
1 John 5:1-6. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. ³ This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. ⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.

What now?

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead - 1 Peter 1:3. Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed!

They gathered together in that upper room and Jesus spoke of love. ***A new command I give you: Love one another.... As I have loved you so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. (John 13:34-35).*** Jesus spoke to this band of brothers who had become such a tightly knit bunch that they were like family. He called them friends. He called them his children. He spoke to them of going back to the Father. Where he was going, they could not yet come, but they were to live in his love and to follow his commands. Jesus then promised the Holy Spirit would come to be their advocate and counselor to support them and strengthen them on their way. For Jesus would also clearly warn his disciples that the world would hate them, but they were to take heart, for Christ has overcome the world.

It was a lot to take in on one night, especially when it was on that same night when they would also hear that they would desert and abandon Jesus; that one of them would betray Jesus; that Jesus would suffer, die, rise again, and return to the Father. It was a lot to take in that Jesus planned to leave them behind to do the work that he started, and one day they would return to him. Jesus said all of this on the night before he died, but it very much appears that John with the help of the Holy Spirit would remember all these things and return to those words often after the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus. John would take those words and share them with whomever he could. For these words and actions of Jesus were unforgettable and worthy to be shared. He who showed them the full extent of his love would come back and tenderly instruct his disciples so that they would believe that Jesus truly was the Son of God and Savior of the world. Jesus would come back and send them out to share the message of salvation to the whole world.

John was there when Jesus spoke in the upper room and he was there when Jesus he approached this tiny group that was hidden and locked up behind closed doors. He was

there when Jesus spoke words of peace and empowerment to those he had called brothers. ***Peace be with you.*** John was there, he would remember how Jesus breathed on them and sent out his disciples to forgive as the Lord had forgiven them. John remembered so clearly how Jesus came and stood among them and how he reached out to Thomas and said, ***Put your finger here, see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe.*** How could John forget how the conversation continued. *Thomas answered, "My Lord and my God!" And then Jesus replied, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed. (John 20:26-29)*

John was there for so many wonderful things that Jesus would say and do. And so John wrote down and recorded the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ so that others who weren't there would hear and ***believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:31).*** And as the message spread throughout the world and the Holy Spirit worked through this saving truth of Jesus and brought his gift of life to many more so that this small group soon began to grow.

What should John say to them? How could he encourage this new generation of disciples and followers of Jesus? How could he encourage these new believers to live in this world that would threaten them and harass them, tempt them and try to lure them back into the empty ways of this world? For those who are called into the family of believers back then and still today, John helps us to answer the question: *"What now?"* Once dead in our sins but now standing alive in Christ and living in the joy of Christ's glorious resurrection, what are we to do with this gift of new life.

Well, John would encourage all his fellow believers, including you and me, with a message of encouragement and exhortation that could be summarized in this way:

Live as one born of God

Love God and Love One Another

And know that Jesus Has Overcome.

In order to keep this encouragement to live for Christ in front of his readers, John would take his readers back around to this emphasis on Christ's love and into the wonderful words and works of Jesus over and over again. He would focus their attention on what Christ has done for us and what all this all means for each and every one who has been brought into the family of believers through faith in Jesus Christ. ***Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. (1 John 5:1)***

There is a lot to unpack in these words. So let's start with the first word: "Everyone". The message of salvation was not just for a few select people. It wasn't just for the privileged few that got to walk and talk with him and touch his nailed marked hands. It wasn't just for one group of people from one area of the world for one point in time. This message was for everyone and that message brings life to all who believe. Sinners, dead in their transgressions and sins, sinners like you and me, are now born of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus brings new life through the gift of the Holy Spirit working through Word and Sacrament to so many still today and this faith in Jesus brings us into blessed fellowship with the Father and with each other, with all believers really. This is remarkable and wonderful news! These are words of tremendous comfort and

encouragement for us today! Everyone who believes in Christ is born of God! We are all members of the family of God who loves us and gave His own Son for us. We are all sons and daughters of the risen King Lord Jesus!

And yet it doesn't end there and thus John continues, *"Everyone who loves the father loves his child as well."* With these words, John goes on to explain what this new life in Christ is going to look like. He begins with this intimate connection between believers. John makes use of the powerful picture of family to encourage fellow believers to love one another. As the Father and the Son have loved you so you also love one another. How can we not hear the echoes of Jesus' words in the upper room in this encouragement that John gives to love the children of God?! As John encourages us to love our brothers and sisters in the faith, he then reminds us of the simple summary of the law that Jesus once gave: to love God and love our neighbor.

