

8/27/23 Christ Fellowship

The Faith Test – 1 John 5:1-5

Anybody here today wearing Nike brand shoes of any kind? Anybody? How do you feel when you wear your Nikes? Do you feel different than when you wear another brand? The reason I ask is the name Nike comes from the Greek word nike (NEE-kay) which means victory or to overcome; to win; to beat the other guy. It's a great name for a shoe but does it help you win? Does that Nike brand make you an overcomer? Do you win all the races you enter? Do they make you faster, stronger or more victorious? No? Hmm...

Well, would you like to be victorious? Would you like to be an overcomer? I'm not talking about winning a foot race. I mean, would you like to be victorious over the problems this world gives you? Would you like to overcome depression, anxiety, fear or anger? I'm even talking about being able to overcome drugs or alcohol or smoking or porn. Would you like to say that you have overcome that lifestyle but you haven't been able to in the past?

Well, I have the way. I have the way but it's not my way. John writes about it in his first letter but it's not John's way. It is God's way and His way to overcome those things...is through faith. Do you have faith? Are you sure? I bet there's not a person in the world who would say they have no faith in anything. But do you have faith in the right thing? Because it's not just about having faith. It's about having faith in Jesus. And that faith makes you an overcomer.

Faith is also the first test that we are going to take to make sure that we are all true believers. Don't you hate tests? I have always hated taking tests. In school, I hated tests and tests hated me. We don't usually learn much from that kind of test but the tests show or prove what we do know. And the faith test is the first test we are going to take to prove to ourselves that we are really believers.

We are starting a new sermon series this week about just that. Let's prove to ourselves that we are Christians; that we are saved and going to Heaven to live with God forever. Notice I didn't say this is how we prove to other people that we are saved. Nor did I say we will be able to tell if other people are saved by this test. We can never make that judgement, nor should we try.

But Satan loves to lie. And he will tell you you aren't saved if you are and will tell you you are saved if you aren't. So, let's take a few tests for the next few weeks to prove to ourselves that we are really saved. And these tests will all come out of the New Testament book of 1 John. I often tell people that are brand new Christians when they ask what part of the Bible they should read first, I often say start in the book of John; the Gospel of John. I would not say that

about the letters of John which are First, Second and Third John way in the back close to the book of Revelation.

It's the same guy but the books are written differently. They have similar messages but written differently. In fact, in the Gospel of John, one of the last things he writes is in **chapter 20** where he says he is writing all this so that you may believe and have life in the name of Jesus. Then in the last part of **1 John**, he says he is writing all this so that you may know that you have eternal life. Same thought. Same guy. Different books, written differently.

So, let's turn to the book of 1 John, if you haven't already, and let's look specifically at chapter **5, verses 1-5**. I hope you brought your Bibles with you this morning because I want you to watch for the words "faith" and "believe" which are the same root words and for the word "overcome" which is that Greek word "nike."

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. 2 This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. 3 In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, 4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

How many words or phrases are there to describe being a Christian. We say saved, born again, Christian, Jesus-follower, walking with Jesus, believer...the list goes on and on. And here in this passage, John gives us another: born of God. And here's the test to see if you are born of God. Do you have faith? And like I said earlier, everybody thinks they have faith. Everybody thinks they believe. Everybody thinks they are going to Heaven. But only those with true faith are able to overcome the world and all the problems the world has.

When I was in high school, I was on the track team. I wasn't very fast so I got into the shotput and discus throw. I was better at that than running. But one day at a track meet, they made the announcement that due to somebody getting hurt, there was an opening in the 400 yard race. Four hundred yards is one lap around the track. And they said that there would be medals for the first five people and there were six spots. I waited and nobody else volunteered so I got in there.

Again, I wasn't very fast and I wasn't wearing spikes like everybody else. I had on my Chuck Taylor hightops which work great for throwing a shotput. But I got lined up with the rest of them. And when the gun went off, I went off. I took off running as fast as I could. Around the first turn and I realize I am in first place! Yes! This is awesome! Who knew I was so fast? I keep

running around to the straightaway and I hear footsteps and sure enough, some guy passes me. That's okay. Second place is respectable. I'm still happy. But I'm running as fast as I can and I'm starting to feel it. Starting to get just a little winded. And I hear more footsteps. Somebody else passes me. It's okay. 3rd place is good. Well, now 4th place is still okay and I'm into the last turn. Starting to really feel my lungs now. More footsteps. And around the last turn to the straightaway, I hit the afterburners. I'm at 100% now and I'm hurting. Lungs on fire. Legs are lead. Arms churning. Almost to the finish line. I'm almost there. Almost gonna get a medal. Footsteps and then right at the finish line, I push my chest out with every ounce of energy I have and the guy next to me sticks his chest out...just a little farther than mine.

All that work for last place. No medal. Exhausted. Humiliated. I walk to the infield and crash.

Maybe you know that feeling. Maybe not on the track in a race but maybe the world has given you a challenge. And by "challenge" I mean a problem and that problem is a sin. You struggle with that pet sin of yours. You struggle and struggle and you never can win. You give it all your effort. You pray. You go to church. You feel terribly guilty...because you are. But no matter what you do, you can't overcome that drug; that bottle; that habit; that mindset or that feeling. You really want to but you just can't.

In our passage in **1 John**, it says in **verse 4** that everyone who is born of God – every Christian – overcomes the world and we do that by faith. But what is faith and how do we get it and how do we know we have it? I would say that there are levels of faith but there are not levels of Christianity. You are either saved or you are not saved. Either born of God or not born of God. So, what about those people who truly are believers born of God but still struggle with overcoming certain things? I think all those are good questions.

