Faith that overcomes the world

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Date: 18 August 2019

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0:00] Andrew Morton, just as you're making your way there, I don't really, should I use the word expert? Well, perhaps not expert, but Andrew Morton, who we know as a church, I mean he preached on 1 John twice when he was here a few years ago, just brilliant. In fact, I'd highly recommend if you can find them on the audio to go back and listen to them all over again. 1 John is a particularly difficult book, even though it's written for young believers, but he did a whole series on 1 John, and just tremendous. He handles it, he's a very good teacher, a Bible teacher, but particularly that comes out in his series on 1 John. You'd have to ask him for it, but very, very good.

We're in 1 John chapter 5, and we're reading the first five verses. 1 John chapter 5, and the first five verses. Now hear God's word. 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. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born 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, may God bless that short reading, yet an impactful reading to our hearts.
I'm going to pray, and then we'll sing, and we'll come back to that word together. Father, we ask you for what we have just read, to make it clear to our heart, not just our mind. But Father, we recognize that we can only see if we understand. And so help us to see your word, help us to understand it, help us to take it in. And Father, may our heart rejoice at what we hear, knowing that what is spoken of here is true of us, because we have been born of God. So Father, we recognize that our lives belong to you this evening, and may we receive the assurance of that in Jesus' name. Amen.
Well, let's stand and sing, and then we'll come back to that word together. Your Bible's open. That's good, because you need them. The reason you need them is because you won't know as to what I'm saying is true, unless you have the same words in front of you. I'm all for trusting people, but I think our trust is to be in God. And one of the ways to show that is simply to have his word to us open daily. It doesn't matter where you are, I guess, or at all, as a matter of fact, but the fact that you are reading his word and listening to God in a world full of other voices.
[3:38] As we come into this text this evening, then, I want to perhaps lay out where we've been, because in order to see this, the first two steps were the equivalent of a small step ladder.

You need to be on the third step in order to see where we are this evening. And so the first two steps are fairly easy. They're not big or hard to understand, but they are this. So a couple of weeks ago, we understood that Christians don't live blindly. We don't live as though we cannot see what God has promised, or we cannot understand what God has in the future for us. Our faith is not blind. It's true that we don't walk by sight, but that is we don't walk by physical sight in a physical world in order to live the Christian life. We live by physical sight in a physical world to live a physical life in order to take the right turn, in order to avoid accidents, in order to do what we need to do. But when it comes to the Christian life, it's true that we don't live by physical sight, but it's not true that we don't live by sight. We do. But the way that we see is by hearing. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Christians see by hearing. And therefore, Christians who don't see, it's normally a hearing problem or a listening problem rather than a sight problem. Now, the other issue here is Romans 12 clearly points out that a Christian can only see that which the mind can understand. In fact, you may even say to someone, I can't see what you're saying. What you're actually saying to them is, I can't understand what you're saying. But it's the same thing. I can't see what you're saying. It's the same as saying, I can't understand. In order to see what God has said to us, we must understand. Romans chapter 12 says that Christians are renewed in the mind. That's

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how they're no longer conformed to the world, because their mind goes through a renewal. And the renewal is that they begin to see. They begin to understand. So, faith comes by hearing. We see by hearing.
And we see by understanding with the mind. It's true that the truth has to be in our heart. But the way that we see that truth is when the mind understands it. Last week, we moved on to understand the centrality of the gospel when it comes to our faith. And then we raised, perhaps, the very difficult question, which was a follow-on of the first week. And that's to do with ignorance.
You know, no Christian ever wants to feel that they're ignorant. And yet, there are times when we open up parts of the Bible and we read it and go, I have no idea what that means or what that says. It's tough to be confronted with your ignorance. But I guess that's what's happening, isn't it? The difficulty, however, with ignorance is that when you think that your ignorance of scripture won't actually make any difference to your Christian life, as if you can say, actually, I can get by without knowing that. I guess if you could get by without knowing that, it raises the question of why God thought he needed to say it. I think God says the whole counsel of his word and then calls us to understand the whole counsel of his word because it's actually needed. It's actually important and quite vital. I guess that level of ignorance, it's a level which says that you just don't know how ignorant the ignorance is. So I guess it's a real challenge for Christians, isn't it, to feel that little pinch, as it were, of scripture, that when you don't know it, to think, well, I actually think I can get by without knowing it. No, you can't.
[7:36] No, you really can't get by without knowing it. If you could, God wouldn't have said it. But God has said it because it's important for your Christian life. It's important for growing up. So I guess, I guess we all have to grow up and we all have to grow through that ignorance. And there's nothing to be embarrassed about not knowing and then knowing, but it is something that we ought to feel.

