OUR RADIANT HOPE

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

I John 3:2

I.

Here is a man who had once leaned upon the bosom of Jesus. Today, he is looking out toward tomorrow. He is not thinking so much of the immediate tomorrow, though to that he was never blind. Christianity has never become so concerned for the distant future that it forgot the present. Those sharing the mind of Christ have always believed that the best way to prepare for the life to come was to love this life and to live it as bravely and faithfully and gallantly as possible. But, John is looking to that tomorrow that he is sure lies beyond the experience that men call death.

How does he face it? What is his attitude toward what lies beyond the little ditch that we call the grave. It is heartening that there is not an attitude of deliberate blindness. He is not blind to the fact that to him and to all his fellows there is coming the experience of passing from this world. There are those who seek to ignore this fact. That flatly refuse to think of death. A little child stood in my presence with tightly shut eyes and said with conviction, "You can't see me." But I
could. Shutting our eyes does not get rid of the reality. To ignore the coming change is at once foolish and futile.

No more is the apostle's attitude one of stalwart indifference. One world at a time has become a rather popular attitude in our day. I remember, even in my student days, a brilliant young professor at Harvard, said to his class, "Gentlemen, sometimes I think belief in immortality is quite reasonable. Frankly, I am totally indifferent as to what lies beyond the grave. In fact, there are times when I rather hope that there is no after-life at all. When I get through with this one, I shall have had enough."

Now, I dare say that none of his hearers were greatly shocked at the professor's selfishness of this declaration. They rather thought that such a statement showed a lack of conceit. Here at least is a man that does not think that the universe depends upon his continuing after death. He has listened with approval to old Omar's seemingly wise words:

"Fear is that existence,
Closing your account and mind,
The world shall see the

When you and I behind the veil have passed.
Yes, the long, long while the world shall last,
Change of our coming into parterre needs,
But as the seven seas should ahead a bubble cast."

But, to be convinced that the attitude of indifference is horribly selfish, it is only necessary to change the scene of this young professor's declaration. Suppose, instead of being in the class room, he is in the sick room where his little laddie is swinging like a pendulum between life and death. At last he heaves one great sigh and lies still. Then his father looks into his quite face and says, "The after-life is a matter of
indifference to me. I do not care in the least whether this son of mine has passed out in the fellowship of Jesus, into a richer and fuller life, or whether he has become a brother to the clod which the rude, -seas turns with his share and treads upon on. I am not in the least interested to know whether he is lost to me forever, or whether I shall find him again in a land where we never grow old."

No, we cannot be indifferent. Certainly not as mature men and women. Of course, indifference is altogether possible for those who are in life's green spring. These naturally think little of eternity. The life that now is seems to them a bit of eternity in itself. While our sun hangs in a morning sky we are not likely to think so much of what is to happen to us when the sun is gone down. It is simply when the shadows begin to lengthen that we feel compelled to concern ourselves with this age-old question "If a man die, shall he live again?"

Then youth can be helplessly indifferent for another reason. Those in the springtime of life have not passed through the trying and desperate experiences that make the after-life seem so essential to some of us. They have not had their hearts broken. They have not seen their dearest hopes blown about them like autumn leaves. They have not passed through those tragic experiences of loss that have left a-emptiness where there was once a home that have left a gnawing agony where there was once a warm and glamorous joy. For youth to be indifferent, therefore is perfectly natural. But for those who are older grown to take this attitude is neither normal or healthful. In fact, to all of us sooner or later there come times when the most pressing question in all our world is, what is waiting for us in tomorrow.

If John is then neither blind nor indifferent to the future, no man is afraid of it. In fact, he looks to this coming change as an event that
is to bring him one of the most glamorous of all his adventures. He looks ahead with a calm confidence. There is a glow of joy upon his face. There is the light of Easter morning in his eyes. He faces his untried tomorrow with a gallant expectancy that fills his soul with song.

II.

