

9/24/23 Christ Fellowship

## The Growth Test – 1 John 5:4

There is a beautiful passage of scripture in **Romans 8** in which Paul tells us that we are “*more than conquerors*.” More than conquerors. We looked at that word “conquer” a few weeks ago. Do you remember the Greek word for it? It means to have the victory or to win; to overcome the enemy. You might be wearing some shoes named after this word. The Greek word is nike but they pronounce it NEE-kay. But the word Paul uses in Romans 8 is hyper-nike. It means to really be a conqueror; to overwhelmingly defeat the enemy; to totally destroy your opponent.

I like that word “hyper-nike.” I wish I had a pair of hyper-nikes. Then I could really run fast, right? Well, we will never know. The problem with Paul telling us we are hyper-nikes or more than conquerors is that, well, how many of you feel like you are hyper-nikes? How many of you feel like you have completely destroyed the enemy? Sin has no allure to you. Temptation is not something you struggle with. Satan is wasting his time trying to tempt you because you are hyper-nikes! Right? All you who feel like hyper-nikes, raise your hand and run around the building. Nobody? Me either.

So, does that make Paul a liar? Is he just trying to sound good or make us feel good? I watched a video of a bull rider who was being interviewed from his hospital bed. He had gotten bucked off a pretty rank bull who then proceeded to stomp on his head and his chest and various other body parts and when he came to in the hospital, the doctor told him, “*You sure are lucky. It could have been a lot worse.*” The cowboy looked at the doctor and said slowly, “***Well, doc, I’ve been lucky before...but it didn’t hurt this bad.***”

Some of you feel kind of the same when it comes to being called a hyper conqueror. You have been a conqueror before but it wasn’t this hard. Being victorious over the devil and his minions is hard to do. And we won’t be completely victorious over Satan until we get to Heaven. And then we will have complete victory over Satan and the world and sin and even death. But until then, we still have a battle to fight. The war has been won but we are still in a battle.

In scripture, overcoming is often equated with enduring. Jesus encouraged those who followed Him to “endure to the end” (Matthew 24:13). A true disciple of Christ is one who endures through trials by the power of the Holy Spirit. An overcomer clings to Christ, no matter how high the cost of discipleship. Hebrews 3:14 says, “*We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end.*”

In the book of Revelation, Jesus promised great rewards to those who overcome. Overcomers

are promised that they will eat from the Tree of Life (2:7), be unharmed by the second death (2:11), eat from hidden manna and be given a new name (2:17), have authority over the nations (2:26), be clothed in white garments (3:5), be made a permanent pillar in the house of God (3:12), and sit with Jesus on His throne (3:21). Jesus warned that holding fast to Him would not be easy, but it would be well worth it. In Mark 13:13 He says, *“You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved”* (ESV). We have the guarantee of Jesus that, if we are His, we will be able to endure to the end and His rewards will make it all worthwhile. (What does the Bible say about being an overcomer? | [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org))

But the question before us in this series of messages is, are we His? Are we “born of God” as John says? Are we really believers in and followers of Jesus, bound for Heaven when we die? We all want to think we are. Nobody wants to admit that they are going to Hell. And since Jesus said all we have to do is believe in Him, well, that’s pretty easy. We must all be saved, born-again Christians walking with the Lord, right?

But Jesus said in **Matthew 7** that we should *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”* What that means is that most people that live, have lived or are going to live on this earth will miss Heaven. Only a few will find it. How do we know that we are one of the few?

Well, that is the question that we are hoping to answer in this series. We are taking five tests to prove to ourselves that we truly are believers. The first test was the faith test. Do you have the faith it takes to be a believer? The second test was the life test. If we are believers, our life will prove it through our good works. The third test was the love test. Are you loving even the unlovely people in your life more and more?

Then today we are going to take the growth test. The growth test is found in **1 John 5:4** and it will show us if we are growing spiritually to the point where we see ourselves overcoming sin and temptation, the devil and the world more and more. None of us are there yet but if we are growing, we should see it more and more.

Turn to **1 John 5** and let’s look at just one verse, **verse 4**. It simply says, *“for everyone born of God overcomes the world.”* That’s enough right there. John is telling us that if we are true believers that we will be nikes. We will be overcomers, victorious over the world. But if we are going to be victorious over the world, we need to make sure we know what the world is. The world that John is talking about isn’t the physical world, rather it is the attitude, or better yet, it

is the spirit of the world, and thus who it is that is in control of the world that must be overcome.

The ruler of this world, the one who is over this present world system in which we live, is none other than Satan, whom the Apostle Paul refers to as the “god of this age.” (2 Corinthians 4:4) Earlier, John talks about this world and the things thereof. He said, *“For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world.”* (1 John 2:16)

As for the “lust of the flesh”, Paul identifies it as sexual immorality and anger in all their various forms, along with idolatry, sorcery, and that which deals with self. Then John talks about the “lust of the eyes,” he’s talking about those things that we see and desire, like possessions, power and the like. And then “the pride of life,” is anything that leads to arrogance, boasting, or selfishness.

Roughly, what John is describing is that the world is nothing less than all those things that allure or trap the human heart. They are those things and concerns we get caught up in. Today, these would entail the world of entertainment and amusement, the world of finance and possessions, or the world of politics or what exerts power over others. And while we can touch and feel them, there is an invisible system that is behind them, one that we cannot see, but it is there. It is what Paul describes as the powers of darkness and the spiritual forces of evil. *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”* (Ephesians 6:12) (Dennis Lee, 10/16/22)

In **Matthew 16**, Jesus said, *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* And because He overcame the world and because of our faith in Him, we, too, have overcome the world. But what does that look like?

When I moved into my house, there were briars and thorns and weeds of all kinds growing up all through the chain link fence all around the house. So, I cut as much as I could with some loppers and I cut it as close to the ground as possible. It took a while, but I got most of it. Now, when I cut it, it was, as my cop friend says, DRT – dead right there. But it wasn’t gone. It was still all there. And at first, you couldn’t tell that I had done anything. But I let it turn brown and then I tried to pull it out of there. And I got most of it but it’s still a struggle because it had been growing in there for so long.

That is similar to how we overcome the world. Jesus overcame the world. Through His death and resurrection, we no longer have to worry about our salvation if we believe in Him. Sin is

dead. Satan is dead. The world and all its foolishness is dead. Even death is dead! The war has been won but we still have to fight the battles because even though it is dead, the world is still a problem. It is still there and it is a problem as we all know. We still get tempted. We still give in to those temptations sometime but that ought to happen less and less.

So, the test is, do you see yourself overcoming the world more and more? Are you sinning less and less? Maybe you are a believer but you haven't seen much growth in this area in a while. How can we get back to a healthy growth pattern?

Well, let me ask you another question. What are you covering yourself with? Let me give you an illustration. Let's go back to that chain link fence of mine with all the thorns and briars in it. If you are going to fight that battle and get all those thorns out of the fence, what would you wear? They are dead. I cut them off at the ground but you still need to get them out of the fence. Are you going to wear shorts and flip flops? I hope not. You won't last long. That stuff is sharp and painful. No, you need long pants, long sleeves, sturdy shoes and even gloves. Shoot, some of that stuff is pretty thick. You might need a helmet and a chainsaw to get it out.

Well, if you are going to overcome the world, you need to be dressed for it. What are you covering yourself with? If you are covering yourself with the things of this world, you don't stand much chance in overcoming it. It's the same theory as a drunk trying to give up drinking. If you are an alcoholic, don't go hang out at the bar. If you are trying to overcome the world, don't hang out with the world.

