

1st JOHN BIBLE STUDY

1 John 5:4-5

Lesson #19

Introduction

This is our 1st John bible study, it's lesson #19, and it's covering chapter 5, verses 4 and 5. The title of this lesson is:

Overcoming the World

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. 5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? 1 John 5:4-5 (NASB)

Verse 4 (a):

4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world;

I suspect that most of us might have a preconceived notion of what it is to overcome the world, that's very different from what the scriptures actually mean when they use that term. When we say that we've overcome something, we usually mean that we've conquered it by force, or by determination. That we've been in a battle and emerged victorious, like the movie hero's who may be bruised and bloody, but nonetheless have won out over the villains, and conquered them in the end, and then stand victorious over their dead bodies with sword raised high in victory. This is the Hollywood hero, the worldly image of overcoming. But it's nothing whatsoever like what the scriptures usually mean by this term.

Jesus knew that a specific time was set for Him to be rejected, humiliated, beaten, and then brutally murdered by that same humankind that He had brought into existence by His own hand. (Col 1:16) He knew that day in advance, as was evidenced by His repeatedly telling His family and His followers that His time had not yet come. But on the day preceding, He began a long talk with His closest disciples, because He knew that the next day was His last day on earth in His mortal flesh and blood body. He knew only too well what laid in store for Him, as evidenced by His agony in the garden of Gethsemane and His prayers to His Father. (Lk 22:44) And yet with this as the impending background, He told His disciples something that seems absolutely backwards from everything we would naturally perceive. He said to them:

33 "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." John 16:33 (NASB)

Now, knowing full well exactly what laid in store for Him within the next 24 hours, how in the world could Jesus speak of peace, and of overcoming the world? Is this what you and I would see as peace and overcoming? Is it what His disciples perceived as peace and overcoming? No, it obviously was not. His disciples were dumbfounded, they didn't know what to say, or how to react. They couldn't believe their ears, Peter said outright that this couldn't possibly happen to Him, and tried to take Him aside for some friendly attitude adjustment. (Mt 16:22)

23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." Matt 16:23 (NASB)

What happened shortly thereafter hardly fits our natural concept of overcoming the world, does it? But it clearly defines what it was to Jesus, and if we have eyes to see, then we can understand it also. So, to understand how Jesus saw this as a victory, when the whole world say it as a defeat, we must come to see it from His perspective.

For the unbeliever, everything of any value and any importance is expressed by the right here and now, in this present age. Everything is evaluated as good or bad, important or unimportant, valuable or worthless, blessing or curse, entirely by how it affects our immediate life and happiness. If it makes us happy, and is perceived as a benefit, then it's called good, but if it makes us uncomfortable, or unhappy, then it's called bad. There's only one evaluation perspective, the here and now. The immediate, or at least nearly immediate, earthly benefit is the only perspective recognized by the world. And because of this the world is very quick to jump to conclusions about everything. This isn't mysterious, in fact it's perfectly logical, given the circumstances. Which circumstances deny, or simply overlook, any recognition of a long range perspective that's beyond the immediate earthly view.

This is why the world, at that time considered the crucifixion of Jesus as proof positive that He was, in the final analysis, just another man, with some very bold words, and some unexplainable healing powers. But, just another man nevertheless, and was vulnerable to the same things as all other men.

As Jesus hung on that brutal cross, mockers yelled at Him to just miraculously come down from the cross, and then they would believe in Him. If He really was the Son of God then He would most surely do exactly that, because certainly no Son of God would ever suffer that shame and painful torment if He had the ability to prevent it, that was obvious to them. Overcoming meant to them, that He would have driven out the oppressors, conquered the Roman empire, and reestablished Israel as the dominant world power, with glory and prosperity as in the days of Solomon. What else could overcoming the world possibly mean?

