

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: THIS IS THE VICTORY

Scripture: I John 5:1-5.

Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and every one that loveth him that begat loveth also him that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

One of the charming fallacies devoutly believed by many Christians is the idea that one who loves and serves the Lord and tries to keep his laws perfectly has an absolute guarantee of happiness, prosperity, health, and success in all his undertakings. Wealthy men and institutions -- and even churches -- oftentimes mistakenly assume that their prosperity and wealth are proof of God's approval and blessing. Sometimes they are. But judged by those standards alone, Jesus was one of the colossal failures of all time. After he began his ministry he never had a permanent home; he scarcely knew a moment when he was not in danger of his life; he had no furniture, no car, no bank account, no stocks and bonds, or life insurance. He had few real friends; one of his chosen twelve betrayed him, and his family rejected him as slightly unbalanced or queer. At his death his tangible assets consisted of one seamless robe and one pair of rather well-worn sandals. These are hardly the marks of the successful man, as the world measures success.

No man ever goes through this world without some conflict. As long as good and evil exist side by side, trouble and conflict will continue. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," said one of Job's friends and advisers.

Why does man seem to be born to trouble? There is no complete answer to that question, but a partial explanation of why trouble comes to all of us is that it is part of the price we pay for our agency -- our right to choose. If there

is to be any choice at all, we must be free to choose evil as well as good. There can be no choice without alternatives, and the alternative to good is evil. Whenever someone chooses evil, he inevitably hurts or harms someone else. At some time or other we have all chosen evil and thereby inflicted some degree of pain and injury on others. The pain and trouble we have received because of the sins of others is part of the price we pay for our freedom to choose. If we are to be free to harm others, they must be free to harm us.

Many people seek to evade life and its troubles by denying that evil exists, by running away from life, by isolating themselves from others, by seeking so many distractions that they do not notice the evil, or by a cold stoicism. But life cannot be evaded. It must be lived, trouble and all. We cannot evade trouble by pretending that it isn't there, but Jesus says we can meet it, and overcome it.

Jesus never promised riches, prosperity, luxury, ease, and freedom from all trouble to those who would follow him. He frankly recognized that evil would come to those who tried to follow him, that persecution often accompanies sainthood. Jesus said that those who would follow him must first deny themselves and take up the cross-- the symbol of suffering, pain, and death. He said again, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." He has promised to give us strength to overcome; and by his own life,

death, and resurrection, he has shown us how to meet life and how to gain the victory over the worst which the world can inflict upon us.

The will of God for all his children is of course peace, plenty, health, happiness, and good. But as long as there are evil people in the world, our peace will always be in peril. God permits evil to remain in the world for the present. He could not destroy it without curtailing our freedom of choice. He does not choose to insure us or insulate us against all trouble. Rather, he gives us the means and the strength to overcome the evil which comes to us as the result of wrong choices both in others, and in ourselves.

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Commentators point out that the Greek verb for "overcometh" is in the aorist tense, which places it not in the future, but in the indefinite past extended into the present. Christ has already won the victory, but IS WINNING it also in the present, moment by moment and day by day. We may have his power, through our faith. How then can we lose? "I can do all things through Christ, which strengtheneth me." It is our faith in him that brings the new birth, and the new birth brings victory.

"Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world." Not "whosoever," but "whatsoever!" It is not man, the person, who overcomes in his own strength, but the life of Christ which is born in him and lives in him. When a man has been regenerated, when God's nature lives in him, sin becomes repugnant and unnatural to him. Keeping God's commandments becomes natural; and therefore "his commandments are not grievous," but are found to be the only way to achieve a full and complete freedom. None of the temptations, trials, or evils with which the world can assail us can overcome us, or destroy our peace, or separate us from the love of God. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or family, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor princi-

palities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord." This assurance of Paul, expressed at the close of the eighth chapter of Romans, does not guarantee that the believer will never experience any of these calamities, but that even if he does experience them they cannot separate him from the love of God. The assurance is not that the Christian shall never have trouble, but that there is no trouble which can happen to him which he cannot victoriously overcome through faith.

The world attacks us in many ways. It attacks us within, by assailing our emotions, by telling us that life is useless and hopeless. It attacks us with feelings of grief, loneliness, frustration, and discouragement. It attacks us from without, with temptations, with ridicule, injustice, hostility, and persecution. Jesus does not guarantee that these attacks will never come; but he does guarantee that if any man will remain in Christ he need never again be defeated by them. Christ can give joy for unhappiness and misery, fellowship for loneliness, holiness for sin, honesty for pride and self-deceit, purity for lust, truth for error, confidence and trust for fear and doubt, love for hatred, and most wonderful of all, life for death. For every assault the world can make, God gives us a matching strength. The victory that overcomes the world meets the world on every point and wins, because "Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world."

How do we know that God can do this? Because he has already done it in Christ. Jesus didn't evade temptation or suffering. He didn't even try to evade death--the most final and disastrous thing the world can inflict upon a man. He met temptation and suffering, and overcame them. He met death, and conquered it for all time. "God hath given to us eternal life," John says; "and this life is in his Son." Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? For this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith in him who has told us, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."