdensome?
I mean, after all, think about it. If the world says, build your identity on what you possess or what you accomplish, that's your drive in life.
[21:19] Then the commands of God come and they do feel like a burden. They feel like an intruder. They're playing a totally different tune than the world is playing.

But what if you could overcome those desires of the world? What if you could break free from them? What if you could get off the pendulum swing and no longer be their slave?
What if your life wasn't ruled by a gnawing insecurity or insignificance anymore? What if your life wasn't justified by how accomplished or successful you were? What if you had been set free from all that?
John says, it's not just possible to be liberated from the world. It's not just possible to overcome it. He says, it's already happened. The one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God has already overcome the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world.
[22:26] Our faith, not just faith in general, but faith in Jesus Christ, the risen Son of God. But how is that so? In what way does faith in Christ mean our victory over the world?

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Well, let's pause and meditate for a moment. Consider first what faith in Christ means about your past. The world, friends, wants you to live in constant guilt and shame because the more you live in guilt and shame and regret, the more you will buy things to fill the hole in your soul.
So it's very convenient for the world to keep you guilty and regretful and ashamed so that you continue to churn the wheel of consumerism. But friends, Christ has forgiven your sins through His death on the cross, through His blood shed for you.
He's taken your past and wiped it clean. You don't need to pay for your sins and mistakes. You don't need to keep trying to live them down. You've been released through His death and resurrection on your behalf.
and your status is now secure. The verdict has been cast over your life before the only court that matters. In the eyes of God, the Creator and the Redeemer, you are forgiven and loved.
[23:58] The only gavel that matters in the cosmos has come down and it is said you're forgiven and you're loved and you're accepted because my Son paid the price for you.

Your slate is clean. And if that's what's true when you're united to Christ, if that's what's true of your past, then the commands of God are no longer burdensome rules.
They're no longer burdensome rules whereby we try to earn heavenly favor or get back into God's good graces. No! God has already justified us in Christ.
The commands aren't there so that we can earn God's favor. They're there so that we can run in the pathway of His love. So that we can live a life of love to the God who gave His only Son to make us His children and welcome us home.
Consider what faith in Christ means not just about your past but about your future. fear. The world wants you to live in constant anxiety and fear. Fear that you'll miss out.
[25:13] Anxiety that you've got to live your best life now and not miss out on a single opportunity. You've got to leave all your options open for as long as possible because you never want to close the door because you might miss something.

Isn't this the, isn't this the tale that the world tells? But friends, the resurrection of Jesus Christ shatters that limited perspective.
When Jesus Christ rose from the grave, He inaugurated, He began the new creation. It was the first fruits. It was the swinging open of the door of a healed and restored creation.
A creation without death. A creation without decay. A creation without loss. A creation that isn't winding down under its own steam, but a creation that's being remade and made new.
And so for those in Christ, the future is not a clock that's running out. So we better get as much as we can.
[26:25] We better get as much pleasure before it's too late. No! For those in Christ, it's not a clock that's winding down. The future is an ever-expanding horizon.

The future for the believer in Christ is the dawn of a day that will not end. where the beauties of this life are seen to be just a foretaste of even greater glories to come.
And so the commands of God are not burdensome distractions or cosmic killjoys keeping us from having fun while this fleeting life lasts.
No, the commands of God are like the blueprint of the new creation. They are paths of joy on a road that stretches out into eternal life.
Do you think you will miss out on joy if you follow God's commands? No is the answer. No.
[27:42] But last, consider what faith in Christ means not just about your past or your future but your present. The world wants you to build your right now identity on consumption and performance.

You are what you purchase, you are what you produce, you are what you achieve, but faith in Christ means a whole new identity. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.
You are right now a child of God in Christ, a son, a daughter of the King. Apart from your production, apart from your possessions, you have the most dignified identity in the universe and it has nothing to do with that.
So you don't need to play the world's games anymore. Jesus once said, a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions, nor does it consist in the abundance of worldly approval or applause.

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Friends in Christ, you are part of a new kingdom now, a new reign, a new movement, a new way of doing things.
[29:03] And God's commands aren't burdensome, just the opposite. They are freedom and life. They are the ways of the kingdom for the sons and daughters of the King right now.

So friends, it's faith. It's faith in Jesus that is the victory that overcomes the world. And it's that that empowers joyful obedience.
And through joyful obedience, genuine love. Jesus is the crucified and risen Son of God. He is the victor over sin and death and condemnation.
Jesus' glory will not fade or perish. His kingdom will know no end. His word will endure for eternity. And in the new heavens and the new earth, His commands will be seen as what they truly are, by everyone.
The expression of perfect love. The will of a King whose name is love and whose life cannot be diminished. So church, let's live these commands now.
[30:21] Out of grateful love for Christ who saved us, united to Him by faith, let's follow His commands in love, overcoming the world and its lives through Him and through faith in His name.

Let's pray. Father, we take just a moment and we pause before You.
God, we admit, God, that oftentimes we become so confused, it's so easy for us to slide as Christians back into thinking that it is our obedience that earns Your favor, and then Your commands do become burdensome.
Father, by Your Holy Spirit right now, would You come and remind us again of the gospel of grace, that we are forgiven and accepted by grace, and we are set free to then obey.
But Father, we also acknowledge this morning that for those apart from Christ, for those outside of Him, for those who have not put their trust in Him.
[31:52] Lord, the realities of the world are all that remain. Lord, I pray that if there are any here this morning who are not in Christ and have not tasted of the joy and freedom that come through His forgiving grace, God, I pray that this morning would be the day of salvation for them, and that by Your Holy Spirit, You would pour into their hearts this faith that overcomes the world, this faith in Jesus.

God, cause them to be born again that they might believe. And Lord, would they reach out to You, take hold of You, and know that any who come to You, any who come to You, You will in no wise cast out, because You are a God of mercy.
Lastly, Jesus, we pray that we would live in this victory, we would live in this joy, we would live in this celebration that You have overcome, and we have overcome in You.
Be glorified in our lives and our church, Father. We pray. Father, we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
[33:32] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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