What is the secret of the sunny outlook of this man? Whatever it is, it is one I am sure that we should like to share. To believe that life still has something fine up its sleeve for you is one of the secrets of joyous living. How was it this aged and aging man kept up his jest? How is he so radiantly happy as he faces the future?

The answer to that question is not that John knows all about the future. He confesses that much of it is shrouded in mystery. Here he is in harmony with all the writers of the New Testament. The Bible as a whole is beautifully reticent about what lies beyond death. It never undertakes to satisfy our curiosity to the full. It never undertakes to give us a blue-print of Heaven. John confesses frankly and without shame that there is much regarding the after-life about which he knows just nothing at all.

But, this ignorance instead of lessening his joy as he looks toward tomorrow, rather increases it. His ignorance adds a touch of glamour. Here, for instance, are two boys who are looking eagerly toward the coming of Santa Claus. They are both absolutely sure of his coming. One of them is not only sure that Santa Claus is going to come, but he is sure of the present that he is going to bring. He has sent on a letter ahead so that he knows just what to expect. The other, while equally certain that he is coming, is very uncertain as to what he shall bring. Which one looks with the greater
eagerness to the visit? Not the one who knows, but the one who does not know.

Now, while the apostle confesses his ignorance regarding the afterlife; while he declares with fine frankness "We know not what we shall be." Yet, his ignorance as to detail does not rob him of certain fundamental and bracing convictions. We would do well to hearten ourselves by looking at some of the things at which this ancient saint was sure. Of course, his assurance of them does not make them true, but thank God! our doubt of them does not make them untrue. I believe that they are convictions that we may share this Easter day.

1. While he is not sure of all the details of the after-life, he is sure of the reality of it. Declaring that he does not know what we shall be, he is certain that we shall be. That is, he believes in the survival of personality. He does not think of the Easter hope as a faith that is something that is transient and fleeting, but as permanent and abiding. He is sure with Paul that the things that are seen are temporal. But he is also sure that the things that are not seen are eternal. Certainly we can be just as sure of the unseen as we can of the seen. Though we are constantly prone to forget this: No less poet than Tennyson sings:-

"We have but faith, we cannot know,

For knowledge is of things we see

And, yet we trust it comes from Thee.

A burning darkness, let it grow.

But, is knowledge only of the things we see? Did you ever see the law of gravitation? Yet, you believe in it. Did you ever see a thought? Did you ever see hate? Did you ever see love? Did you ever see yourself? You never have. You have never either seen yourself, nor have you seen any body else. You have seen the house in which you live. You have seen the house
in which I live. But the real self, you have never seen. Now death can
destroy the house, but it can no more destroy the personality than a
stick of dynamite can destroy the fact that twice two make four.

To be convinced of this, it is only necessary to remember that these
bodies of ours are constantly changing. You do not have the same body
that you had seven years ago. You do not have the same brain that you
had seven years ago. But you are the same personality. You will be the
same tomorrow. You will be the same, I take it, on the other side of death.
John with all the writers of the New Testament believed in the survival
of the most precious thing in all the universe, personality. Though
ignorant of the details of existence in that other world, he was sure of
the reality of it. You are still going to be you, and I am still going
to be I in this world and in all worlds. Of that, I think we may be sure.

2. John believed, not only that he was going to be himself in the
life to come, but that he was going to know in that other world those whom
he had known in this. He did not believe that the after-life was going
to bring him a lesser knowledge, but a fuller one. He had walked with
Jesus in the here and now. He had leaned upon his bosom. He had been
intimately associated with fellow disciples whom he had loved tenderly. He
believed that he was going to see his Master again. He believed that he
was going to enter again into the fellowship of those that he had loved long
since, and lost awhile.