If He really was the Son of God, then surely no man could have ever possibly put Him to death. This is obvious, right? You see how we humans think? How we're so quick to jump to conclusions based on our biased and limited point of view? Who among the people even considered the possibility that this Jesus had a plan that intentionally included His own crucifixion? Wouldn't that be insane? What possible reason could Jesus have had, that would have made Him intentionally suffer such a horrific ordeal? This is unimaginable. And yet, Jesus said:

17 "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again., 18 "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father." John 10:17-18 (NASB)

Who in the world, at that time, considered the possibility that Jesus was voluntarily surrendering His life for a reason of His own, a reason that no one even understood at that time; and nothing was actually what it seemed to be from the natural human perspective? How could anyone in their right mind call this an overcoming victory over the world? (Jn 16:33) Surely this Man's thinking was diametrically opposed to everything we humans consider logical. So how is it that He can call an event that we perceive as a dismal defeat, to be in truth, a world overcoming victory of cosmic proportions?

The answer is obvious, He must have known something that we didn't about what was really going on behind the scenes. He must have had a perspective that was not based on the here and now, but on an unseen future of which we were not aware. And which, is of obviously higher and greater importance to Him than our limited, here and now earthly perspective. He obviously felt that He had accomplished something of much higher significance on the cosmic scale of importance. And if we can be made to see the whole thing from His perspective, the invisible and future perspective, then we will be able to see, and rightly understand, how His life, and death, and resurrection, truly and eternally affect everything that exists, for evermore. No event that has ever occurred in all time and space, has so drastically and permanently affected mankind, and yet while it was happening, no one had any idea of what they were actually witnessing. He declared that He had overcome the world, but the world counted Him as little more than a poor hapless victim.

So, what did Jesus know that nobody else understood at the time? Why did He call this horrific event a victory, and why did He say that He had overcome the world? And in what manner did He overcome it, after all, it killed Him. Well, if you're a believer, then you know the answers to all these questions, and the mystery of Jesus has been revealed to you by the Spirit of God. You know that the war that Jesus was fighting was not for the mortal flesh, not for the here and now, but for the eternal souls of humankind. You know that sin holds all mankind under the bondage of death under the righteous judgement of God, (Rom 3:23, 6:23) and unless someone was able, and willing, to propitiate that debt, then all mankind was lost. And Jesus voluntarily did just that, by living a perfect sinless life, and then forfeiting that life as a substitute for all who would repent and believe in Him as the divine and perfect Son of God. He was totally victorious over the bondage of sin that held mankind captive, and He overcame that obstacle, and the one behind it, in totality.

He overcame while on that cross, and He most surely could have come down if He desired, and called 12 legions of angels to slaughter every one of those mockers that taunted Him, but He knew exactly what He was doing, and He was certainly no victim, as His subsequent resurrection and ascension openly demonstrated. These were without a doubt His finest hours, and all eternity turns on what happened on that fateful day in the life of Jesus. When He overcame the world on behalf of those whom He loves with an eternal and immeasurable love.

And now we have the words of John that say that whatever (whomever) is born of God overcomes the world. For anyone to ever see Jesus as an overcomer, instead of a victim, they must have their eyes opened to the truth of who Jesus is, and what He accomplished by His perfect sinless life, His substitutionary death, and His bodily resurrection. And how does one come upon this understanding? John finishes this same sentence with the words:

Verse 4 (b):

and this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith

We've discussed the difference in perspective that determines one's assessment of success and failure, of blessing and curse, and what's of greatest importance versus what's lesser. We used Jesus' words recorded in John's gospel about overcoming the world, but we've not paid much attention yet to the other things that He said in that same sentence. He also said that He had spoken to them so that they would have peace. But again that seems inconsistent with what was about to happen to Him, and then to themselves afterwards. What peace, there was seemingly only persecution and death awaiting all of them, at least in the immediate future? And Jesus's words answered this. He immediately said that in the world they would have tribulation. So, the peace that Jesus was talking about could not have been the peace that we usually perceive. He must have meant some other kind of peace. Yes, He did, He was speaking again of a perspective that was not of this immediate world, but of that eternal existence of the soul.

Mankind knows that God is holy, and righteous and perfect. And that He has commanded that we obey all His commandments, and if we don't then the penalty is eternal death. (Rom 3:32, 6:23) We live in the knowledge that we don't live up to His standard, and that nagging specter of death looms ever present over our lives. We know that we don't live forever, and someday we will all die, and this can't be avoided. Furthermore, in our natural state, we don't want to obey God's commandments, they are contrary to our own desires, and therefore we are constantly at war with our feelings, and emotions, and desires that pull us away from God, and put us in jeopardy of His wrath. There is a restlessness, a worry, a lack of peace, even in the heart of the most devout atheist, that someday they will have to face a sovereign God, and answer to Him for their lives. Any man or woman who claims to feel no such fear is a bawl-faced liar, because we all know better, don't we?

