

2024/05/05

SERMON: Faith-Prayer is the Victory

This morning I have prepared a message that focuses on John the Apostle's letter to the First Century Christians. I would say this is a sermon in *practical theology*, although everything we know about God brings us closer to God and Jesus. What could be more practical or pragmatic than that? But, just as the Apostle John preached it, as any Believer can, you can start applying it right away, especially in prayer.

Reading (**1 John 5.1-4**) *Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. 2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.*

Hymn (#486) in the hymnal we often use here at OIC has “*Faith is the Victory that overcomes the world*” based on (**1 John 5.4**). I prefer the word “conquers” over “overcomes” as in the Original Greek New Testament. The meanings are similar; however, overcoming seems to imply that we Born-Again Christians just got over the world by a small amount...by a Yen, so to speak....or won a baseball {yakyu} game pitching for the “Hanshin Tigers” by one run! But the Greek as Breathed by Holy Spirit says (**1John 5.4/Greek**) *because everyone who has been born of God conquers (nikao/Greek) the world. And this is the victorious power that conquers (nikao/Greek) the world—our faith.*

This attitude of Victory clearly lines up with the meaning in (**Romans 8.37/NASB & the Original Greek agree**) *But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.*

Therefore, our *faith* causes us to *conquer the world*, in an overwhelming way!

Now, we need to understand “faith” correctly. I have heard many children of the Devil say good bye to each other saying “Keep the faith!” Whenever I get the opportunity, I ask them: “Faith in What or Who?” Somehow, the world has a strange idea that ignores that there must be an “object” of one's faith. The only object of faith that creates *the victorious power that conquers is Jesus.*

In my last message on the **Book of Romans 12.1-12** , I brought out our humble position with what is often *our small faith, smaller than a mustard seed*. But, at the same time, I emphasized that God's gracious gift of salvation includes His causing our small faith to grow as we *continue in our saving faith, big or small*. And from this same message I said: **As time passes in the Christian's walk, each of us will get to know better the details of the “measure” in (Romans 12.3) as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.**

CONCERNING FAITH - Jesus' Mustard seed comparison:

Our Lord Jesus challenged and encouraged His disciples in (**Matthew 17.20**) *And He *said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a **mustard seed**, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.* Thus the Lord **challenged His disciples {us} to desire “Mustard Seed Faith” that can move mountains.**

CONCERNING FAITH THAT GROWS – Jesus' Promise that God grows Faith inside our hearts:

Jesus also told how God causes our faith to grow. We can't make our faith grow only by our own will, but we can be willing to ask God to give us the desire of our hearts for *more faith!* For Jesus said in (**Luke 13.20-21**): **20** *And again He said, “To what shall I compare the kingdom of God? 21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.”*

With leaven in it, the bread “grows.” Thus God causes our faith to grow. God causes it to grow often beyond our understanding for many periods of time as we *keep the faith*. That faith He gave us is the leaven planted in the flour {of our hearts}.

Now you may ask, Pastor Bruce, how do I know that my faith is big enough to *conquer the world*? Are you a Born-Again Christian? If your answer is YES! That is enough. Saving faith is by God's Promise big enough to conquer the world. That guarantees it! For the Word of God says in (**1John 5.4/Greek**) *because everyone who has been born of God conquers (**nikao/Greek**) the world.*

Now I will try to “bring out” or exegete the context of John's writing on *faith that conquers the world.*” A believers saving faith, as I have preached on the subject of **Justification**, is a gift from God to *believe*. **For we are made righteous on the basis of Jesus' death on The Cross to buy OUR eternal forgiveness.** In (**Ephesians 2.8-9**) **8** *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. Christians believe this Truth because it is recorded in the Authoritative Word of God, the Bible. There are also evidences in many documents written by respected historians as well. Believing the truth of Jesus' Sacrifice is the Gift of Saving Faith.*

In **(1 John 5.1)** *Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.* Born Again Christians are “born of God.” Once a sinner is born again, they also find themselves loving God the Father. The New Testament also cements the Holy Trinity as the One God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob of the Older Covenant of Faith.