But that simple summary of the law is not so simple to follow. For though we are born of God we are at the same time still sinners. God has brought us into the family of believers to encourage one another in our new life. As we obey his commands we are blessed not only as individuals, but we are blessed as a family unit. We are called to live for each other as we encourage one another through love and mutual encouragement in the faith. And our Father's commands are not burdensome, but they are designed for our good and for the good of our neighbor as we follow his commands and give glory to God.

But oh, how we lose sight of this bond that we have with God and with each other! Instead of living in love for God and each other we often break loose of this connection as we rebel and look to go our own way. Like sinful selfish children we want our own way, we rebel against the commands of God that our sinful nature sees as needless restrictions of our Father, we rebel and go our own way and we end up hurting those in our own family and many times hurting ourselves. In our sinfulness, we forget that we here are brothers and sisters in Christ and we see and treat each other as rivals. We do not trust each other. We try to take advantage of each other. We look down and pick on one another. We fight and quarrel. We let petty things come between us and we hold on to grudges. Even within this family of believers, there are those divisions that we ourselves construct in our unloving ways. Like inconsiderate children, we also lead others within this family of believers astray by the careless ways that we conduct ourselves. As we are tempted and lured away by the sinful ways of this world we don't consider or realize how this will influence our brothers and sisters in the faith. Ask yourself, are my selfish actions, my gossip, my foul language, my unchecked habits, and selfish choices causing others to stray from obedience to God as well?!

For those who would try to find solace in the ways of the world be warned. We live in a world that will very much encourage us to give into selfish indulgence, but that same world will often turn around and shame those same actions as being so careless and thoughtless toward others. No wonder so many people struggle to find peace!

Jesus graciously steps into this world of turmoil and contradiction and shame and guilt and he greets us with words of peace. Our Savior steps into this world filled with sinners and instead of giving us over to our self-inflicted misery and division and isolation he says, "Peace be with you!" And he extends to us his nail marked hands that bring us into

the family of God. Through faith in Jesus, dear sinner, you are a child of God and he cares for you. God the Father cared so much for you that he sends his Son, to forgive and restore, even his most rebellious child. Behold your Savior and Lord, believe in him who overcomes! Live in the life and love that he brings.

John, who experience firsthand the forgiveness and love that Jesus brought to a small group who had a habit of infighting, now points us to the one who brings peace and unity and love for all time and eternity. John gladly points us to the one who calls us to love because he first loved us. You who are by God's grace saved and redeemed from all sin, you who are washed and cleansed in the blood of Christ and in the waters of baptism, look to Jesus the Christ. He is the one God appointed and sent to bring victory and peace. He is the one who overcomes your sin and the power of death and hell. He gave his whole life for you. He lived every second of his life in love for his brothers and sisters in this world. He offered up his perfect life and was raised again to give us peace and victory, for through his blood Jesus purifies us from all our sins. He makes us one with God through his perfect sacrifice, and according to his loving promise he has sent his Spirit to bring us the gift of faith and new life, and to bring us into the family of God. Behold, the one who is baptized in the Jordan is the one who shed his blood on the cross to save you. He came in water and blood to bear the burden of your sin as your brother and give you peace with the Father. He came in compassion and love to teach and preach, to die and rise again, to give you new life.

By God's gift of faith, we have new life in Christ. We are rescued from death and sin's misery and are given victory and life in Christ. ***³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (1 Peter 1:3)*** So what now?! What are we to do with this gift of new life that God has given to us through faith in Christ Jesus? The unforgettable words of Jesus given in the upper room are echoed by the eyewitness John for us to hold on to and remember - and it all boils down to one word: Love. We are to love God and love each other. So let us never grow tired of showing love and caring for the needs of all people, especially for those who are with us in this family of believers. For through God's wonderful gift of faith in Christ Jesus we are sons and daughters of the King, we are brothers and sisters in the faith. God in his love has called us to be members of his family! Let us live in the peace and joy that this message brings!

What a joy it was to come together last week and rejoice as a family of believers in the new life that Jesus brings. What a privilege it was to come to our Father's house and to hear of his love, to marvel together at the Savior's service in the upper room as he washed his disciples' feet. What a solemn blessing it was as we gazed into the darkness as perfect love was extended to us on the cross. What a joy it has been to rejoice together in the new life that our risen Lord brings through his glorious resurrection. Having been gathered together as a family of believers on those holiest of days, let us together consider the question, what now? Well, standing in the light of salvation. Standing in the joy of Christ's glorious resurrection and alive in him, let us live a life of love as we love God and love one another. Amen!