The peace that Jesus speaks of, is first, a peace with God, concerning His wrath and punishment being completely resolved by Jesus Christ, (1Jn 4:17-19) and then secondly, a peace with our own conscience, because we no longer desire to pursue those things that are contrary to God's commandments. Yes, our flesh still draws us into occasional sin, but it is not the desire of our heart to do so, therefore we are at peace with God over the desires of our heart, (Rom 6:17-18) and in complete agreement with Him as to what is sin and what is righteous. We know the love of God that surpasses all understanding, and with that, the peace of mind and heart that we are forgiven, and belong to Him forevermore. The world cannot know, or understand this kind of peace. To them, it's a mystery, like a fairy tale for the simple minded.

So, Jesus spoke of peace in that verse we quoted, but then He said that in the world we will have tribulation. One dictionary defines tribulation as a state of great trouble or suffering. Jesus said that they **would** have such times, not that they **might**, but that they would. And, indeed they did. How the modern day prosperity ministries get away with their nonsense of health and wealth is a mystery to me. Did Jesus say - in this world you will have health, wealth and prosperity, or did He say you will have tribulations? (great troubles and suffering) Read the verses and see what Jesus repeatedly foretold for His followers, and see if you can find health, wealth, and prosperity, or self-esteem, in this present worldly age among those prophetic forecasts? (Mat 10:34-39; Lk 9:23-25, 14:25-27, 33)

In Matthew 10, Jesus tells us:

34 "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 "For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; 36 and a man's enemies will be the members of his [own] household.

37 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 "He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

Matt 10:34-39 (NASB)

In Luke 9, Jesus tells His disciples:

23 And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. 24 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. 25 "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? 26 "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when He comes in His glory, and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

Luke 9:23-26 (NASB)

And then in Luke 14, Jesus says some startling things:

26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. 27 "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.....

33 "So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. Luke 14:26-27, 33 (NASB)

For sure there is immeasurable health, and wealth, and prosperity promised for those who love God, but just **not** in this earthly realm of the here and now. Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world. (Jn 18:36) And His promises to His followers is not of this world, except that promise of tribulations. Even those of us who know better, still have this annoying habit of evaluating almost everything based on how it affects us right now in this present age. If it seems good then we say we are experiencing God's blessing on us, but the minute we suffer any tribulations, we cry foul and ask God what happened to His promises of blessing. The thought that we may be experiencing discipline, for our benefit, or, just some testing to mature and grow our faith, seems to be the last thought on our mind's. If it's good right now, then it's deemed a blessing, but if it involves tribulation, then it's immediately labeled a curse, or a demonic attack.

Again, referring to that popular prosperity ministry, that evaluates everything in the here and now, we see their error very clearly. Have you ever noticed that the vast majority of the prosperity preachers preach almost entirely from the Old Testament? Why do they do that? Because the Old Testament is under the old covenant. And what essentially is the old covenant? It's a covenant of immediate earthly prosperity or judgement, based on immediate actions of obedience or disobedience. It was **not** a covenant of salvation, it was a covenant of living relationship.

Salvation has forever been by faith alone. (Gen 15:6; Ro 4:9, 22; Gal 3:6; Jas 2:23) So, the prosperity preachers take a part from the old covenant and splice it together with a part of the new covenant, and come out with a hybrid covenant. One that does not exist in the bible. They take the immediate prosperity of the old covenant, and combine it with the faith of the new covenant. But there is no such covenant. The prosperity of the old covenant was for lives of obedience, not for belief, and the rewards of the new covenant is future, not present. So they've created a covenant whereby we are supposed to get the immediate earthly rewards of the old covenant, but not with obedience to His commandments, but simply with a new covenant claim of belief in Jesus. One must be completely ignorant of the distinction between the two covenants to fall for such a silly and obvious deception.