(Deuteronomy 6.4-5) **4** *“Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.* This Scripture **(Deuteronomy 6.4-5)** in Hebrew is called **“The Shemai”** : *Shemai Israel! Adonai Elohim Adonai echad.*” The Apostle John declares one effect of being born again is a conscious love of God the Father. Loving the Father will also mean a love for all Born-Again Christians, the *child born of Him.*

Jesus had introduced The Trinity in His teaching as well as God's revelations around Him. In the Great Commission by Jesus in **(Matthew 28.19)** He says, **19** *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.* “ Therefore He instructs **“baptizing” in the Name of Three Persons in the Godhead, the Holy Trinity. God is One, as in the “Shemai” but One is “echad”** which means, *complex unity.* This is the same Hebrew word for Adam and Eve's becoming “one” by Marriage in the Garden of Eden. In **(Genesis 2.24)** *For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one (echad-complex unity) flesh.*

God has caused me, by maturing in Christ, to experience His Word in my personal life in His time. My experience is that newly Born again Christians have to learn over time to love *Holy Spirit* as a Person. He created faith within us, and He will raise our bodies from the grave! But our minds have trouble with “Spirit!” God knew that and sent His Son not only to be the physical *Lamb of God* whose sacrifice took away our sins, but also, to allow our minds to get around God revealed in the flesh. But, it is Holy Spirit who continues to remind us of Jesus' sacrifice and daily Presence with all Believers. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the famous English Bible Preacher and devotions writer, said this eloquently in the 19th Century:

He who knoweth the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost as he should know them, never setteth one before another in his love; he sees them at Bethlehem, at Gethsemane, and on Calvary, all equally engaged in the work of salvation.” (Morning & Evening/ February 5th, Morning, C.H. Spurgeon).

TAKEAWAY#1

Born-Again Christians receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of re-birth. He creates love in our hardened hearts that was never there before our re-birth. This *New Creation* includes loving God the Father and all of God's Children. As Christians grow into maturity they normally become more aware on the Holy Spirit in their lives. A genuine and personal relationship with Jesus means fellowship and love of the Godhead, Three in One, or Holy Trinity.

In **(1John 5.2-3)** *2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments.3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments;*” Now we know that His commandments are NOT TO KEEP THE LAW as God gave Moses. As we learned in **(Romans 6.14)** *For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not **under law** but **under grace**.* Jesus gave us a commandment to consciously focus on what Jesus said in **(John 13.34-35)** *A new commandment I give to you, that you **love one another**, even as I have **loved** you, that you also **love one another**. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have **love for one another**.” Jesus actually said this to a Jewish lawyer about 30 years before Paul wrote the Book of Romans, “for you are not **under law** but **under grace**.”*

Jesus' confronting that lawyer is recorded in **(Matthew 22.34-40)** *34 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together. 35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And He said to him, “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ 40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”* So the Apostle John makes what Jesus said to be the focus of his teaching for Christians on how to live and to love.

Now earlier in this Letter to Christians the Apostle John had repeated this teaching to love by both Jesus' commandments in both the Old and New Testament. Looking at **(1 John 2.7-11)** *Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but **an old commandment** which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. 8 On the other hand, I am writing **a new commandment** to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and **the true Light** is already shining. 9 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. 10 The one who loves his brother **abides in the Light** and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But the one who **hates his brother is in the darkness***

and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

Now I will highlight some details to point out the meaning from (1 John 2.7-11):

AN OLD COMMANDEMENT TO LOVE (v.7) – As Jesus told the Pharisees in **(Matthew 22.34-40)** quoting “*YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.*” from the Old Testament from **(Deuteronomy 6.5)**. And **(Leviticus 19.18)** *You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.*”

Then in **(Matthew 22.34-40)** Jesus added the emphasis to the Old testament , as He is the Word of God become flesh. He came to remove us all from the curse of sin, the curse of living under the Law so He adds in **(Matthew 22.40)** *40 On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.*” **Therefore, Jesus , who was to nail the Law on the Cross with Himself, spoke here of the Spirit of the Law, which would still be true after He set us free from the Letter of the Law by His death on the Cross.**

A NEW COMMANDEMENT TO LOVE (v.8)– On the last day before His Crucifixion at the “Last Supper” Jesus revealed this “New Commandment” in **(John 13.34-35)** *34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” John was there and wrote in accord or agreement to teach the Word of God...to teach Jesus' NEW COMMANDEMENT TO LOVE.

