

# Eternal Life

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## Text:

I John 5:5-13

Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

## Introduction

We have reached the end of I John. We have taken from the Sunday after Easter to the Sunday before Advent to go through these five chapters. There are still a few verses left and we will look at them next week, but they are ancillary to the argument of the book; a sort of *post scriptum*. We have taken twenty five sermons to explain single sermon. What is important now that we are finishing is that we don't just file it away and forget about it, but that we continue to read it and meditate on it. I remind you that you should see this book as handbook of

the Christian life. The difference between it and one that you might purchase at a Christian bookstore is that it comes from an Apostle, from the 1<sup>st</sup> century and was directly inspired by the Holy Spirit. As such it has power to transform your life. Therefore, I would encourage you to reread it every week for a month and then every month for a year. I would also encourage you to memorize some of its more important passages. The Word of God has no power to transform us, or to encourage us, or to enlighten us, unless it is present in our hearts and minds. I would also encourage you to remember and think upon the argument of the book; the outline of its structure. I recall it to you one last time now that we have seen its full development.

John is writing because God has acted in human history; because he, along with the other Apostles, was an eyewitness to God's Action. Thus he is bearing witness to what he has seen and heard. His testimony can be summarized as follows:

- God is love, and he has demonstrated his love for humanity by sending his Son to be their savior.
- The Son, who was both fully God and completely human, God incarnate, the light of the world, lived among us and taught us the ways of God, then he gave his life as a sacrifice for our sins. He defeated death by his resurrection procuring for humanity the gift of eternal life.
- God now freely bestows his gift of eternal life upon those who believe in the Son.
- Eternal life is both a present reality and a future hope. As a future hope it takes away our fear of death and gives us confidence as we face our ultimate destiny. As a present reality it transforms us. It demonstrates itself in this transformation.
- Those who share in eternal life are living in fellowship with God, with Christ and with one another. They are walking in the light. This is the first half of the book, and they are walking as God's Children. This is the message of the second half of the book.

- Those who walk in the light, and walk as God’s children, i.e. those who have been “born of God”; those who possess eternal life demonstrate that life in five specific ways.
  - They are renouncing sin
  - They are listening to and obeying the commands of Jesus Christ
  - They are renouncing the world, the domain of sin, chaos, and death
  - They are practicing love
  - They are maintaining active faith in Jesus Christ

## I. John’s Purpose in Writing

We have now been through this list of five things twice. Today we complete the cycle by considering the verses which we read as our text, which encourage us to believe in Jesus Christ. This last paragraph corresponds to the first in several ways. First, both contain purpose statements: In the first paragraph John tells us that he is writing this letter so that we might live in fellowship with God and with his Son Jesus Christ, and with one another, and that our “joy might be full”. In verse 13 of today’s text he says that he is writing to those of us who believe in Jesus Christ so that “we might know that we have eternal life.” These three things are not unrelated and they are all related to John’s two major themes: walking in the light, and walking as God’s Children, and to the five subsidiary themes that are developed under each.

We have fellowship, joy, and assurance of eternal life as we walk in the light of Christ, and live as God’s children. When we walk and live thus our lives are characterized by these five things that are always spoken of in the present tense. They are not things that we do once for all, but abiding behavior patterns. Two are negative, because to live positively we must reject the negative. The light of Christ and the life of God are the most positive things we can know, but to know them we must reject the darkness and death of sin and the world. Three are

positive. They correspond to the three basic Christian graces: faith, hope, and love.

First, we must walk in obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ. This involves faith, hope, and love. Faith is required to accept that his ways are right and good and lead to life, joy, peace, and hope. Faith is first born of hope; hope that there is eternal life, that there is a life that rises above the chaos of a world dominated by sin. Faith born of hope then continues to nurture hope. The more we act in faith by walking in the light and living as God's children, the more we reject the chaos of sin and the world, the greater our confidence and assurance as we journey toward our ultimate destination.

