

OBEDIENT OVERCOMERS**(Read 1 John 5:1-5)**

Intro: Today I am exactly one week shy of a very important anniversary. I came home from New Mexico and arrived at home at 4 AM 39 years ago on August 13. I had decided I didn't want to be 2,000 miles away from Kathy Garrett any more – two weeks away from her was long enough. So I packed my little bug with all my belongings and left New Mexico with my dog Gabe riding shotgun. Thirty-six or so hours later I arrived home in Collegeville, PA. I only made one stop that wasn't for fuel (and other things that are necessary when you pump yourself full of coffee) – it was in Joplin, Missouri, at 3 AM on the morning before, because it was raining so hard and I was beginning to see double. I stopped and got a motel room and slept for a few hours. My driving time, at the speed limit of the day which was 55 mph, was 36 hours. I left Friday morning and arrived home on Sunday morning. By 2 PM that day I was with Kathy for the closing services of the Rawlinsville Camp Meeting. Was I exhausted? Maybe. Was I in love? You bet! And I would have gone anywhere to be with that girl. Yes indeed! I would do anything for her then, and I would do anything for her today, 39 years later. That's what you do for the ones you love. It's crazy love.

John tells us in our text for today that that is the kind of love we are to have for God and our fellow human beings – and not just the ones you are overcome by infatuation with. Everyone! It's a matter of obedience. But in this world, and certainly in this society where families can't gather at Thanksgiving meals because some voted one way and some voted the other way, we need to be overcomers. We are not to be like the world, we are to be like Jesus who overcame the world.

John keeps hammering home on the subject of love, and I'm hoping that you're not getting tired of it, because the only place that the world is going to find the genuine article is in the lives of Christ Followers – it's up to us Church.

Let's look at what this love entails . . .

Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ and that he is the Son of God?

- This is where it starts. If you are having trouble loving, maybe it's because you are having trouble believing. You see, it's hard to hold on to anything if you don't believe in it. On the final day of the Battle of Gettysburg, the commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, General Robert E. Lee, ordered General George Pickett to take his 12,500 men and advance against Cemetery Ridge. The men had to march over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of open field toward Union artillery and soldiers who were behind stone walls. It was a shooting gallery and they walked right into it. There were 50% casualties as you might expect. Why did they march into certain death like that? Because they believed in their cause.

On the other hand, Kathy and I watched a movie several weeks ago called *Enemy at the Gates* which is about a Soviet sharpshooter in the Battle of Stalingrad during World War II. Stalingrad was a horrific siege where thousands upon thousands of Russians were killed defending the city at all costs and many thousand more died of illness and starvation. The beginning of the movie shows soldiers being sent across the Volga River into battle. Every other soldier was issued a rifle (if the other guy fell, you picked up his rifle and went forward. They were packed into the boats like sardines and as the enemy artillery and air attacks began, the terrified men began jumping overboard as their commanders screamed for them to stop and shot them for disobeying. The clear implication of their actions, and indeed, of the entire movie, was that the Russian soldiers didn't really believe in their cause. Unlike the Rebel soldiers at Gettysburg, they ran.

- The kind of love that comes from a Christ Follower is the love that comes from believing in the cause which requires believing in the one who, as the son of God, came into humanity, born of a virgin, walked among us, died for the sin of humanity and rose again on the third day. If you do not, it's impossible to love with the love of the Lord. What do you believe?
- John goes on . . .

The love of God and love of our fellow human beings are both sides of the same coin

- It's straight from the life and teaching of Jesus. In fact we call it the Great Commandment. A religious leader came to Jesus and asked him, "*Of all the commandments, which is the most important?*" "*The most important one,*" answered Jesus, "*is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.*" Mark 12:28-31.

- Obedience is a family matter – if we love God, we necessarily love his kids too – if we love the father, we love his kids. Someone wrote, *"Man is not only born to love, he is also born to be loved."* Paul told the Romans, as long as it depends on you, be at peace with everyone. (Romans 12:18) and John would use similar thinking – as long as it depends on you, LOVE EVERYONE! It's what obedience is. It's what will overcome the hate that seems to grow with each passing day.
- Not everyone is likable, you can count on that. They will try your patience! But John is telling us here in no uncertain terms, everyone is lovable. God loves them, so you love them too. Obedience is the natural result of our love for God, so if you say you love God, then walk your talk and love his kids. Moody said *"Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather."* The Bible is our walking orders and the orders here are to love the children of God.
- And the truth is, in John's words . . .

Love is not burdensome

- Let me explain: John tells us in verse 3 that love for God is to obey his commands. In the same way I drove through ice storms to get to Kathy, and harvested tobacco to prove to her brothers that I was worthy of her, all because I was crazy about her; my love for God demands complete obedience. And just as it was EASY for me to do that for Kathy, John says that God's commands are not burdensome. That means, in addition to walking in holiness and standing for truth, we need to love his children. Does this mean it's EASY to be a Christ Follower? Nope – it means he will help. Does this mean it's easy to love others all the time? Nope – we've already established that. But we can count on the fact that what God asks us to do, he will help us do it. He makes us into overcomers.
- Jesus said, *"My yoke is easy and my burden is light"* Let me clarify that with the entire passage. Listen, *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* Matthew 11:28-30 Notice the rest is for souls and we need to learn from him. Part of believing in him is living like him. Being Jesus to a hateful world.
- The kind of love that Christ Followers have is not a passing emotion – it's a lasting devotion. That's the very definition of agape. Love is work. Love is an action word. Love is an investment.
- The Hollies, one of my favorite Rock groups back in the Stone Age sang a song called *"He aint heavy, he's my brother."* which is based on an old British parable about a little boy or girl (depending on which version you find) who is carrying a lame younger brother to school. Here's one version that I found in several places including William Barclay's commentary. *"There was once a lad going to school long before the days when it was possible to get in your car and drive to school and he was seen often carrying a little boy on his shoulder. And as one observer noticed, the little boy that was being carried on his shoulder was lame. He walked up to the young lad who was carrying the other one and he said, "Do you carry him to school every day?" And he said, "Yes sir, I carry him every day." "Well that's a very heavy burden for you to carry," said the stranger. And the little boy says, "He's no burden, he's my brother."*
- That's what obedient love is. That's what overcoming the hate in a hateful world is. It's not seeing it as a burden, but as a privilege to live out our belief in the one who said *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.* John 13:34.

Conclusion: John ends by saying that the one who overcomes the world is the one who has a right view of who Jesus is. He's not just a nice guy with blue eyes and beautiful hair. He's not just a good man who said profound things. He's not just a prophet. He's not just a baby in a manger. He's not just a dead man on a cross. He's a Risen Savior who is the son of God. When you nail that down, you are an obedient overcomer and part of the family of God. Which reminds me of a song, but I'll change the words ever so slightly. "I'm so glad you're a part of the family of God". Amen.