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THE WORLD SUBDUED BY FAITH.

“And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”—1. John, v. 4.

To a mind unaccustomed to reflect upon the vast, and almost creative energies of its own powers, a simple statement of what a man, under the government of a strong ruling passion, may effect, is incredible. And when we narrate to such a mind what men so governed have done, if it regards us not as dealing in the fictitious and marvelous, it is yet impressed with the idea, that the individuals we instance were possessed of superhuman powers and endowments, which render them unfit examples for the imitation of the race. And yet a ruling passion only combines and concentrates upon one object, the powers of the mind, which, without such an object, are neither excited nor concentrated. And whilst we no more believe that God makes men mentally, than he does physically, alike, we yet do believe that very much of the excess of difference observable in the past and present generations of men, is owing mainly to the exciting and combining influence of a ruling passion, which, bringing all the powers of the mind to bear on one object, and keeping them there, enabled its possessors to inscribe their names in letters of light, and as enduring as the sun, upon the rock for ever. The rays of light as they fall naturally from the sun, excite no peculiar attention; but when collected by a burning glass to a focal point, they will melt the hardest substance. The notes which compose the thunder will, singly, not disturb the slumbers of an infant, but when concentrated, they burst upon the world in one peal, they cause the earth to tremble. And so the different powers of the mind may expend their strength, each on their object, without exciting any attention whatever; but when aroused and centered on one object, they excite the admiration of the world by their wonderful achievements. And this is equally true, whether the objects selected be bad or good.

In illustration of all this, may we not ask, what feats has not avarice accomplished when it subdued to its own base purposes the dif-

ferent powers of the mind? It has submitted to all manner of self-denial—and has suffered all manner of evil for the simple and silly purpose of *possessing* money. To gain its object, it caused its possessor, “first to starve in this world, and then to submit to be damned in that to come.” And what has not ambition accomplished? Let the life and history of Alexander and Buonaparte answer. When the wearing of the tiara was the highest earthly distinction, there was a certain man who resolved at all hazards to be pope. This was his ambition. He became a priest, a friar. He submitted to the most awful mortifications, and for years successively. His fame spread far and wide. He was raised to the office of cardinal, but his penances were not a whit abated. A vacancy occurring in the chair of St. Peter, he was elected pope. And from that hour until the day of his death, he was as open and as gross a profligate as the world ever saw. His ruling passion, in order to obtain its object, restrained and confined to his own bosom his fiery and corrupt propensities; but when obtained, and the restraining motive was withdrawn, they burst forth like a volcano. It was their love for science and learning and discovery, that enabled a Boyle to grasp the impassive air, and a Newton to tell the strength of the unseen chains that link the planets in their orbs; and a Greenfield, without teachers, and almost without time, at the age of twenty-seven years, to master upwards of twenty languages; and a Columbus, amid difficulties almost appalling, to prosecute to completion the discovery of this Western Continent.

But great as have been and now are the achievements of these ruling passions, and others that might be named, the strongest principle known to the human heart is *faith in God*. This is the grand triumphant principle, which, in the language of our text, “overcometh the world.” Military heroes have won for themselves unfading laurels in conquering kingdoms, in building up for themselves thrones and empires. But the conquests even of the greatest of them were but partial, and confined to a small portion of the earth. But the conquests of faith are universal. The conquerors whose name and fame the historic muse has recorded and sung, whilst conquerors abroad, were slaves at home; and whilst lording it over the nations were slaves to their own lusts; but faith commences its conquests at home, and follows them up and follows them out until it has overcome the world. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” So that of all the ruling passions or principles that occupy the human bosom, that collect up the affections, and passions, and powers of the mind, and turn their concentrated force to the obtaining of one object, faith in God is the strongest. This is plainly the sentiment of our text. And our object in the present discourse is,

I. TO EXPLAIN TO YOU WHAT FAITH IS. . And

II. TO SHOW YOU HOW IT OVERCOMES THE WORLD.

FIRST. WE ARE TO EXPLAIN TO YOU WHAT FAITH IS.