That too, may be our faith. I had occasion some years ago to think
seriously of this life beyond because there was good chance that the experience
of it was very near. At first, there was a little sense of homesickness as
I thought of giving up this familiar world with its dear and friendly faces.
That other was such a strange country. But, what heartened me was this:
While I did not know exactly the nature of the country of which my bark seemed about to land, I was sure that there would be somebody there that I knew. The land may be strange, but there would be old loved faces that answered to their same names. Quite sure am I, that were I to step out upon that unseen shore this Easter morning, there would be many there that I know. Some of them white-souled men and women to whom it has been my privilege to minister. Some of them would be the inmates of the home whose living presence made sweet and radiant the days of my childhood. We may share with John the assurance of meeting those we love and lose beyond this changing world.

3. Then John was sure of a growing likeness to Christ. "We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." What a vast transformation the companionship of Jesus wrought in the heart of John in the here and now. John became the apostle of love, but when he first met Jesus, he was anything but that. He was full of thunder and lightning. He was vindictive. He wanted to destroy certain ignorant villagers because in their blindness and prejudice they had refused his crowd and himself a nights lodging. But, he has now died under the stroke of the cross. His one message has become this:—"My little children love one another."

Now if Jesus has wrought this great change in a few short years that they have lived together in this world, how marvelous must be the transformation as he climbs the alpine heights of this world. You see John does not believe in a static heaven. Where we ever got the idea that heaven would be one long preaching service I do not know. It has no guarantee in the New Testament. Heaven is to be a place of high adventure. A place where far more fully than here we know the joy of going on. Here then, are some of John's radiant hopes. "I am sure", he said, "that I shall continue to live. I am sure I shall continue to live in the fellowship of my Lord and those
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who love him. I am sure that in that high companionship I shall venture upon a road of eternal progress." What a radiant faith!

III.

Now, why did John cherish that wild hope? It was not because he had proof positive of their reality. He did not. You can prove certain little things, but the reality of big things can never be proven. You can prove that three time three make nine. But you cannot prove in the same fashion these dreams of this radiant apostle. Yet, he is just as sure of them as he is of his own existence. And his assurance has been shared by an innumerable company that no man can number. Why then was he so sure?

In answering this question, John does not appeal to the past. He might have done so, he had passed through those trying scenes which literally re-made the world. He was by, when his Master was nailed to the cross. He heard him say "Woman, behold thy son." Then to himself, "Beholy thy mother." He heard Jesus breath that prayer "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." He shared the utter desperation and desolation of his fellow disciples when the crucifixion of his Master put a period to all his dearest hopes and dreams.

Then he had passed through that experience that had convinced him that his Lord had risen. It was to him and Simon that Mary came with the story that the tomb had been broken open and the body of Jesus stolen. He had run with eager feet to visit that empty tomb. He had entered in to see the grave clothes lying, not as if they had been stripped away. They were there as if Jesus had simply melted out of them. His body seems to have been made ethereal so that the grave clothes held exactly the form that they had held when his body was in them. It was this that brought John's first conviction
of the resurrection, "He saw and believed."

The faith to which he came at that moment brought him from the depths of despair. What it did for him, it did for his fellow disciples. From a little handful of hopeless, desolate, defeated men, they came an irresistible army that literally remade the world. But John does not base his assurance on anything in the past.

This, of course was the case, not because he cared nothing for evidences, he did. I think it was the case because he realized how inadequate evidences are. Evidences help, but they are never enough. I still have the glasses my mother used to wear. They are evidences of my mother, but they are no substitute for her. He says little of evidences because he felt they were no longer needed. When you looked up into the heavens last night, the dull, opaque planets had blossomed into stars. Those stars have no light in themselves. The fact that they shine is an evidence of the sun. But when the sun rises, they are no longer seen. That does not mean that when the sun rises they no longer exist. They become unnecessary.

