

Bring It On

I John 5:1-6

Intro

The section that proceeds where we pick up in I John has gone about the process of describing God. The description is a rather simple one: God is love. Those who abide in love, abide in God and God abides in them. What that then means is that because God is in you, there should be a love that extends from you toward the entirety of humanity.

Following in that stead is the logic that if you say that love God and do not love your brothers and sisters, whether those brothers or sisters are through blood relation or through societal bond, then you are a liar and do not actually love God. This is an example, albeit through a negative illustration, that allows us to see how when we “abide in love” and therefore God, our love is able to reach out into the world.

This brings us up to chapter 5 where another example of what it means to love God is provided. However, this time the example is placed in the affirmative. It is this: a way to show your love for God is by following God’s commandments. We’re told that these commandments are not hard to follow.

Now, all of us know that following the commandments of loving God and your neighbor as yourself are easier said than done.

However, when you include into this equation the forgiveness of God when we fall short and return with repentant hearts, and then the support of God to get back on the horse and try again, we are able to realize that these ordinances are not as hard to follow as we once thought.

Basically, when we abide in God, who is love, all things are possible.

All of this is familiar as we touch upon some facet of it on a regular basis.

However, what follows it, which we are told is the result of having love and faith in the One who establishes these commandments for us to follow, is not our normal fare. The statement is this: Every child of God can defeat the world. This is one of those lines of thought which stands out, yes, because its pushing into new ground, but also because of just how affirmative the declaration is.

It isn’t that you can hold the world at bay, keeping away all that is not of God.

It isn’t that you can make some serious advancements against the world, going out and changing some, and only some, of the things that we deem to be not of God.

It certainly isn’t that you can retreat and completely ostracize yourself from the world, running away and hiding in some remote corner of your world for fear of what you may encounter.

Instead, what the statement purports is that *every* child of God can *defeat* the world. This is the proclamation that we are asked to deal with, discern the meaning of, and then respond to. How do you? What does the statement, “every child of God can defeat the world” means to you? If you were to

say these very words to someone else, what would the context be so that this statement might be put into action? Needless to say, the context is extremely important. The scripture reads this way.

I John 5:1-6

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³ For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, ⁴ for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. ⁵ Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

“Bring It On”

I am not old. But at this point in my life, I am able to recognize that there are quite a few things that have changed in the time that I have had to life. I remember a day when the 8 track tape was the latest thing (only to be replaced by the cassette tape). I remember when Harvest Gold and Avocado Green were all the rage in kitchen colors. I remember station wagons and my parents letting me sleep on the floor boards as we would drive across the country at night. I remember the phone hanging on the wall in the kitchen with a ridiculously long chord that seemed to stretch for 40 feet.

One of the other things that I remember was that in order to the most current and world headlines, you had to tune into one of the three half hour national news broadcasts. As a kid, I thought that was able to cover the bases rather well.

Little did I know.

With cable TV came a need and a desire for all sorts of content, and very quickly CNN was born. But, as we all know, one outlet providing 24 hour news coverage is never enough. People all around the world, and I do think its specifically in this country where more is always viewed as better, began to rethink what was actually necessary in order to be “on top of” all the news that was being made and the differing opinions that developed from it. I looked it up, there are no fewer than 15 news and opinion networks that are available on air...and that doesn't even touch the ones that are dedicated to streaming online. Each of these stations, including the traditional broadcast outlets, all try to beat one another to the punch, so if there was a story to run with (because you know, in our world today, there's nothing really to report, let alone talk about), it's off like a shot.

Here's the thing that I need to ask: has that been a good thing? Yes, we are able to 'know' what is going on immediately, but the 'hot take' method of news reporting where talking heads spin events in a direction that suits their particular perspective, leaving us to think that something or someone is bad, until the next day when we receive a broader context to the initial report which causes us to be told that what we were just told was a negative is actually a positive.

Wars, politics, finances, health news: it happens to everything and everyone.

Look, I very much believe that while there are advantages to having live and steaming news whenever and wherever we want it, there are also major disadvantages. You become so immersed in the minutia

of what you are seeing and being heard said, that the broader, long term outlook is almost impossible to achieve, especially when the talking head's begin to amp up the volume. By getting stuck in the blow-by-blow, we are unable to maintain any sort of foundation and begin to swing back and forth with our emotions and our beliefs of the moment as the news cycle fluctuates from day to day, hour to hour, minute to minute, second by second (thank you Twitter).