Why is that so important? Well, we come to a part of scripture in 1 John 5, which is not without its testing, not without its sort of strength in its conviction, even though it's completely assuring to the believer, it comes with great clarity. And it's the clarity that brings its conviction home.
I guess one of the first things to say is this, that the reason we know God is because of what he does. And that's true throughout the whole of scripture. God is always known by what he does. When you begin to describe God, you can't help but quickly get into how you know him to be loving, how you know him to be powerful. You will point to an event or an action where he demonstrates his love or he demonstrates his power or he demonstrates his wrath. You know God to be these things because you're able to point to actions that confirm that. God is known by what he does. Now, if that's true about God, it's also going to overflow into the Christian life, meaning that it's going to be true about us somewhere down the line. And 1 John brings us down the line, as it were, to that point where we begin to understand how those two relate. John's whole point is to bring you to the assurance of faith, but he doesn't want to bring it to you sort of haphandedly. He does it with absolute clarity because he understands that your faith is to rest on Christ, is to rest on the truth. And no one's satisfied with a lie the moment they know it's a lie. Let me give you a simple illustration of this.
You know, growing up, I was told that there was that man who comes in December with a red suit. You know, and I can remember how happy I was thinking about this man who had come in December with a red suit and he'd bring all these things apparently. And yet, when I, you know, I look back to all of those early childhood days and thinking just how happy I was, even if it was only for a few days before and then miserable for the rest of the year afterwards. Who knows? I mean, children are never quite as happy afterwards. You know, a week afterwards is what they are the week leading up to it. It's a mystery. Who knows? Here's the thing though, that when I'm feeling sad, I can't go back and believe in that person to make me happy. Because I know it's not true. And I think that's the challenge, isn't it? That what John does here is that he knows that there are some people in the world that will tell you the equivalent of the red man who comes at Christmas in order to produce in you a happiness. But it's a false happiness because you haven't quite learned that that's not real.
[11:06] The moment you do learn that that's real, you can no longer go back to that moment where you can make yourself happy again by believing in that person. Because you know it's not there, it's not true.

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Only the truth satisfies. Only the truth brings you into that happiness. And that's what John does here in 1 John 5. In fact, all the way through 1 John. He's very, very concerned that if you want to live the life, the Christian life full of joy, then it must be based on the truth. Now there's many Christians who in their ignorance will just believe in hope, but not necessarily hope in Christ. They'll believe in faith, but not necessarily faith in Christ. I can remember listening to a lady who lost her husband, not a Christian. And she just was asked the question, and what got you through? And she says, hope. And I wanted the person who was asking her to say, in what? And he didn't. And it was as if hope in hope was a thing that got someone through.
And I'm sure that that works. But it doesn't get a person anywhere. It is that Father Christmas moment. It is that comfort that isn't actually a true comfort. It does comfort, but it comforts in the very way that isn't true. And we know that, don't we? We know that things like that can exist.
Well, John's not happy with that. John's not happy with you being comforted with something that can comfort if it's not true. This first letter then of John is a summary. He wants to deal with the sensitive Christian believer who wonders whether or not they are believing the right thing. You know, perhaps you've been there. But he also understands, like all good theologians, that doubt is caused by belief in God, not by the absence of belief in God. I guess, again, Christians aren't always up to speed with this, but it's a very important point. Let me try and drill it out to you, as it were.
[13:23] If you believe that God is all-powerful, that God is all-loving, that God really is in control, then you have something in your life where God's sovereignty doesn't seem to be demonstrating.