Now, John makes no appeal to the evidences because he is in present possession of reality. He bases his hopes for tomorrow on what he is experiencing in the here and now. How reasonable and sane that is. How prone we are to expect that the mere act of dying will work a strange magic to our characters. But the mere act of sleeping does not change you from a bad man to a good man. Nor will the sleep of death do that. As you lie down at night, so you will wake in the morning. John believes that he is going to wake with Christ. Why? Because he is walking with him now. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God." Because we have on Sonship to God through Christ now, we are sure that we shall gaze on in that fellowship beyond death.

What then is our Easter hope? In that something passing is going to
made eternal, it is rather this:—That having eternal life now, we shall have it beyond this world. When Jesus sought to question Martha over the loss of her brother. He said "Thy brother shall rise again." Martha is almost impatient at the answer. "I know that he shall rise again at the resurrection in the last day," But what she implies is that it is so vague. But what is the answer of Jesus? "I am the resurrection and life." I am not vague, I am not a far off. I am in the here and now. Eternal life is something that we do not have to die in order to win. It is something that is possible now, and possessing it now, we may be sure that we shall possess it for evermore.

Surely this is a reason for faith. It is the only faith that acknowledges the supreme worth of personality. It is the only faith that is possible if God is the God revealed in Jesus Christ. A mighty and loving Father. Even a potter would not make a vessel in order to smash. Certainly a father would not create a son in order to let go his hand and drop him into the mud of oblivion, when life's fitful fever is over. No, in him we have eternal life. We are therefore out on an endless quest that will only end at the tombstone of our Maker.

This is a faith that ought to be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. When Columbus sailed west, his men became panic. They were sailing into the unknown, and they were fearful to the point of mutiny. But Columbus held on his course, when other hearts feared. This, he did because he was sure there was land ahead. Out yonder was the solid earth with blooming flowers and singing birds. And so through storm and wind we may sail today unafraid because we have the glad faith in our hearts and the glad song upon our lips. "Land ahead!" "Beloved, now are we the sons of God and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall
appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.
"The World Conqueror."

I John 5:4

"Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." The writer of this letter is addressing himself to the members of a despised sect who are scattered abroad among various heathen cities. Some of them are slaves. Some of them are being persecuted. Some have already suffered the loss of all they had. All of them are living amidst a society that is cruel and selfish and rotten beyond anything that we know today. And yet this audacious man speaks to them of world conquest.

And, mark you, he is not dealing in sarcasm. He is not mocking them. He is not testing his ability to write shrewd and cutting irony. He is speaking in sober earnest. He is absolutely confident of the truth of what he is saying. There is not the shadow of a doubt in his mind but what every single one of these humble and despised Christians may, if he will, become a world conqueror.

Now, John has a great deal to say about overcoming. He is the apostle of love, I know. He is also the apostle of the life of victory. Where did he get his idea of conquest? I think when he wrote this text he had very vividly before him the picture of a tragic night years ago, and once more he is listening to the winsome cadences of the voice of Jesus, "Spake as never man spake," This man is only a few hours away from the thorny crown and the cutting scourge. He is rubbing elbows with the bitter shame and agony of the Cross. He is dying, so far as we can see, in utter failure and defeat.

The appalling disaster has, of course, cast its black shadow over those few loyal ones who love him. And it is to them that this young man, dying at the early age of thirty-three, makes this thrilling declaration: "Be of good cheer. I have overcome the world." And, mark you, John believed that his Master, in spite of his seeming defeat, had really conquered. He had not the slightest doubt but that this man who appeared so utterly to fail, had been crowned an eternal victor. And because Christ conquered the world he is confident that we too may conquer.

But he did not claim for a moment that every man is destined to conquer. The world conqueror is a peculiar type. Who is this victor? The answer is in the text, "Whatsoever is born of God." Christ conquered. Through the power of the spirit we become sharers in the divine nature. Then, since this divine nature conquered in Jesus Christ our Lord, we may expect it to conquer in ourselves. Therefore, with unshaken boldness we hear this man say, "Whatsoever" and that is equal to "whosoever is born of God overcometh the world."