This we will do as briefly as possible, as the *overcoming power* of

faith is the emphatic idea of our text, and as our object is to make it the same in this discourse.

As you may all know, the Scriptures speak of various kinds of faith. There is a historical faith, which is simply a conviction that the Bible is true,—there is a temporary faith, which, like Jonah's gourd, appears for a little time and then vanishes away;—there was a miraculous faith granted to the Apostles to work miracles for the confirmation of the Gospel. By this Judas cast out devils, and yet he was a devil himself. Faith in all these senses we may possess, and yet be destitute of that which unites to Christ. So that in addition to these there is a justifying faith, called by the Apostle (Col. ii. 12) "the faith of the operation of God." This consists in believing "on the words of the Son of God." Its object is Christ crucified—Christ lifted up on the cross—and it implies the reliance and dependance of the soul on him for salvation, and the renunciation of our own righteousness as affording the least foundation for hope. Such is faith.

Here, as all will see, are interests of eternal importance involved. The subject of this justifying faith sees that he is to live for ever and under the wrath of Almighty God, and that the only way of escape from that wrath is through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Christ he also sees that he may arise to glory, honor, immortality and eternal life in heaven. In the full expectation of the blessings promised in the Gospel, he fixes his mind and his dependance upon Christ; he follows him in all the ways of obedience, and esteems all things as dross and as dung that he may win Christ, and be found of him eventually prepared for the inheritance of the saints in light. And he would trample upon the glory of universal empire if opposed to his spiritual and eternal interests.

The great truths of religion, through faith, exert the same influence upon the mind as if they were perceived by the senses. It considers them as realities, and is suitably affected by them. Yes, such is the assurance which faith gives of the existence and magnitude of eternal things, that they often make a stronger impression on the minds of believers than is made by things visible and present. Hence, they renounce the pleasures of sin for the happiness promised by religion; they abandon the world as their portion in the expectation of the heavenly inheritance. And the sacrifices which believers have often made and now do make, of ease, honor, wealth, friends, and even of life, are obvious and tangible proofs of the mighty power of faith. These are the trophies which adorn its triumphs. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

Faith is the gift of God; is the effect of the exceeding greatness of his power. The spirit enlightens the mind, subdues the will, which, like a garrison, holds out against God, and, with a sweet violence, conquers and changes it; makes the sinner willing to have Christ on any terms, to be ruled by him as well as saved by him. What gold is among the metals, faith is among the graces, the most precious of them all. Indeed, the other graces have been called the daughters of faith.

In heaven, love will be the chief grace, but here faith is the primary one. Love is the crowning grace in heaven, but faith is the conquering grace on earth; and where there is no conquering there is no crowning. When faith once gains possession of the mind and soul it brings up a great many auxiliaries to its aid. It causes *love* to burn with a flame so intense as that nothing can quench it. Many waters cannot quench love. And faith worketh by love. And it excites *hope*, if not the strongest, yet the most enduring passion of our nature. Hope paints upon the darkest cloud of adversity a bow of promise of future prosperity and happiness. And faith calls up *patience of endurance*. We are commanded to "be followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." Faith believes the glorious rewards given to suffering. This makes the soul patient in suffering. Thus, if we may so express ourselves, faith is the main-spring, or the master wheel which sets all the other graces in motion. It makes things unseen and eternal the grand objects of human pursuit. It connects with Christ and secures his almighty aid in all its conflicts. It summons up to its aid every power of the mind and every affection of the heart, and gives new strength and courage to them all. It reckons that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory which it is seeking. And without the least dismay it opposes itself to the world, and overcomes it.

We proceed.

SECONDLY. TO SHOW YOU HOW IT OVERCOMES THE WORLD.