It doesn't seem to be showing up. What do you do? Well, you doubt. But the reason you're doubting is precisely because you know what God is capable of. The reason that doubt is caused is because you know God can. And so you pray, well, if you can, Lord, then why don't you? And it's the very knowledge that God is all-powerful. It's the very knowledge that God can that causes the doubt when he doesn't.
Well, does he love me? Would he do this for me? Perhaps he wouldn't. And all of those doubts emerge simply because you know something about God to be true. And you're not the only one to deal with it.
Jeremiah had to deal with this. Job had to deal with it. There's plenty of people in the Psalms who had to deal with that reality of believing in God, believing that God could do these things and has done these things in the past. And you're sat there waiting around for him to do it for you.
And he's not. And you begin to doubt, am I not like his people of old? Am I not as good as them? No, it's none of those things. But it is to acknowledge at least that doubt, that kind of doubt, is actually caused by a very strong belief in God. Not a weak belief in God. It's actually caused by a very high knowledge of God, that God is powerful and sovereign. And so how do you encourage a believer like that? Who's not denying God, who doesn't doubt because he doesn't believe God is there, but rather is doubting precisely because he knows what God can do, but doesn't seem to be doing. So doubt emerges precisely because of the faith and knowledge that you have of God.
[15:22] John also recognizes that young Christians are not without their challenges in the world. Their faith is going to be opposed, and of course, they are going to be opposed in their faith.

And John tackles these issues head on, but the way that he tackles them is not by going after the teachers, but rather just by bringing home to the young believers what actually is true. He just reestablishes the truth. He doesn't go after the people and waste his time and effort on them, as though let's go out and debate everyone until we can prove them wrong. No, he leads them, he lets them get on. He rather comes into the church and he says, now let me set you straight.
Let me teach you the truth. And why is that important? Well, because if you're going to overcome the world, it's your faith, he says, that will overcome the world. It is the one who belongs to Jesus that will overcome all of this, all of this trouble, all of this heartache, all of this, all these struggles down here. How will you ever overcome them? Will they ever end? And the answer is yes. And the way that they'll end is ultimately when Christ returns, but they end in faith in Christ.
The victory has already been won. So John does two things. Not only does he want to make these believers aware of what to believe, but he also wants them to be assured that what they believe is true. In other words, he understands the distinction between the two. Like many Christians know what they believe, but then sometimes you can doubt whether or not what you believe is actually the truth. As if this is the belief, the knowledge that will get me to be with God. What if it's one of those other religions out there? You know, what if that happens? Well, the answer is very clear. It's

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theologically clear throughout the whole of scripture. But the simple answer is this, who does the revealing?
Who does the revealing? See, nothing is ever truly discovered in the sense that we can find something out that wasn't there. You know, I love, you know, you get these archaeologists, you know, look at what we've discovered. Well, you've unearthed something. It was always there. You just dug a little deeper than the previous person. Or a scientist that has a telescope that can go, you know, millions of miles into the universe. Look at what we've discovered. Well, you're able to see it now, but it was always there. The more important question is, how did it get there? The only way you can discover something is if that something has first been revealed, is if it's been put there. That's John's point.
[18:17] Look at what God has done. Look at who God has put into the world. Look at how all of this ties up. You wouldn't know any of it, John would say, if it was not for God telling you. It's a very simple point, but a powerful one. The only reason you know that God is who he says he is, is because God is known by what he does, what he says. Your faith in God is there precisely because God has revealed himself in such a way so that you could have faith in him. You know, Christians are like children, sometimes playing hide and seek. There's always one child that you can't find. You know, come on, come out, and they won't. I can remember being on holiday a couple of years ago, and we were staying in this house. It was nice for Susan's parents, and so it was a little bit bigger, quite a bit bigger, actually, than any house I'd probably ever seen. And so there's plenty of places to hide. So we played hide and seek with their children. Well, my son, we could not find him. And to be honest, it was so quiet that I thought, well, perhaps this is quite an idea not to find him. Let's just have it, you know.

Let's play hide and seek for a long time, and, you know, we will count to a thousand. Make it fun. No, we wouldn't do that. And there's, right, you can't find. So the idea that the ability is within us, that we've got this ability to be able to search out of, no, there comes a time where there has to be that revealing. And God reveals, and that's how we come to believe in him. That's how the relationship begins. Look at what he says in verse one. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. But how do you know that Jesus is the Christ? Well, because it's been revealed to you. It's because Jesus Christ came into this world. It's because he did the miracles that he did. It's because he died on the cross, because he rose from the grave. That's how you know. You know God through what he's done. It's been revealed to you.
Verse two, then, gives you the evidence of your relationship in God. That everyone who loves God the Father belongs to him. He goes on, verse two, that we know that we love one another if, of course, we love one another by teaching them to obey God's commandments. That's a real challenge, isn't it? To love one another by holding God's commandments as the standard of love. You know, we would never encourage a believer to do something that God wouldn't say is okay. The definition of love is whether or not it ties up with a command. That's love. That's real, biblical love. What does that mean? Well, that's the assurance of whether or not you're a genuine believer. That you love in that kind of way. That you believe and love the Father in that kind of way.
It's the assurance that you will overcome the world because you have the same faith, that faith. And the person who belongs to Christ, the one who believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, is the one who will overcome the world. But of course, all of this is conditioned, heavily conditioned, or rather not conditioned in the sense that you have to keep them, but conditioned in the sense that they are with great clarity that how this assurance is being explained. The true believer who is assured in their faith, or rather being assured in their faith, is the one who recognizes themselves in these words. That's where the assurance come from. It's not the Father Christmas moment.
[22:04] This is the clarity. Yes, I've done that. Yes, I've been there. Yes, I've... Right? And there's no credit to ourselves, but rather because of what has been revealed to us and has made us this way. So let's think then of the commandments. Why does God even give commandments to his people? There's a number of different reasons why the world needs commandments, why we need commandments. But I always find it striking that God gave commandments to his people he brought out of slavery. So he brought his people out of slavery and then gave them a list of things not that they couldn't do. This sounds a little bit like slavery all over again. Right? I'm taking you out of Egypt because of the oppression that you're under there, and then I'm going to give you a list of things you cannot do. And yet it's those very things that they cannot do which gives them the freedom that they have not only in God, but amongst each other. Thou shalt not kill. I think that's a wonderful freedom

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commandment.

Don't bear false witness. How freeing is that? You know, love God, don't commit adultery. What about idolatry? All of these things are freeing and wonderful. Don't steal. Don't murder.
They are relational commandments. What does that mean? It means this, that if you remove God from the commandments, what have you got? Just, just, God's not there. Well, then you've got morality by choice. I could choose to be good, but then I could equally choose not to be good. I could choose to be moral, or I could choose to be amoral. There's no one telling me what to do. I can choose one over the other, but we need to be told what to do. That's part of the problem. That's part of the issue. That's how it gets solved. That revelation. This is how it's meant to be. But if you remove God, then it means that you end up living in a world where people choose their own morality.
Well, hang on. We're already there. And it didn't take very long, did it? That's the problem. Removing God from the commandments, even the moral ones, the straightforward moral ones that most people would believe, not killing each other. It's a pretty good one.
You know, even most atheists would agree that that's a good one. But if you remove God, then there's, then it's just someone's word against someone else's. Well, who says it's a good idea? [24:50] That's the problem you have. If you remove God, you remove any power to say one is right and one is wrong. No, these commandments are relational commandments. They're the very things that bring us into God and with each other. They're the very things that restore and keep harmony amongst each other. Hence why John says here that you'll know whether or not you're loving each other by whether or not you're doing it according to the commandment of God. You'll know. Well, why is that so important, John? Because then you'll know if you're a believer. Then you'll know if you're genuinely mine. That's the crucial side to John's clarity. And this is why it's a very difficult letter, but at the same time, one where it doesn't mess around. It just wants you to be absolutely assured. Do we get it right all the time? Not for a moment. Not even close sometimes. But is our heart a heart of repentance when we get it wrong there? Yeah, of course it is. Do we love God and do we, are we saddened when we've messed things up? Yes, of course we are. There's the assurance.

There's the assurance. Think about it like this. If I stood here and said I can swim, how do you know? Well, I can by the way. But how do you know? You have no idea. Now you will know whether or not I can swim if I go swimming and you watch me. And if I am swimming, then my claim that I can swim would be a true one. Okay. How do I know that I can swim? Well, because I can swim. I go swimming. You can watch me swim. Okay. What about the commandments?
How do I know I can keep a commandment? Well, by keeping them. And what John does is he links the keeping of commandments with your identity as a Christian.
That's what he does. He links the two together. Therefore, if you look at a person keeping the commandments of God in the New Testament sense, he says there you'll see a person who belongs to God.
There you'll see a person who's born of God. In the same way, if you see someone swimming, you're able to say they can swim. The distinction here is, of course, we're not swimming all the time, but we are meant to keep the commandments all the time. And that's where the assurance comes from.
[27:37] The assurance of faith comes when you live by faith. The assurance of being someone who is born of God comes with all the markers of someone who is born of God. We're not perfect.

But nevertheless, that is where our heart is. The point here is to realize, very, very simply, that God is known by what he does.
And God's people equally are known by what they do. God is known by what he does. And God's people know that they are the people of God by what they do.
That's where the assurance comes from. How do I know without arrogance, without assumption or presumption, how do I know when I wake up in the morning and I decide to be like Jesus today? Because there's always those mornings where you wake up and that conviction to be like Jesus is not always there. Do I be like Jesus today or not? What do I do?
[28:49] And I have that conviction to be like Jesus. And I try to live that Christian life. How do I know that I'm... How do I know that I am of God?

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Well, you'll know the moment you start living the life. That's the only way you can know. Okay, and the same way, the only way a bird can know if it can fly is if it flies.
The only way you can know if you can swim is if you swim. The only way you can know, truly know, if you're a believer, is by living the believer's life as said in 1 John.
It's a very, very simple connection. That's where the assurance comes from. It's not measuring up to any human standard. It's simply spotting the evidences of a life born in God.
Not perfection. You're never going to get there. Well, not in... Not this side of glory. But what it does mean is that the trajectory of your life is heading that way.
[29:55] What then about victory then? And this is where we start bringing it to the close. The victory that we have is a victory that only God can give us in Christ Jesus.

But it's a victory measured against the world. We've heard Jesus say in the New Testament, don't love the world or the things in the world.
We hear Paul say in Romans, do not be conformed to the world. We even hear Jesus say to his disciples that he has overcome the world. Jesus even measures the value of your life to the world. What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and yet forfeits his soul? In other words, what he's doing as a mental picture is he's having you on one side of the scale and the world and everything in it on the other side and you outweigh the world.
The value of your life outweighs the world. So don't trade it off for that. Because you're trading it off for something less. Far, far less than what you are in Christ Jesus.
[31:02] That's part of the victory. Part of the victory is understanding exactly what Christ Jesus has done for you. Part of the victory, or at least enjoying the victory, is exercising faith in the victory that Christ has accomplished.

And of course, you'll notice that the word victory, or the understanding of victory, or overcoming the world, which is victory language, takes place in the context of battle.
You overcome something because there's something to overcome. Victory is true because the battle is real. Christ on the cross says it is finished.
It's already been settled. You know, I watch, you know, a few replays because I never get to see the things that I want to watch at the time when it's on.
And so we have these things where it can record stuff off the TV. And, you know, you watch it back. And sometimes you've seen it before and you know what the end's going to be.
[32:04] But for some reason you can't stop your heart from beating fast. I know what the outcome is. You know, like when you watch a sad film and you know they're only acting, but you...