ABIDES IN THE LIGHT (v.9)– **Jesus said in (John 8.12)** “*Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”* So the Apostle John applies this Truth to loving your brother in Christ in **(1John 2.9)** *9 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.*

LOVE A BROTHER (vs.10) *10 The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.* As we love our brothers and sisters in Christ we have a close walk with Jesus. He is the Light! We can spiritually see where we are going...we don't stumble.

HATE A BROTHER (vs.11) *But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.*”

Our lives have many hidden obstacles which we must trust God to protect us from, and that are beyond our understanding. As a missionary I have lived in many unfamiliar homes. I want to forget all the “pain” of tripping over things in the night. The Bible shows us that walking in spiritual darkness will cause much spiritual pain, much worse than a stubbed or banged toe!

Hating a brother prevents close fellowship to walk close to Jesus, who is the Light. Christians who walk in darkness of hate and bitterness forget how God forgave them when they hated God!

In last week's Message from **(Romans 12.1-12)** I said “But, the context of the members of the Body of Christ in the Local Church means we all must risk hurting feelings so that we all may follow the Apostle Paul's instructions in **(Ephesians 4.15)** *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,*”

And in **(1 John 5.1)** *and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.*

Some very important and difficult words on *speaking the truth in love*: When a fellow Christian has hurt you or someone else it is always important to first pray to Jesus about it. Often, by His Spirit, He will help them change their behavior without you having to say anything. The instruction in **(Romans 12.9)** says: *Let love be without hypocrisy.* Sometimes, particularly if a sinful and hurtful behavior continues, and it seems willful and more than an imperfection or bad habit, then confrontation is necessary. It is not loving a brother to not care about their relationship with the Lord and other Christians.

Paramount or of first importance in our attitude must be *forgiveness*. Reading **(Luke 17:3-4)** *Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. 4 And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, ‘I repent,’ forgive him.”*

But more difficult and more tense is the situation when a Christian is still unaware of his or her sin as in **(Matthew 18.15-20/NABRE)** **15** *“If your brother sins [against you], go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother. 16 If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that ‘every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector. 18 Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 19 Again, [amen,] I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”*

I agree with the exegesis and bringing out of the meaning of the Bible by these notes by the NABRE editors here below. I am adding these to my message for I want you beloved saints to know I intend to exercise the authority that the Chief Shepherd has given me. I prayerfully aim to keep my authority within the Bible. I want all to know that if I seem “unkind” that it is I, not you, who will stand before the Chief Shepherd and be held accountable for “smiling or ignoring” sins in His Church.

NABRE (New American Bible Revised) Editors' NOTES on (Matthew 18.15-20) and Church Discipline say: “The discourse {by Jesus in the Bible} now turns to how they are to deal with one who sins and yet remains within the community. First there is to be private correction (Mt 18:15); if this is unsuccessful, further correction is needed before two or three witnesses (Mt 18:16); if this fails, the matter is to be brought before the assembled community (the church), and if the sinner refuses to attend to the correction of the church, he is to be expelled (Mt 18:17). The church’s judgment will be ratified in heaven, i.e., by God (Mt 18:18).” {End NASBRE QUOTE}

Now, I want to add to emphasize the importance of prayer, the proximity or context of (Matthew 18.19-20) in the next verses after the verses covered in the NABRE Editors' NOTES. *Again, [amen,] I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”*

The NABRE analysis of this strict instruction fits with my statement in my sermon last week: **“We are not playing Church like a computer game.”** I plan to lead a monthly prayer gathering here most likely on Saturday afternoons. For I believe that **A praying church will not be a playing church!** We at OIC need to show Jesus we intend to be together for corporate prayer and sharing prayer needs to deal with important spiritual challenges here at OIC, in the church and in personal lives.

