

## Auburn Baptist Church

September 23, 2018

### But If Not ...

*1 John 5:4; Hebrews 11; Daniel 3*

**1 John 5:4, "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."**

It has always impressed me how many great hymns have been based upon various Scriptures. As I was thinking about our text this morning I read **1 John 5:4** where it says, "**this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith**" and I recognized an old popular hymn. Does anybody else know which hymn this would be? That's right: "Faith Is the Victory."

*Faith is the victory! Faith is the victory! Oh, glorious victory, that overcomes the world.*

That's a great promise!!! God's telling us that our faith is MIGHTY thing! It gives us power in this world we wouldn't have otherwise.

**Hebrews 11**, the great chapter of faith in Scripture, tells us that as well. The author of Hebrews tells us about the faith of men like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and several others. Then the writer goes on to say, "**what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.**" **Hebrews 11:32-34**

Do you believe that? That's the kind of power I want in my life. I want a powerful faith that can OVERCOME this world and give me victory. But there's a fly in the ointment. The author of Hebrews doesn't stop there with the words we just read.

He goes on to write: "**Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.**" **Hebrews 11:36-38.**

One preacher reflected on this part of Hebrews 11 and wrote: "I guarantee you that no one ever taught me this side of faith in Sunday school. Imagine what would happen if they did. 'Okay, children, today we're going to learn how trusting God might get you torn in two, thrown into jail, hated by your friends, and will force you to drive an old beater the rest of your life.' It would certainly thin the herd."

And I wouldn't blame the herd for thinning out. Nobody I know is interested in a faith that would lead to pain, struggling, torment and pain.

That's why certain kinds of preachers only dwell on something called the "prosperity gospel." They teach their followers that all they need to do is believe and have enough faith... and their faith will fix everything... and everything will be OK.

It's a popular message. It draws the crowds. It's often preached on television because it is a crowd pleaser. People come, put their tithes in the mail, and buy that preacher's books and tapes.

These kinds of preachers sell a god that is channeled through visualization, positive thinking, and – a real popular one – "Name it and Claim it." "Name it and claim it" is all about naming what you want, claiming it before the throne of God – and then being so intense about your faith that you WILL receive what you've named and claimed, that it will be yours.

Preachers like this draw in people by the thousands, because there are people out there who feel helpless in this world and want a God who will step in and will fix what is wrong. A God that would give them healing, and security, and success.

Now, the thing is, I believe in a God who can DO all those things. Don't you? I believe in a God, just like the God that the author of Hebrews describes. A God who can enable me to conquer kingdoms. A God who can stop the mouths of lions and quench the power of fire. Who can make me strong when I am weak. I BELIEVE in that kind of God!

What I DON'T believe is that God will always do these things just because *I* want him to. God loves me and wants the best for me, but He doesn't dance to my tune. I don't believe in a God who bends to my will.

However, that is what false teachers are trying to sell the hurting and suffering. It's a fake faith that teaches people that all they need to do is pull a few levers and punch a few buttons and God will dance to their tune. He will do what they want done. They teach their followers that all they need do is follow their teachings, and they can get God to bend to THEIR will – not the other way around.

And if it doesn't work... why then – it's YOUR FAULT... not God's. If you had only learned to visualize success like they taught. If you had only learned to practice "positive thinking" the way they told you to. If you had only had properly named it in true faith, and then claimed it in true faith. If only... you'd had ENOUGH faith. If you it didn't get what you'd prayed for it was your fault. You just didn't have enough faith.

The whole mindset behind that kind of teaching is that faith is the tool you can use to get what you want. And if the tool doesn't work... it was because it was YOUR fault. You obviously didn't have enough faith.

Because if you had enough faith... then you'd ... be healed ... become successful ... get that job you wanted ... you'd never suffer, never feel pain, ... all would be right with the world. For these false teachers – faith fixes everything. It makes it so we never suffer, we never fail.

Well, if that's true...Did Paul not have enough faith? He was beaten and stoned and run out of almost every town. Did the Apostles not have enough faith? Every disciple except John died a martyr's death. Did Jesus not have enough faith? He ended up on the cross and died a terrible death.

Just before he was betrayed Jesus spent a long time at the Garden of Gethsemane praying about His impending crucifixion and death. Do you remember what He prayed? **"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done"** Luke 22:42

You see, godly faith is different than what the name it and claim crowd preach. Those preachers teach that faith is when you hand God a sheet of paper and it has all your requests written on it... and then you believe and EXPECT God to do what you want.

That's not Biblical Faith. Biblical Faith is when you hand God a blank sheet of paper, and then you tell God – not my will, but YOURS be done. Here's a blank piece of paper. I TRUST you to fill it in with things You want done in my life. Granted, I'll still make my requests known to God. I'll still tell Him what I'd prefer to see done in my life. But I won't feel like I can corner God into a promise He didn't make.