When Jesus raised that cup at the last supper, and declared that this was the new covenant in His blood, He was proclaiming the end of the old, and the beginning of a new and superior covenant between God and man. And this covenant provides for far better rewards, but requires waiting until His return to take possession of those rewards. And, In the interim, it calls for perseverance in the faith, and enduring hardships, sufferings, and testings, to bring us to a Christlike maturity level where we may rightly receive those rewards. My fellow Christians, do not expect peace on this earth, do not expect prosperity, do not expect popularity and acceptance, if you do you will surely be disappointed. Now some may find a few of these, in modest measures, and for short periods, but they are the exception, not the rule. Pay attention to the words of Jesus, that we've already referred to, and expect exactly what He said.

Forget that prosperity and self-esteem nonsense, it is a stumbling block to you, designed to take your eyes off of God and onto the world, like Peter's misguided words to Jesus. Overcoming the world, to the Christian, is not conquering the world, but avoiding being drawn into its destructive ways that lead to judgement. Jesus overcame the world, but He did not, at that time, conquer the world. We must understand the difference, or we'll be drawn into the world's way of thinking, and end up missing the whole point.

Our most important battle is with sin and evil, being fought within our own heart's and mind's, not with those external forces of worldly influence and power. Jesus didn't challenge Caesar to a duel for control of Rome and its vast empire, He challenged, and conquered Satan, in a dual of the will, to worship God alone, and obey His commandments. Satan had conquered the will of Adam and Eve, and plunged them, and all their posterity, into destruction, but he met his match in Jesus, who took back, forevermore, what Satan had stolen. By dying on a cross, He overcame the world. Unless you see and comprehend what was really going on behind the scenes, you won't understand, and you'll call this nonsense.

Satan offered Jesus a way of attaining the position of rulership and authority over the world that circumvented the cross; all He had to do was kneel down and worship Satan, and Satan would grant Him that position that God has temporarily allocated to him. (Mat 4:9) But Jesus would have nothing to do with this. He understood His divine mission, as the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world. (Jn 1:29) And He most certainly would not kneel down and worship Satan, as He responded from scripture declaring - that we shall worship the Lord our God, and serve Him only.

We have a very difficult time seeing and evaluating day to day experiences from a long range, divine perspective. And in our defense, the here and now is the only perspective we can relate to with our natural intellect and senses, but we know that it isn't the only perspective that exists, and much effort is required to keep properly focused, under the heat of pressing and immediate battles. Let me use a most amazing verse recorded by the writer of Hebrews concerning the Lord Jesus Himself:

8 Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. 9 And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation, Heb 5:8-9 (NASB)

Do you see beloved? Jesus was made perfect in obedience to his Father, by faithfully enduring the suffering that was required, and we likewise, are intended to be made like Jesus in obedience to God, by our own faithfully enduring the intended tribulations of this world. We are not here on a picnic, we are here in a war with sin, that must be fought to the best of our ability, lest we fall short of that heavenly calling. For the Christian, this life is not about the here and now, it is about learning obedience through the things that we are designated to suffer, for the sake of our being perfected in Christ. But, to keep from being misleading, the sufferings and tribulations are indeed in the here and now, even though the benefits and rewards are not, because our kingdom, for which we strive, is that of Christ Jesus at His glorious return.

Allow me to just add a little caveat here. We often pray to God for Him to make us more like Jesus, and this is certainly the right thing to pray. But do we understand what we're asking for? I really don't think so. I think we want, and even expect that we can get the final result, without enduring the means that produced it. We want to be like Jesus, we just don't want to get like that the same way He did. We ask for Christlikeness, and then immediately plead for relief when the sufferings needed to produce that result are implemented. If you aren't willing to endure the process, then don't ask for the final product. Jesus said, if we want to follow Him, we must take up our own cross, meaning endure our own sufferings, there's no circumventing the process if the final results are to ever be achieved. The next time you pray this, please understand what you're asking for, that you recognize what's in store, and make sure that you really want it enough to persevere through the process that's required.