By "the world," in our text, must be meant, of course, the influence of worldly motives and considerations; the opposition, of whatever kind, which the world presents. Every individual born of God is in conflict with the world; that is, with its enticements, and evil examples, and temptations, and opposition. All these things, and all similar things, are comprehended under the name "world." By a figure of speech it is sometimes put for unrenewed and wicked persons; as when the Saviour says, "If the *world* hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." And by a figure of speech it is also put for sensual lusts and pleasures, for the riches, honors, and dignities of the world. As when John says, "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." But in our text all these things, and all other things which oppose themselves to the eternal interests of man, are included, and faith is said to overcome them all. And now as to the how it gains such a victory.

I. *Faith purifies the heart from those lusts and affections through which the world usually obtains dominion over us.* The first synod of the Christian Church was called in Jerusalem, for the purpose of settling the controversy which arose as to whether the Gentiles should be circumcised before their reception into the fellowship of the saints. Peter takes the ground that they should not, and for the reason that God bestowed upon Jews and Gentiles alike the Holy Ghost; *purifying their hearts by faith.* (Acts xv. 9.) And he rightly argued that,

where God makes no difference, we should not. The point, however, to which we wish to draw your attention, is the purifying influence which he ascribes to faith: "Purifying their hearts by faith."

Destitute of faith, we are under the influence of that evil trinity, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. There is that in our hearts upon which temptations from all these sources act, and through which they control us. Were it not for that thing in our hearts, these temptations would be powerless. Angels are entirely unaffected by the temptations and seductions which destroy men; and for the reasons that, in their holy natures, there is nothing upon which they can act. It is obvious, therefore, that, in the proportion our natures are freed from that thing upon which these act, we will be as unaffected by them as are angels. And one of the effects of faith is to purify the heart from that very thing. Faith is, in the soul, as fire among metals; it refines and purifies. The heart which, like the disturbed ocean, is ever casting up mire and dirt, is a stranger to faith. Faith is a heavenly plant that will not grow in an impure soil. Christ is its object, and it changes the soul into the image of Christ. A person deformed may look on a beautiful object without becoming beautiful; but faith, fixed upon Christ, transforms a man into his similitude. Looking on a bleeding Christ, begets a bleeding heart,—on a holy Christ, begets a holy heart,—on an humble Christ, begets an humble heart. As theameleon is said to partake of the color of that upon which it is looking, so faith, looking on Christ, begets a moral likeness to Christ. And by thus purifying the heart from those lusts and affections which are native to it, the agents through which the world governs us are removed, and it has no longer dominion over us. But this is only driving the world from the heart, its strongest fortress; and whilst this is a wonderful gain upon its power, it has yet to be subdued.

II. *By faith we are led to entertain right views of the world.* It is by putting on false disguises, and by making false pretences, that the world deceives even its own votaries. Deceived by their deceitful hearts worldly men call the evil good and the good evil; they put darkness for light and light for darkness. And whilst thus deceived, they are out in the pursuit of the world as if it were the chief good. But one of the immediate effects of faith is, to take off this false disguise from the world, and to reveal its true character; and to open the eyes to a perception of that character. When this is done, the charm is dissolved. The world is now seen in its true colors, and its controlling influence is gone.

Faith is the Christian's telescope, through which he views things here and hereafter. Through it he plainly sees the infinite importance of things unseen and eternal above those which are seen and temporal, and the latter he counts as dross, that he may gain the former. A candle is welcomed as a great light by the man in a dungeon; it is only an encumbrance to a man walking in the light of the sun. And

such are the motives which earth presents to the man who, by faith, has gained right views of eternity. So infinitely below the heavenly do all earthly motives fall, that they scarcely receive consideration. The treasures of earth are all failing; the pleasures of earth are all unsatisfying. The honors of earth are but as the flowers of grass. And we ourselves are passing away from earth with the rapidity of the shooting star, which begins and ends its career almost within the same moment. And all this whilst the treasures and pleasures of heaven are enduring, and its life of ceaseless fruition as abiding as is the throne of God. Now, all this faith clearly and fully reveals to its possessor. And, hence, faith deprives the motives which the world presents of all power to influence; and if our former position drove the world from its strong fortress—the heart, this renders the weapons with which it afterwards annoys, powerless to hurt, and its seductive arts too weak to influence. This is a still further advance upon the world; but yet it has to be subdued.