God does not want us to become foundationless. That is part of what this morning's scripture tells us. Love God. If we do this then we will (necessarily) obey the commandments that we hear every week. If we have faith in the God of Love whose decrees we follow, then we will have a foundation that is strong.

It's the second part of the scripture that tells us what we can do when we have that foundation in the love of God: we can defeat the world.

Now *that* is a strong statement.

So what does that statement mean to you? When you hear it, how do you take it? If you were to say it to someone else, in what context would you place it so as to give it definition?

Do you take it as the vindication that you need to go out and purify all that is "evil" in the world?

Many have.

The crusades of the Holy Lands and the Inquisitions of various different areas and times have proven this to be the case.

Do you take it as a literary exaggeration of a writer who has gotten on a bit of a role and then before they know it, they have a phrase that stands out a little bit more than they had hoped?

As someone who has had to write something for public consumption every now and again, there has been a piece or two that upon reading after publication, I look at and wonder why I went where I did.

Do you take this little phrase of, "every child of God can defeat the world" as an affirmation that when it is God's will, there is nothing that can stand in permanent opposition to those who follow the Almighty? I'm sure that many have.

As I read the commentaries, there wasn't a lot of help in terms of clarifying how this statement should be understood. This leaves us to use what precedes and then follows this one phrase as the contextual frame.

What we have before the passage are two chapters describing in various machinations how God is love. It's not just a few verses: its two whole chapters (which we have heard from a few times over the last month or so). What this tells me is that the power to "defeat the world" comes from a place that is looking to create rather than destroy.

Heal and mend, rather than shred and wreak havoc.

What follows the "defeat the world" segment are remarks that talk about Jesus and how belief in him, belief in the Son of the God who is love, is able us to lead us to eternal life. This is what surrounds,

“Every child of God can defeat the world.” With that helping to set the tone, this phrase begins to transform into a declaration that there is nothing that can stand between us and who God wants us to be.

As I kept reading and rereading this proclamation of scripture, the writings of Norman Vincent Peale began to pop up in my mind (I did mow his lawn for a quite a few summers: I think of him every now and again!).

I thought to myself, “this sounds like something he would love to comment on. There’s got to be something.” Sure enough, and without all that much searching I found it. He wrote this, that through this passage and the loving power that it speaks to, “you will have the power to look any defeating circumstance in the face and say, ‘I have the secret to victory.’”

He continues, “We need to realize that the difficulties inherent in this life are not without value, and that every defeating situation has within it a potential victory. Almighty God buries at the heart of every difficulty a nugget of gold. Sometimes, overwhelmed by the difficulty, a person throws up [their] hands, not knowing that at the very heart of this crisis is some great value in life for which [they] seek. So, when a difficulty faces you, don’t be appalled by it but say, “I wonder what God has put into this difficulty for me? By [God’s] grace I am going to find it.” Then ultimately, have victory over the defeating circumstance. (That last line was mine!)

So, what are the difficulties that are leaning on you this morning? What did you bring with you that’s keeping you from thriving? And I mean that so much more than how the world sees your standing: I mean that I regard to your walk with God. What do you carry that needs to be...defeated? Name it! Face it! Invite God in! Have others pray for you and even over you! Defeat it!

Look I know how easy to look at the things that hold you down and think that there is no way out, that the story has already been written and that the tale that it tells is you being perpetually burdened by fill in the blank.

Well, that’s partially correct. The story is written, written by a God whose love is so great that not even the chains of death could contain Him. The faith that we have been blessed with allows us to draw upon a foundation that not only lets us resist, but even defeat those things that we look at shaping us.

With God, those ‘realities’ that lean upon us no longer define us. They may continue to be a part of our life (health diagnosis for example), but they do not have the power to define us. God has granted us the authority, through his son, that by standing upon him as the foundation we can defeat the travails of our lives.

And again, this isn’t just for a select few Christians either. As it states, this is for “every child of God.” With the power and the will of God on our side each of us has the power to overcome all of those defeating circumstances in our lives. Each of us can name a different situation that could be classified as crushing. And all of them can be defeated, by each and every one of us, in ways that bring glory to God. So bring it on! Whatever the world can throw at us, let it come because through our foundation in the God of love, we can defeat it all.

After Sermon Prayer

Holy God, it is through Your Spirit helping us to abide in You and therefore love, that we are granted the power, through faith, to defeat the world in all of the ways that are not of You. When those issues come to our personal doorsteps, help us to respond, as so many have done before us, to step up so as to bring Your love, Your compassion, and at times, even Your righteous indignation to these situations so that through You, we might be able to defeat them in faith and bring life to an environment that was once devoid of such light. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen,