

## The Ultimate Victory

By Linda Rex

**May 5, 2024, 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Easter**—“I wish I had your faith,” a friend said to me. We had been talking about a change God had done in my life. The Lord had given me a totally new perspective about what it meant to follow Christ. And his grace had transformed my life.

The interesting thing about faith is that we cannot drum it up ourselves. We can only receive it as a gift from God. It is the faith of Jesus Christ that we need most, for only Jesus truly knows the trustworthiness, faithfulness, love, and goodness of the Triune God.

This Sunday’s reading in the New Testament, 1 John 5:1–6, speaks of the need to believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God who lived in our human flesh, was crucified, and rose again. Bound up in the sacrificial self-offering of Jesus Christ is a profound expression of God’s love. As we believe, we receive this gift of love he offers us. This gift is God’s love poured out in the Spirit of truth. The Spirit bears witness within us to the reality that God has come to dwell in human hearts, through Jesus in the Spirit.

The love of God is poured out within our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). It is Christ in us by the Spirit who is the law of God written on human hearts. It is Jesus’ own face-to-face relationship with his Father in the Spirit that we participate in. It is his triumph over evil, sin, and death that we share in. And we find within his victory our own victory over all that opposes God. This is the beauty of our new life in Christ.

Too often we focus on the dos and don’ts of our life in Christ. We focus on whether or not we (or others) are measuring up to the standards we believe God requires of us. We find ourselves trying to hide our failures to love. We stuff down inside, as best as we can, all those things we are ashamed of and feel guilty about. And they only seem to gain strength and power.

What we miss is the reality that, in Christ, we are who God has declared us to be—his very own beloved children. We cannot alter our inclusion in his life by our behavior or misbehavior. God’s love is unconditional. However, the reality is that our experience of his love is affected by our behavior or misbehavior. And we may need to be reawakened to the reality in which we exist.

When my toddler threw a temper tantrum, it did not change the reality that they were my beloved child. It did not alter my love for them or my desire to be with them and to have them in my life. It did require that I respond to them in the most loving way possible. They needed to know who they were—my beloved child—and that the behavior they were manifesting was out of sync with that reality. The reality was they could not continue their misbehavior and fully enjoy the fellowship of our family.

Every person who has ever lived was created to participate in God’s life and love. God has loved every person since before the foundation of the world. God knew we each tend to turn and go our own way. This has not altered his love for us. Rather, he has worked since before time began to ensure that nothing, not even our own stubborn disobedient wills, would stand in the way of us being able to participate in his life and love. For it is God’s purpose that every person be included in his life and love for all eternity.

We cannot do any of this on our own. Our own efforts as humans have sent us down the road to ruin, back to the nothingness out of which we were created. God is not willing that anyone perish, and so the Son of God came. Born of a woman, he lived a very human life in obedience to his Father, and died a painful, bloody death. And he rose from the grave to carry our human flesh with him into glory. Now we all are able by faith to participate in Jesus’ own life with his

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Father in the Spirit. Jesus sent the Spirit from the Father to us so he might live his life in and through us. We have been given Christ's own life of faith, obedience, and right relationship with his Father, by the Spirit.

We stand with open hands and open hearts to receive this gift of God's love and grace. We are God's beloved children. He is our very own Father. Jesus, as our brother and friend, includes us in his own fellowship with his Father in the Spirit. And the Spirit says in our hearts, the words of the Father and Jesus, "I am yours, and you are mine."

If you are struggling to believe, simply ask the Lord Jesus to give you his faith to believe. He will be happy to share everything he has with you, including the faith to believe.

*We thank you, heavenly Father, for the gift of your Son and your Spirit. We ask for the grace to believe—free us from our unbelief. Enable us to leave each day, by your Spirit, in the truth of who we are as your beloved children, accepted, forgiven, redeemed, and renewed, through Jesus our Lord. Amen.*

*"Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? This is the One who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. It is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth." 1 John 5:1–6 NASB*

*"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ, the incarnate begotten son of God, loves the Father and esteems the son with equal affection. In this knowing [of mankind's co-genesis revealed in the Christ-incarnation,] we love the children of God with the same love that we have discovered in God; we treasure the conclusion of his prophetic purpose with affection. For the love of God is realized in the way we evaluate his precepts; if love's triumph is the conclusion of every prophetic pointer, how can this be interpreted as an unbearable burden? Whatever is born of God is destined to triumph over the world system. Our faith celebrates a victory that is already accomplished! This is the ultimate victory: the certainty that the human Jesus is the divine son of God; (that he is indeed the incarnate Christ—and the central theme of both the Word that was before time was as well as the key to understanding all of Scripture. He is the Savior of the world. ...) This is he who was to come; he arrived in the flesh via his mother's womb—by water and blood—Jesus Christ. And in his ministry as the Christ, he was not only borne witness to by John the Baptist in the prophetic baptism of water, but he went all the way into his baptism of death, in his shed blood, where he died humanity's death. And it is the Spirit that bears witness according to her own being, which is truth!" 1 John 5:1–6 Mirror Bible*