III. *Faith overcomes the whole array of worldly motive and temptation.* It fixes its eye upon the recompense of reward, and it carves its way through the whole array of worldly influences which rise up to arrest its progress to the possession of that reward. To place this great idea before you we must descend to particulars.

What more alluring than the honors of the world;—and what lust exerts so powerful a sway as the burning ambition to attain them! What shipwreck has it made of character, peace, fortune; what oceans of blood has it shed! What fruitful plains has it converted to deserts! And yet faith has regarded the objects of this ambition as baubles too worthless for her to stoop to. “By faith Moses when he was come to years refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.” Here, then, is faith trampling upon the lust of empire, and rejecting the most brilliant crown in the known world, because it came up in competition with the crown of glory.

And, in like manner, it has overcome the frowns and flatteries of the world. How often has principle been yielded in preference to bearing the frowns and persecutions of those above us. How few, in the presence of power and authority, ever have a mind of their own, when acting up to their most solemn convictions of right would expose to danger. What sacrifice of principle is there everywhere to frowns and to fears! But look at Joseph in the palace of Potiphar, and amid the court of Pharaoh! Witness the triumph of Daniel’s faith in the court of Babylon, and that of his three companions, when the den of lions and the burning furnace were to be the rewards of its acting. When the command of the king was upon them to bow down to the idol set up, and the burning furnace was threatened as the punishment of their refusal, their faith in God enabled them to reply, “O king, we

are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thy hand." Here, again, is faith trampling on the frowns and the flatteries of the world, and triumphing over them. It fears the anger of God incurred in swerving from the right so much more than the wrath of man in doing right;—it so estimates the divine approbation in abstaining from the wrong above the world's favor in doing the wrong, that it clings to the right and rejects the wrong at all hazards. Through frowns and flatteries it holds on the even tenor of its way.

Faith is even a stronger principle than the love of life itself. This love is proverbially the strongest principle native to the human bosom. What will not a man give in exchange for his life? What sacrifice is unwillingly made to preserve it? And yet faith, realising that laying down life for the sake of Christ and the Gospel is the way to save it, cheerfully meets death when obedience requires it. Indeed, until we hate life itself, that is, until we esteem its continuance far less than we do obedience to Christ, we cannot be his disciples. How cheerfully Daniel went to the den of lions, and the three Hebrew youths to the furnace, rather than deny God. Paul counted not his own life dear that he might win Christ. Apostles, prophets, martyrs, confessors, to plant the cross amid the wilds of superstition, endured all manner of hardships, and freely poured out their blood like water. They had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, they were slain by the sword; and amid the tortures of crucifixion and the stake, faith enabled them to rejoice that they were counted worthy to suffer for the sake of Christ. And here we see faith triumphing over the world, regarding its most fearful and deadly assaults with composure, and no more affected by them than is the ocean rock by the waves that dash and foam around it, and then go to sleep at its base.

Taking faith to represent the new nature which is communicated in regeneration, we see that all in whom it is found are made by it victorious over the world. They overcome their natural love for its honor, riches, pleasures, decorations and friendships, and their natural fear of the frowns, and the contempt, and the rage of men. So strongly does it connect with God, so powerfully does it tend to holiness, so clear and far reaching are its judgments, so heavenly are its affections, that it prepares for submission to losses, for the exercise of self-denial, and for the enduring of afflictions in the cause of God. It teaches to disregard the maxims, fashions, customs and opinions of an ungodly generation. True, the conflicts of faith with a corrupt nature are frequently sharp;—the new man may be at times cast down and overcome, and apparently slain; but the seed remaineth in him, and he rises again invigorated by the Spirit, and renews the conflict, and obtains the victory. So that to every individual who believes in Christ, the victory over the world is secured, unless the shield of faith can be torn away from him, and broken at his feet.