But I said that there are levels of faith. Let's start there. Everybody has some faith. I mean, you sat down in that chair. That showed some faith in that chair. **James 2:19** says that even demons believe in God. They have that much faith. So, it's not just about having faith. You have to have faith in God but it's deeper than just demon faith that God exists. And I believe this is where so many people fail to truly become believers, because there is no quantitative amount of faith where you can say, *"Almost there...almost there...made it. Now I have faith enough to be a Christian and go to Heaven."*

Nelson's Bible Dictionary says, *"Genuine saving faith is a personal attachment to Christ, best thought of as a combination of two ideas – reliance on Christ and commitment to Him."* (Page 373) It is a personal attachment based on reliance on Him and commitment to Him. Again, you can't really quantify it. You can't put a number on it to be able to say this much is not enough and this much is just enough and this much up here is really good. Faith doesn't work that way.

In the Old Testament book of Daniel, there are three young men who are facing a big obstacle. They have a problem; a challenge to overcome, if you will. The king is about to throw them into the fiery furnace and they are about to be charcoal in just a few seconds. I'd call that a challenge, wouldn't you? Would you say that's a problem? I mean, they can't *nike* overcome that, can they?

Let me read to you just a few verses once again from **Daniel chapter 3** where King Nebuchadnezzar says to Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, *"if you are ready to fall down and worship the image I made, very good. But if you do not worship it, you will be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god will be able to rescue you from my hand?"*

16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to him, "King Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. 17 If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."

Boom! That is faith. That is the right kind of faith in the right amount of faith based on the right person to have faith in. Oh, but I hear you! You say, *"I have faith but I can't overcome my problems of addiction."* Or, you say, *"I can't overcome my problem of unhappiness in my marriage...or my job...or my finances."* And I hear ya. Nobody is trying to kill you. That might even be easier. The boys just had to overcome one time. You have to overcome every single day, day in and day out, with temptation hammering on you all day every day. How do you do that?

Well, you may or may not like my answer. In fact, it might be considered a test within the test. My answer is not complicated. It's simple but it's not as easy as it sounds and depending on how you feel about it might say something about the level of your faith. Hear me out. The way to get more faith...the right faith...in the right person...is prayer and Bible study. Prayer and Bible study.

Now, when I say that prayer and Bible study is the way to more and better faith, did that make you sad just a little bit? Were you hoping for something more exciting? Do you dread prayer and dislike Bible study? If so, that might tell you something about your faith right there because faith grows stronger the more you know God and the best way to know God is through prayer and Bible study.

See, I can read that story about Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and my faith gets stronger just by reading about their faith. Then I can read in the New Testament about Jesus and what

He did for me and I start to see God clearer. I start to see who He is and what He wants and I get a better understanding of Him. Then, because I know God better than I did, my prayers improve. I don't waste time praying for things that I have found out in scripture are not God's will. **And** I can pray that God would increase my faith. That's just an example of how prayer and Bible study grow our faith. And our faith that God gives us is, along with the grace that God gives us is what saves us.

Then when that saving faith starts to grow, it becomes overcoming faith. It becomes overcoming faith because we know that God is in control and He loves us. We know that because we have read that in scripture and because it has been revealed to us through prayer but it also is proven true in our lives. It gets proven when we have just a little bit of faith that God will protect us in some storm...and He actually protects us. Then when the storm is even bigger, we know that God is in control of the storm no matter its size and so we have faith in the bigger storms.

But what happens when God allows those storms to sink our ship? Does that mean God wasn't in control? What happens to your faith in God when...you get cancer? When you get fired? When your spouse leaves? When your kid acts the fool? Where is God then?

Let me read to you again a small part of that story with the three boys. For being youngsters, they had some very mature faith. Listen to this part again. *If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty's hand. 18 But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods.*

Even if He doesn't! Even if God allows me to get cancer...even if God allows me to get fired or divorced or allows the world to crash in on me, still I will trust Him. I trust Him because He has proven Himself trustworthy. He has proven Himself trustworthy all through the Old Testament and into the New Testament and I know that because I read it. But also, He has proven Himself to be trustworthy in my own life. I have had my ship sunk a few times and it is painful and I don't like it and I don't want it. But if God allows it or even causes it, I will accept it from His hand because I know that even if my ship sinks, God is in control and He loves me. And because I have read **Romans 8:28**, I know that God works all things for my good. I know because scripture tells me and I know that because it has been proven out in my life.

As I was preparing for this message, I figured this was the part where I needed a really good illustration of how faith allows us to overcome. But instead of telling you some story, I have asked Billy to come give his testimony. Who better to tell of how the faith that God gives us is a saving faith but also an overcoming faith? Billy has been to prison three times. He has lived life

like he wanted to live it and he has paid the penalty for his lack of faith. But God changed him in prison and he has become God's poster boy for God's grace and mercy and forgiveness and blessings. He is also somebody I am proud to call my friend. Billy...

Maybe today you don't have the kind of faith that we have been talking about. I'm sure you have some kind of faith but do you have faith in yourself, faith in your money, your intelligence, your skill? Or do you have a personal attachment to Christ, completely relying on Him and fully committed to Him?

One kind of faith leads to eternal life in Hell and one kind of faith leads to eternal life in Heaven with God as co-heirs with Jesus to all the good things God wants to give you. Make sure today. We aren't guaranteed another breath. Ask God to forgive you of your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness and scripture says He will. Ask Him to help you overcome your habits and addictions and wrong feelings. Ask Him to save you and make you a new creation. Do it right now as the music plays.