Why am I crying? They're all going to come out on the red carpet a month later and win an Oscar. Why am I crying at this? Well, it's because you're taken in.
Well, every now and then you watch something and you know how it's going to turn out. And yet you're still caught up in that suspense halfway through. You know, like, Columbo. You know who the murderer is right at the very beginning.
And yet you still wonder whether or not he's going to catch him. Well, of course he does. That's the kind of that tension that we live in the Christian life. We know the victory is won and yet we still go through life.
Has it been won? Yes, it's been won. It's been won. The focus here then is on Christ, not you. The focus here is not on you winning, but the fact that Christ has already won it for you.
[33:11] The focus here is not on your faith being victorious, but rather the faith that God has given you being victorious in this world. Your faith is understanding that the victory has already been won in Christ Jesus.

It's not you understanding that your faith will win the victory. No, no, no. The faith that you have in the victory of Christ is how you overcome the world by faith.
It's all about him. That's how you overcome it. Jesus said this to his disciples. I've said these things to you that you may have peace.
In a world you will have tribulation. Okay? I've said these things to you that you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart.
I have overcome the world. There's the peace. There's the victory. Okay? You're to have peace, but you're also going to have tribulation.
[34:10] But you're going to have it in the context that Christ has overcome the world. So let me finish. How do we bring down the resources of God into our daily situation?

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Well, by faith. How do I live this Christian life the way one John is telling me to live it? Well, I exercise faith in God and the resources that he has.
And I'm strengthened by God by exercising faith in him. Because without faith I can't please God. And without faith I can enjoy the resources and the benefits that he has for his people.
You know, the only way I can keep a commandment is if God's given me the ability to do so. Yeah, I've still got to choose to do it. I've still got to use my volition.
I've still got to use my will to want to love God. But all of that comes with a changed heart. All of that comes with God doing it for me in the first place. God's given me the ability to swim.
[35:09] Now I've got to go swim. God's given me the ability to love him. Now I should love him. God's given me the ability to obey his commandments. Now I should obey it.

I don't obey it all by myself as though that gives me the assurance. No, what gives me the assurance is that I find myself obeying a commandment that I could not obey all on my own. That's the assurance.
That I find myself living by faith in a world where I could not live by faith all on my own. That's the assurance. I enjoy the assurance that God has done it in me and for me.
And so when I find myself doing it, knowing that I could not do this on my own, I am then assured that it is God in me doing it. And that's how we live the Christian life.
Having that faith in him. Well, let me finish with this. As you go home tonight, as you wake up tomorrow morning, whatever you do, I guess learn.
[36:10] Go in, learn. You know, let your mind and heart take it in. Understand. Strengthen your faith by understanding. Ask God to show you the spiritual disciplines and how to practice them.

You know, prayer is difficult. It's even more difficult when life's tough. You know, I know that some people say, you know, when life gets tough, I turn to God in prayer. Do you know what? I've had a few tough moments and I've never known that to be the case.
Either I'm a really poor Christian and they're super Christians or actually it's just perhaps not that true for everybody. No, when I'm having a tough time, prayer is the last thing I want to do.
And yet it is the very thing that would really help us if we go to God and pray. Is it difficult? Boy, is it difficult. Really difficult. Exercise faith.
Strengthen your faith. But the way to strengthen it is by understanding two very simple things. And here I'll finish. Number one, you have a choice. A daily choice.
[37:19] You can choose to do many things that God has given you the ability to do so. But here's the sort of rub. There's this thing called choice theory.

I won't go into it. But the two main points of choice theory is this. Number one, you have a choice. Number two, information is so important. Because you can only choose the things you know.
You can only choose the things you know. You could guess it, life, of course. But people have real choices and they have real knowledge. God has given you his whole word in order to educate your mind and heart.
So that you would make the right choices. Trust God and love him. Amen. Here's the victory.
Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling. And to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.
[38:26] To the only wise God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Be glory, majesty, dominion and authority. Before all time and now and forevermore. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

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