And has faith in any one recorded instance ever failed to overcome the world ultimately? Search the records of the past for such an instance. You will find lapses, and dark hours, and fearful forebodings scattered through the lives of the faithful; but can you find an instance of ultimate defeat? Ask the patriarchs who lived in the infancy of our world—and the prophets who revealed to men the will of God—and the Apostles who went out to the battle with idolatry, not counting their lives dear, so that they might plant the cross amid the wilds of superstition; and all these will say, with one heart and voice, “this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” Ask the martyrs and the confessors of every generation—the saints who held fast to their profession on the rack and in the furnace—the noble champions who appeared in the days of a declining church, and at the price of their blood defended the pure doctrines of the Gospel; and all these of whom the world was not worthy, will say with an emphasis as sincere as it is emphatic, “this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” And a similar testimony comes up from thousands in the more private walks of life, who, having taken Christ as their everlasting portion, and in dependence upon his might, have gone unobtrusively through duty and trial, and then lain down on a dying bed, and who, smiling amid the decayings of the body, have triumphantly exclaimed, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; and now thanks be unto God who hath given us the victory through Jesus Christ, our Lord.”

And faith in God is the same triumphant principle now that it has ever been. It has lost none of its power to overcome by use and exercise. And it is now overcoming the world as gloriously (though less conspicuously) as it did in the case of Moses, or of Daniel, or even of Paul. And were there another pen equally inspired and powerful to insert in the history of the Church, another such chapter as is the eleventh of Hebrews, there could be collected from the history of the Reformation, and from the history of modern missions, an array of holy men, who, when all circumstances are taken into consideration, fall, in the strength and the triumphs of faith, but little below the noble company of worthies placed in such glorious array by the Apostle of the Gentiles. Wherein does a Luther, at Worms, fail in comparison with Moses under the frowns of Pharaoh—or with Joshua, contending with the Amalekites? Wherein do a Morrison and a Carey fall below Abraham in faith, who went out from his own country not knowing whither he went? And wherein do a Brainerd and a Martyn, all circumstances considered, differ from a Paul or a Peter, in the actings of their faith? It is said, that before and after Agamemnon, there were greater heroes than he, but they had no Homer to sing their deeds in undying numbers; and they are unnamed and unknown. And other things being equal, both before and since the Apostles, there were and have been triumphs of faith equal to theirs, but there was no inspired pen to place them on an inspired page. And why should it not be so? Is not faith the same principle now that it has ever been? Are not

its objects the same? And are not we all such as were Moses, and Daniel, and Paul, and the other worthies whose names adorn the records of the Church? And is not an opposing world the same in its oppositions? And why should the triumphs of faith materially differ? They do not differ except in their degrees. Oh, it is withering to the efforts of faith, and enfeebling to all our spiritual powers, even to imagine that faith cannot accomplish now what it ever has; that it cannot triumph over the world now, as it ever has done. And as every victory gained by a general and his army only inspires their courage, and animates their hopes that in the next engagement they will be also successful; so the successive victories obtained by faith over the world in all ages and countries, should only animate our valor and dissipate all fear that the laurels of faith shall ever entwine and decorate the brows of the world.

Let us all then remember that heaven is the reward of victory—that victory supposes a conflict—that conflict supposes an enemy, and that that enemy is the world. And this is an omnipresent enemy, the perfect master of all feints and disguises, and of all deceivableness of unrighteousness. But with the shield of faith we need not fear its attacks. This guards us on the right hand and on the left. If now overcome, it is because of the weakness of faith, and instead of giving over the battle as lost, cry to heaven for an increase of faith, and rise again to the combat. Let every day witness an increase of your faith, and a renewal of the battle. And soon, with the world under your feet, and the song of triumph on your lips, you will be enabled to say, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Thanks be unto God who hath given me the victory through Jesus Christ my Lord.” And when the day of final reward has arrived,

“ Oh, that each in that day
 May be able to say,
 I have fought my way through,
 I have finish'd the work thou didst give me to do;
 Oh, that each from his Lord
 May receive the glad word,
 Well and faithfully done,
 Enter into my joys and sit down on my throne.”