Jesus NEVER taught the "name it and claim it" kind of foolishness. Jesus told His followers: **"... In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."** John 16:33

Jesus never taught us that a life of faith would be filled with sweetness and light. Jesus never taught that a life of faith would always be painless and comforting.

IN THIS WORLD YOU WILL HAVE TROUBLE. If you don't understand that one basic truth... you're going to be extremely disappointed. In fact, misunderstanding that truth can lead to warping your attitude toward God to the point that you end up building a wall of misunderstanding between yourself and Him. A wall that may ultimately intimidate you to the point that you walk away from God because He is not bending to your will and desires.

Rev. Jeff Strite talks about communicating with a guy on Facebook. He was a Christian... but it seemed he was always a little argumentative about things, and one of the things he wanted to argue about was some of the promises of God.

He seemed to focus on the promises about God's faithfulness in the Psalms - and he seemed to be offended that the Psalms painted God as being willing to protect us from our enemies. He didn't accept that because he'd experienced too much pain and suffering in his life. His wife had divorced him, and some of the churches he'd been in had been rough on him. Life had been harsh and uncomfortable, and he was angry.

He was too religious to turn his back on Church, but you could tell he was angry with God. God hadn't answered his prayers when or in the way HE had thought God should have. And so He didn't think God cared whether he believed or not. HIS faith saw no victory, because HIS faith

didn't stop the world from beating up on him.

But his problem was that he wanted God to do things on HIS terms and on HIS timetable. But it doesn't work that way.

If you look at the stories in the Bible you find that God's people sometimes had to wait years to see how God working in their lives. I found one graphic on the internet that said it this way:

- Joseph waited 15 years
- Abraham waited 25 years
- Moses waited 40 years
- Jesus waited 30

If God is making you wait – you're in VERY good company.

My point is this: Our faith IS the victory that overcomes the world. Our God does mighty things in response to our faith. Our God IS faithful. But He doesn't do things on our terms, or on our timetable, or in our way. That's NOT how it works!

But let me tell you how it DOES WORK. One of the best stories about true faith is found in the Old Testament. It's the story of Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego and the fiery furnace.

In **Daniel 3:1**, we're told that, "**King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, ninety feet high and nine feet wide, and set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.**" Everybody was commanded to bow down to this image, but Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego refused to do that. They were hauled before the King who said they would have one more chance to bow down to his idol, or they'd be thrown into the fiery furnace and die.

Their response was classic: "**O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.**" **Daniel 3:16-18**

In other words... our God CAN rescue us. But if not - even if He doesn't rescue us - we still won't bow down. And of course we know the rest of the story. The king was furious and commanded that the fire be made seven times hotter than normal and had these three young men cast into the fire. And God rescued them from the flames.

They were saying their faith was the victory that overcame their world. The King could kill them, but he couldn't kill their faith. Their God was big enough to rescue them. But if He chose not to... they still believed, and they would not disobey Him in this matter. They had no intention of trying to manipulate God to do things THEIR way.

Centuries later, other believers were faced a certain death. They had stood against an enemy in France. But the enemy (Hitler's forces) steadily pushed them back. The Blitzkrieg, the Panzers, the Luftwaffe and the skill of Nazi's forces were just too much for them. And eventually they found themselves defending a strip of beach on the shores of Dunkirk. There was no way they

could escape. It was only a matter of time before Hitler's forces crushed them

They managed to send a message back to England. And it consisted of only 3 words. BUT IF NOT...

In England, everyone knew what these men were saying: "Our God is able to deliver us (pause) BUT IF NOT we still will not surrender. We will die standing against this foe. We will not give up. (Charles Colson BreakPoint October 2001)

Scholars still puzzle over why Hitler did not crush the forces of France and Britain while he had them cornered on the beaches of Dunkirk. It really made no sense. What possible reason did he have for holding back?

Well, we know. We know why Hitler stayed his hand. These men had surrendered themselves into the power of their God and they were willing to do their duty and die IF their God did not rescue them. And God rescued them in one of the most dynamic rescues of WWII.

Over the next 9 days England mobilized every ship, yacht and dinghy they could find, and they rescued 336,000 men from certain death.

Why were these men rescued? Because their faith was the victory that overcame their world. And that is what God calls us to as well. To have a faith that stands firm even in the face of certain loss and death. A faith that overcomes the world. A faith that trusts God to work things out in His timing, according to His will, in whatever manner He deems best.

Sermon Source:

Adapted from a sermon by Rev. Jeff Strite entitled: "Can Faith Fix Anything?"  
[www.sermoncentral.com](http://www.sermoncentral.com). March 2015. Accessed June 2016.