If any of you feel a fellow Christian at OIC is acting this sinful way, come and see me. It is “my job” to pray and deal with these issues. As we have a Church Council, they are also trustworthy elected leaders to exercise this Authority from Heaven and I exercise my authority from Jesus as well; but in frequent communication with these leaders whom I respect and love.

Now, back to the exegesis, but remember that the above is practical or applied exegesis to please the Chief Shepherd of the Church, Jesus.

In (1 John 5.3b) *and His commandments are not burdensome.* As we mature in Christ, not shrinking back when we realize that the Christian life isn't difficult, it is impossible. Then Jesus' commands actually become “not burdensome.” Let me explain. When Jesus said:

(John 15.5) *I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”* The impossible Christian Life requires living everything we do with Jesus. I wonder why any Christian would want to do anything without Him, Eh? But, the Apostle Paul who had sinful flesh like me and you, learned an

important truth about his challenging life as a Missionary/ Pastor/ Evangelist in **(1 Corinthians 15.10)**. *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.*” Maturity in Christ leads to allowing more and more power of the Holy Spirit by God's undeserved favor or grace to cause Jesus to bear much fruit, in Paul and in us too, as Jesus said in **(John 15.5)**.

TAKEAWAY#2

The one {Christian} who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. **(1John 2.10)** Jesus' command to love one another seems simple and often feels easy. But human beings are definitely not either simple or easy. Being a Born Again Christian begins the process of perfection, becoming a Son of God. It is my responsibility, as an Under-shepherd for the Chief Shepherd, to protect His Sheep, from those sinning in the church community. Most of these saints are sincere Christians, but who are focused only on themselves due to the pressure of the *world to form them into its mold*. The Bible makes this clear that taking no action to fix this is unacceptable to Jesus. This, like Christianity in general, is “impossible” to deal with without Jesus' Spirit enabling and empowering us.

Now for our main title verse: **(1 John 5.4b)** *And this is the Victory that overcomes the world, even your faith.*” or, more true to the original meaning, *And this is the victorious power that conquers(nikao/Greek) the world— our faith.* Newly Born Again Believers know something wonderful was done by God inside them; repentance, faith, a new heart. But, learning to sense the intangible but powerful faith is the school we are in with Professor or Jesus Sensei, by Holy Spirit. For a new believer Bible verses like **(Hebrews 11.1)** may feel too mysterious: *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.* But as we keep listening to our Great Professor Teacher, Jesus Sensei, by the Holy Spirit, the **conviction of things not seen** becomes more like the faith of Peter as he walked on water to be with Jesus. This is recorded in **(Matthew 14.28-30)**:

28 Peter said to Him, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” **29** And He said, “Come!” And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. **30** But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

And, often like Peter, when we get our gaze or focus off Jesus, we sink as fear and doubt seems to be taking away our *faith conquering the world*. But to us, like with Peter, **31** Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” But, Jesus, after scolding His beloved student, saved him from sinking and performed the miracle sought by all the boat crew in **(Matthew 14.32)** **32** When they {Jesus and Peter} got into

the boat, the wind stopped.” As I preached before, “doubt” is a spiritual cancer, but, Jesus would rather that we test our faith than that we accept a life where our faith is not conquering the world. A quote by C.S. Lewis that I saw in a Christian movie, “God's Not Dead” fits my understanding of Jesus with an almost drowned Peter. **Only a real risk tests the reality of a belief! (C.S.Lewis)**

Pastor Bruce's experiential Christianity.