From this we can see that our battle with the world is not for political, or military, or even economic control of it, but for our own freedom from its damning influences of sin over us and our behaviors and affections. Overcoming the world is not overpowering it, in the ordinary sense of the term, but rather overcoming the temptations that cause the destruction of all those who live in it, and support its life of disobedience to God. Therefore, the weapons of our warfare are not the ordinary carnal weapons:

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, 6 and we are ready to punish all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete. 2 Cor 10:3-6 (NASB)

So, realizing that our battle is not for world control, but for spiritual control of our own selves, we see that the weapon that overcomes this enemy isn't swords, or guns, or bombs, but a change of our own nature, a change of our own heart and

mind. And what is the one and only weapon that is capable of accomplishing this - faith beloved? Our faith, that we received as a free gift of God, is both capable, and even guaranteed, to do that job, because it works by the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. (1Pet 1:2) The only effective weapon for overcoming the world is genuine saving faith, bestowed by the gift of God. Nothing else in the created universe is capable of effectuating this result. We cannot do it by the sheer force of our own determination, thought we're often tempted, or tricked into thinking we can.

Faith is the unique instrument of world overcoming power for any and every human being. And this is what John is telling us in this verse. He says "that which is born of God overcomes the world." And then finishes that sentence with the very specific identification of just exactly what he means by being born of God, by saying "this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith." Faith overcomes the world in the heart and mind of every believer.

There are many Christians, and/or professing Christians, who perceive that our mission is to conquer the world. Not understanding the difference between conquering and overcoming causes many dear saints to launch every kind of campaign and political action groups for the purpose of affecting laws and legislation. And don't get me wrong, it's a noble effort to publically speak out against ungodliness, in every form, but the mission of overcoming the world is not about overpowering the world by government legislation, or military action.

The mission is to overcome sin in our own lives, and present the gospel of Jesus Christ to all who have an ear to hear it. Jesus, and Jesus only, will overpower the world governments, and military powers, when He bodily returns. That victory has been given to Him by His Father, as part of the reward for His obedient sacrifice on that cross. The submissive lamb, becomes a roaring majestic Lion, that slaughters His adversaries with only a word from His mouth, and takes control of the whole earth, as the Jews expected Him to do at His first coming. (Rev 19) But, as the verse from 2nd Corinthians says, that only happens when our own obedience is complete. Not when we've conquered the world, but when we've overcome its sinful influence over our own lives.

You might say - well then, that will never happen, because we will never overcome our disobedience, if we live a thousand years. This is true, we will not ever bring our flesh to perfection, so, when the time is fulfilled, and our struggles and perseverance have been proven, then we have the words from the Apostle Paul, that we will be changed, in the twinkling of an eye, into bodies that are imperishable, and undefiled. (1Co 15:50-54) Our unwinnable battle with the flesh will be over, as we are made perfect, as He is perfect, by the power that He (Jesus) has to conform all things to Himself. (Phi 3:20-21) Just like John already said earlier in this same epistle. (3:2) Yes, We will someday be like Him, and we will see Him as He is, but, not in these fleshly bodies, and not during this present age. So we are told to overcome, not to conquer the world, and then when He returns, He will do the conquering, and He will receive the glory. (Come quickly Lord Jesus.) Now John ties the whole package together, and narrows the definition even more in the next sentence:

Verse 5:

5 Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Now that John has told us who it is that overcomes the world, and that it's faith, not force, that empowers that overcoming, and that this is the product of being born of God, as opposed to being of human origin, he makes one further clarification. He asks a rhetorical question, because he answers it in the same sentence. He asks, who are those who overcome the world, and answers, that it is those who believe that Jesus *is* the Son of God.

John inseparably bonds together being born of God, and overcoming the world, and the gift of faith, all to one common element. And that element is, believing that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. There is no faith, there is no overcoming, there is no birth of God, unless there is authentic, fruit bearing (meaning obedient) belief that Jesus is the divine Son of God. Nothing else stands, if this element falls. Nothing else is genuine, if this element is false. And nothing overcomes the world, and its death hold on humanity, unless there is authentic believing that Jesus is the Son of God.

The Father has made Himself available to His human creatures, but only, and exclusively, by way of His beloved Son. Jesus said that He was the way, and the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to the Father but by Him. (Jn 14:6) By believing that He is that divine and unique propitiation for the sins of man, and the only source of righteous perfection, and

the only One who holds in His hand, that precious gift of eternal life. Believing this, savingly, meaning obediently, is John's definition of overcoming the world. John's going to expand on this thought even further in subsequent verses, but for now, I'm going to end this lesson here, and we'll begin at verse 6 in our next lesson. To Him be the glory, forever. Amen.

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