Now, what is it to conquer the world? In the mind of John conquest does not mean the same that it did in the mind of the unbelieving heathen about him. It did not mean the same that it does in the mind of many of ourselves. We think a man conquers the world, for instance, when he steals from the world the things that he wants. We look upon a man as a conqueror when he exploits the coal fields and the oil wells and makes them yield to him their riches. He is a world conqueror who holds the railroads in his grasp. But do these men really conquer? They do not so much own their possessions as their possessions own them. The very railroads that they hold become so many threads of the spider web that entan-
gles them or so many tentacles of the devil-fish that drinks up their energies or their very heart's blood.

History says that Alexander the Great conquered the world. But was that a real conquest? Why, the world that he conquered took a wine cup and held it to his lips and compelled him to drink himself to death. "I have conquered the world", says the military giant and the world laughs mockingly as it says "Yes, I know. Take another drink". And then it watches him totter out to the cemetery.

What is it to conquer the world as Christ conquered it and as he means for you and me to conquer it? First, "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world". In what way? By bringing the world upon its knees to us? By no means. To conquer the world as Christ conquered it, first, to conquer the love of the world. And the text might well be read "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the love of the world".

And, mark me, my brother, this love of the world must be overcome or there is no salvation for us. The Bible is very plain on that point. Listen. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. For if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." And James makes it more emphatic, if possible, when he says, "The love of the world is enmity against God". That is, if man loves the world he is not only not going to love God, but he is going to be positively antagonistic to God. So you see, this love of the world must be overcome. Who is to be the conqueror? Only one type of man and that is the man that is born of God.

Second, "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the anxiety that belongs to the people of the world." All worldly people are anxious. All worldly people worry. But anxiety and worry and care! These are not christian graces. Worry and christianity will not persistently keep house in the same heart. Christ was constantly warning against it. "Take not anxious thought for the morrow", He says. Do not worry about what you shall eat or what you shall drink or about what you shall put on. "After all these things", He says, "the Gentiles seek." And Paul shows that he has been in his Master's school when he says, "In nothing be anxious, but in everything with prayer and supplication and with thanksgiving, let your request be made known unto God".

So you see that a care filled life is antagonistic to the plain teaching of our Lord. Since it is antagonistic he makes it possible for us to be rid of care. And this is the path that leads to freedom "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world".

Third, "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the fear of the world". How natural fear is. What slaves we are to it. We fear the world's opinion. We fear its scorn. We are afraid of its criticism. We are afraid of the laughter of the world.

Now, the wise man says that fear of the world bringeth a snare and we can not but realize the truth of that statement. How many men have been snared to their utter undoing by the fear of the world. What was it that wrecked Peter on the night of his betrayal? His fear of man. Dr. Whinney tells us that when he was seeking salvation he went into the woods alone to pray. He said that he had no more than gotten upon his knees when he heard a rustle among the leaves. He said that instantly he sprang to his feet in terror lest it should be somebody. He was in the
grip of the fear of man. And you and I are no better by nature but even worse. What is our hope? Just this, the blessed truth of the text, "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world".

Now, how is it that these who are born of God overcome? They do not overcome by running off and hiding themselves from the world. Men have never succeeded in conquering the world by simply leaving it. They do not conquer by any process of self-repression. You will not overcome the world by trying to make yourself into a Stoic. These men to whom John wrote, we ourselves, have but one way of overcoming. We are to overcome through faith. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith".

And the reason that faith makes us conquerors is easily seen. There is absolutely no magic in it. Why is it that faith enables a man to overcome the world? What does it do for him? What is it that makes that wonderful achievement possible? Answer — faith changes spiritual realities from mere theories into certainties. Faith makes the unseen real.

How did this present visible world come to get such a grip of us? How is it that it holds me with such a powerful hand? I will tell you the secret. I had a wonderful experience a few years ago. I was born. I was born into a world that was physical and little by little and more and more I became aware of that world. I became conscious of its rewards, of its favors, its crowns and its frowns and wherever I go today the seen, the tangible, the material, flouts itself in my face, demands my confidence and my love.