Everything matters: where you go, what you watch, what you wear, what you eat and drink, the music you listen to. Okay, I don't know about you but I have always enjoyed country music. I know it has changed in the last few years and now I think it's more pop than country most of the time. But for years, I listened to all that good old drinkin' and cheatin' country. You know what I mean. Merle Haggard and George Jones. Yeah, that's good stuff...if you live in the world...if you are okay with being overcome by the world.

But I can't listen to that stuff much at all anymore. Maybe you can. I'm not judging you. I'm just telling you that when I listen to that old country, it doesn't take me long before I can tell that my thinking gets messed up and the world will overcome me just by listening to the wrong music. Now, if you listen to the wrong stuff and watch the wrong stuff and hang around the wrong stuff, don't be surprised when the god of the wrong stuff – Satan – overcomes you. He is prowling around looking to see who he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8) Why would you offer yourself on a platter for him? That's what you do when you are not just in the world but of the world. We have to live here til Jesus comes so you better prepare for the battle. Don't flirt with the world.

Now, I hope that you are seeing a similar pattern in all these messages on how to test ourselves to see if we are true Christians. There are a couple of things all these tests have in common. As I said last week, they are all impossible tests. There is no way you can have the faith or the good works or the love that God expects us to have that will prove our Christianity. You can't do it...on your own. But if we are born of God, as John says, then God will give to His child the ability, the strength, the faith, the motive, the passion – everything it takes to do what He has called you to do.

The other thing these messages are intended to do is just to test you. I'm not really trying to tell you how to love and how to have faith and how to grow. I'm asking if you are seeing these things in your life and seeing them manifest more and more in your life as you grow in your relationship with God. And maybe you don't score a 100 on all the tests and now you are worried. Well, none of us will score 100 on these tests until we are in Heaven but you should be able to see God doing all these things in your life more and more.

Now, if you want to see what true growth is and how it allows you to overcome the world and especially through enduring hardships, I would encourage you to think about young Joseph way back in the Old Testament. You remember the stories. Way back in Genesis, Joseph, in his fancy-schmancy coat, was thrown in the well and sold by his brothers. He was bought by Potiphar and did well while he was a slave there but then...when nobody else was around, lonely ol' Potiphar's wife grabs him by his jacket, bats her little eyelashes at him and says, *"Hey, Joe, nobody else around. How about me and you, big boy?"* Wink, wink.

Now, what would you do? You didn't deserve to be there. You're a long way from home. Nobody would ever know. What would you do? Do you remember what Joseph did? He ran! He got out of there. He overcame the temptation and then through the rest of his life – his very difficult life – Joseph continued to overcome temptation, despair, loss, loneliness, injustice and, maybe the hardest to overcome, he overcame forgiveness and then even overcame prosperity.

The one thing that is said in Joseph's story, over and over again – if you read about him from Genesis chapter 37 all the way to the end of the book – it says over and over, *"and God was with him...God was with Joseph...God was with him"* all through there. When he was in the pit and when he was in the palace, God was with him. And because of Joseph's faith in God, he was an overcomer all his life with God's power. You might even say he was a hyper-nike!

Does that sound like you? Joseph wasn't perfect. And his life was far from perfect. But through God's power, he was able to overcome. That's the test. Just like the other tests, you can't do it on your own. You can't be a hyper-nike in your own power. You know you can't because you've

tried, haven't you? God knows that too and that's why, if you are born of God, a true believer, follower of Jesus, born-again Christian then God gives you the power to overcome what God allows to happen in your life. It may not be pretty or perfect but you can do all things through Christ who gives you strength.

If that sounds like you, then bow your head and close your eyes and just thank God for giving you that power plus the grace and mercy and forgiveness that He does. If that doesn't sound like you; if you are not overcoming more and more in this life, I'd love to talk with you right now. Timmy will be up here as well.

Today is the day of true salvation. All you have to do is believe that Jesus – who is God – died on the cross for your sins and rose again after three days and lives today and wants to have a relationship with you. Ask God to forgive you of all your many sins and allow Him to come into your life and start changing you to look more and more like Him. Do it right now as the music plays.