The key Bible verse in today's message: *Faith is the Victory that conquers the World.* I believe that for our thinking it is Biblical include with the “World” the words *the Flesh, and the Devil.* I remember clearly how some dear Christians in a prayer group were critical when, just after I was hired here at OIC, I said: ”Don't pray for my protection from the Devil. Pray that Holy Spirit overcomes my sinful flesh!” They were upset. I understand why. Only one of these dear Christians who are really sold out to reach the people of Japan for Christ understood. She realized that God had given me a **confidence as a gift to tread over Satan.** She may have remembered that I was a “sorcerer for Satan!” I could not have got saved by being born again if God had not brought me through experiencing tormenting Satanic attacks as I began to realize Satan's being defeated in my life as I was being saved. My intense period being brought to Christ was almost a year of constant spiritual warfare. I had no spiritual “breathing room” until May 17, 1973, the Day that I was wondrously Born-Again.

In January 2023 I again had “hellish” torment during my COVID (Omicron) illness as my wife helped me not lose my mind, and she also pushed me in love to preach in delirium via YouTube to OIC on the Sunday you voted to hire me. Then, as I came to my senses, I realized that God's AMEN for my prayer request against my flesh and not the Devil, had made the Devil Mad! As every Christian I knew in the 1970's *Jesus Movement in America* would say:”The Devil is mad, and I am glad!”

Pastor Bruce, besides your experiential Christianity, what you were saved from, is there any Bible verse to support this theology? YES! Let us look at Jesus just before he led the disciples to pray at Gethsemane knowing His arrest was imminent by the Jerusalem Leaders, Jewish Priests mostly, with armed soldiers. He told His Eleven Apostles in **(John 14.29-31) 29** *Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe. 30 I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; 31 but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here.*

Satan, the ruler of this world had nothing in Jesus. Jesus was in the flesh but without the fleshly sinful nature that we all still have. Our sinful nature is like kindling wood. Satan sends fiery darts and our old nature can ignite into fires of evil thought, doubt of God's love, forgetfulness of Jesus' Victory for us. When this happens we stop conquering the World, the Flesh, and the Devil! We have the faith in us, for God gave it to us! But, our faith seems dead and not there at all! So

knowing how different I am from Jesus with my *old nature kindling wood*, I cannot say as Jesus said regarding the Devil, *he has nothing in me*. **I believed then, and still do, that if my flesh is kept subdued by the Holy Spirit, I can tread over Satan more like my Savior Jesus did as He went all the way to The Cross, and most gloriously, while He was on the Cross...The Son of God standing, with one foot on Satan the Snake's Head...bruising it forever!**

I find that without prayer, by myself and with friends, that this is just playing a game regarding the Devil's power aimed at me and my weakness. One of my favorite verses is King David's experiential “Christianity” (before Christ, but he had the Spirit of Christ upon him). **(Psalm 116.1-2) says:** *I love the LORD because he heard my plea for mercy, 2 and listened to me. As long as I live, I will call to him when I need help.*” We can grow in **confidence** that He answers our pleas for mercy, as Jesus did for King David and a sinking Peter. If we prayerfully desire to obey Jesus' call to us to have faith for more “impossible miracles,” our own personal walking on water; we will find ourselves living **(1 John 5.3) And this is the victorious power that conquers (nikao/Greek) the world— our faith.** **Prayers for Help when our faith seems to fail.** Prayers from the heart are often more effective than lengthy letters to God. Sure, there are lengthy letters to God from our heart too. But notice the Apostle Peter's effective prayer of **Three words!** in **(Matthew 14.30)** *“Lord, save me!”*

The Word of God has shown us in verse by verse, and in experiential Christianity of the Saints before us, that Christians have the power of God in their saving faith to **conquer the world, the flesh, and the Devil.** But, for saving faith to grow, to bear more fruit and be more victorious for Jesus' Kingdom work, we must desire **more and ask for more!** **As we persevere in service and in prayer we will all experience that Prayer leading to Faith that will conquer the World.**
.....Holy Communion

REFERENCES

NABRE – New American Bible Revised Edition, Scripture texts, prefaces, introductions, footnotes and cross references used in this work are taken from the New American Bible, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC

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