Now, there are those to whom the seen alone is real, because it is only with the seen that they have had experience. But as genuinely as I was born into this physical world, I was also born again. I was born, not of the flesh but of the spirit. This birth made me conscious of the seen but of the unseen. And had I been faithful to all its privileges, its unseen realities would have been quite as genuine and quite as real to me as the solid earth upon which I stand.

Now, it is easy enough to see why one who has such faith is a world conqueror. Suppose while I am speaking Christ should suddenly become as real to you as the one who is speaking at this moment. What would happen? You would take your eyes off of me. I could no longer hold your attention. All your thought and your gaze would be fixed upon Him. It is on this principle that we are to overcome the world. The reason we are defeated is because the things seen are real and the things unseen are only theories. Once let faith open our eyes and Christ becomes a genuine reality to us. Then, and then only, will we conquer.

Do you remember Bunyan's story of the man with the muck rake? Why did this man continue to rake up dirt and mud and sticks and straws when a mighty angel of God was poised above him offering him a priceless crown? It was not because this man loved mud and cared nothing for crowns. It was rather because he was conscious of the one and wholly unconscious of the other. If his eyes had only been opened to see the unclaimed glory that was his, he would have flung down his rake and have claimed it.

It is only thus that we will overcome the love of the world. We can not uproot this love from our hearts and leave nothing in its place. The lower love must be displaced by the higher. If we cease to love the treas-
ures of this world, faith must open our eyes to our spiritual treasures. If we cease to be lured by the pleasures of this world we must come to know by experience that in His presence there is fullness of joy and at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

You remember how Paul wrote that tear bespattered letter in which he pinned this brief epitaph of a dead soul, "Demas forsook me, having loved this present world". And how, I wonder, did Paul manage to stand true. How did he keep from falling in love with this present world, even as Demas did? It was not because he had a dead or sterile heart. It was because his soul was so full of a larger love that there was absolutely no room for the lower.

Did you ever hear of the man who fell in love with the stars? He was born in the twilight and the first sight upon which he ever looked was a heaven full of stars. For long he was conscious of nothing else, and they were always twinkling and gleaming and luring him more and more. And then one eventful morning the sun came and he forgot the stars altogether and fell in love with the sun. Not that the stars had been destroyed. They were still there. But so wonderful was the splendor of the sun that he couldn't even see them any more. And so life's best love vanishes in the splendor of the rising of the Son of Righteousness with healing in His wings.

This faith that makes Christ real naturally also makes us conquerors over anxiety. Faith kills our care. When Christ says, "Don't worry" he does not talk with the platitudinous nonsense that we sometimes hear coupled with that big sentence. His appeal is to our good sense and to our faith. First, He said "Don't worry" because worry is unreasonable, it never helps. You can not by worry add one cubit to your stature.

Suppose I am not as tall as I want to be. I think I could use a few inches of extra height very effectively. I could impress folks that come to see me a little more that I do, to say the least of it. The average stranger that comes into my office glances me over and then looks about one foot above the top of my head and asks for the pastor. How should I remedy this difficulty? Not by worry. That never made anybody grow. Maybe you are not as handsome as you'd like. I wouldn't mind your looking a little bit better myself. What is the remedy? Really, I don't know. If I did I'd soon be the richest man in the world. I fear there's no help or hope for you. But I can tell you one thing that isn't a remedy and that is worry. Don't worry. It doesn't get you anywhere. It is unreasonable.

But that is not Christ's big remedy for worry. To say a thing is unreasonable will never prevent us human beings from doing it. We do a million unreasonable things. It is perfectly unreasonable for you to ever fall in love with your husband but you went ahead and did it. The big reason why we should not worry is this, God is our Father. He knows just how tall we ought to be. He knows all about us. He is interested in us no matter how small we are. We know that because He is even interested in ravens. He is not above being undertaker to a sparrow. He even stoops to put its dress upon the lily. "And if God so clothed the grass, which today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven, would He not much more clothe you, oh ye of little faith?" Believe me, heart, when faith comes in the front door you will hear the back door slam and worry will be going out.