To walk in obedience to Jesus Christ means to love. Over and over again in this letter, John has stressed the great commandment of Jesus Christ: to love one another as he has loved us. He has made it clear that God's objective is to complete his love in us, that the life of faithful obedience to Jesus Christ is first and foremost a life of active, giving love.

But at the beginning and end of it all John places active present tense faith in Jesus Christ. Today's text begins with the question: Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? We escape the chaos and corruption of the world by active faith in Jesus Christ. "He that believes" here would be better translated: "he who is believing". Faith has a past tense, and a finished mode, but here the tense is present and the mode is continuing. It is true that we come to believe in Jesus Christ. There is a moment of decision when we first believe and confess that belief. That is the beginning of the Christian life, but what John is talking about here is victory over the world, about escaping from the chaos and corruption of the world to a life of companionship with God, and that requires an ongoing, living, active believing in Jesus Christ. As we saw earlier it involves believing both the truth about Jesus Christ and active obedience to the truth of Jesus Christ.

## II. Witnesses

The second parallel we notice between the beginning and end of John's argument is the emphasis upon witness or testimony. Faith is not blind it is not without reason. It goes beyond the purely rational, but it is never irrational. In the first paragraph John emphasizes those who were eyewitness to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Those who saw, heard, and touched the "Word of Life". He includes himself among those who were eyewitness to God's great revelatory and redemptive act, the incarnation. He says that all that he is saying is simply announcing what God has done in Christ. The origin of his message, the message that he is proclaiming to us, is God himself.

We stated then that the testimony that leads to faith is both external and internal. It is God speaking to us objectively in the historically verifiable facts of the incarnation, but it is also God speaking to us internally by the Holy Spirit. Today's text speaks to this double witness that God has given to Jesus Christ. The word "witness" appears 10 times in the paragraph as both a verb and a noun.

Let us look first of all at the external witness. At the beginning of the passage there is a statement that strikes us as obscure, but was most certainly very clear to the original readers. He says that the Son is: "he that came by water and blood, *even* Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth."

To understand what John is saying here, let me remind you, first of all, that Jesus Christ is a unique being. There was no one before him who was like him and there will never be anyone else like him. He was anticipated in the Old Testament in various ways. The one that came to predominate was the Messiah, the Christ. When he came, he was the Messiah, but he did not fit the expectations that the Jews had of the Messiah, so many of them rejected him. Those who did accept him; those who became his followers, had the task after the resurrection of explaining him to the world. Who was this person who was like no other? He was fully human, but at the same time he was also God. It took a long time for his followers to come to an agreement on exactly how to put into words who he was and what he had done. The early centuries of Christianity saw different explanations given. Today we refer to the ones that ultimately were not accepted

as true and in accord with the testimony of the Apostles as Christological heresies. Behind this statement that seems strange to us most likely lies one of those heresies. By reading between the lines of this Epistle we already know that not everyone in John's community held to the same view of who Christ was.

Simply put, the water here is a reference to Christ's baptism, and the blood to his death. We know that some came to teach that Jesus of Nazareth was an ordinary man upon whom the Christ Spirit came at his baptism, and left before his death. What John is maintaining, and what he is saying that God has born witness to, is that at his baptism, and even before his baptism, Jesus was God's Son, and he remained God's Son in death. This is the reason, that as he has maintained earlier, his death is a sacrifice for our sins that obtains our forgiveness and purification. It is to this truth that the Holy Spirit now bears witness. It is in this truth about Jesus Christ that we have the hope of eternal life.

### **III. Eternal Life**

The conclusion of the passage, which is also the conclusion of John's argument, sums up all that John is saying in this book. He writes in verse 12: "And this is the record (or testimony), that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." The truth that the Apostles were witnesses to; the thing that the entire life and ministry of Jesus bears witness to; the thing that God the Father has born witness to; the thing that the Holy Spirit is presently bearing witness to, is that God has given us eternal life. This gift of eternal life is communicated to us through his Son Jesus Christ. To have the Son is to have eternal life; to not have the Son of God is to not have life. This is the foundational truth upon which the Christian life is built.