Finally, this faith will conquer the fear of the world. "God is our refuge and strength". What is a natural result of a faith that genuinely
realizes that truth? Listen - "Therefore will we not fear". And I do not know of any other power that can conquer our fears. The fear of the world. It is an insidious, dogged fear. It walks with the preacher along his daily road. It climbs with him into the pulpit. It bids him say the popular thing rather that the true thing. It urges him to seek to please rather that to convince and to convert. It walks with the young man and the young woman into society, calling on them to compromise with conscience, bidding them run after the multitude doing evil. It appeals to all of us, but faith conquers fear.

It conquers not only the fear of man. It conquers the fear of every foe. You can not read the story of the early Church without being impressed with their noble daring. What optimists they were. With what audacity they faced the multiplied impossibilities that were about them. Difficulties there were that seemed absolutely impossible to be overcome and yet they set about the task with almost a holy swagger, saying, "Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world".

We come upon timid days. We want to walk by sight. We are afraid to walk by faith. We hate our fears, we are ashamed of our timidity. How shall we be rid of them. There is no remedy but that given by the inspired apostle. He said "overcome through faith".

How was it that Stephen managed to go so fearlessly through the terrible ordeal of martyrdom? The mob raged against him. They threw stones at him. They pounded the life out of him but they couldn't pound the radiance from his face nor the courage from his heart. What was the secret? "He looked up steadfastly unto heaven, and said 'Behold I see the heavens open and Jesus standing at the right hand of God". Yes, the faith that makes Christ real triumphs over our fear. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me."

And now this closing word. Do you really believe that what John says in this text is true? I know what you will say. You will say, "If what John says is true then there are very few in the Church who have really claimed their privileges" and that is most certainly true. Oh, I am sure that we have had it borne in on us again and again and that either one of two things is true. Either Christ can not do for us what He claims to do, or we have never met the conditions.

Now, for one, I believe that Jesus Christ can do in a human life today exactly what he did when he walked among men these centuries ago. I believe that He can do today exactly what this text claims He can do. I believe that He can make us to become partakers of the divine nature. I believe, that, having been born again, we can through faith overcome the world. I do not take this text to mean that we may not at times fail and be defeated but certainly, if it means anything at all, it means this much, that the prevailing tone of your life will be one of conquest. That your long experience will be an experience of victory.

Now, if this is true, and it is true, you believe it and I believe it, let me press home to your heart this question, "Are you conquering or are you being conquered? Are you triumphing over the world, the love of it, the anxiety for it, the fear of it, or is the world dominating you?" If you are being conquered face the fact and not only face it, but determine that through faith you are going to cling more closely to Him who is able to make you conquerors and more than conquerors, through Him that loved us and gave
Himself for us. And some day you will come to know, not simply because you have read it in the Book, but because it is your own experience, that "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world".
THE CHURCH -- ITS VICTORY

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" ....1st John:5:4

Here is a text with a thrill. It holds out possibilities for which everyone yearns. This is the victory we all want to win. We all hate defeat, we all dread failure. I never heard a more human prayer than that prayed by old Uncle Caleb Smith. He said, "Lord, help us not to fight if we can help it, but if we do fight, help us to whip, for Christ's sake."

I am confidant that about the most dreary moments of our lives are those moments when we are depressed with a sense of failure. I trained a football team once. We won a few games on the home field then went away for our first game abroad. What a drumming we did get! I hurried home and went to bed. The defeat was so bitter that it almost made me sick.

Not only does this text speak of a privilege that everyone desires, it also speaks of one that may be achieved by everyone. There are a thousand prizes that are beyond the grasp of your hand and beyond the grasp of mine, but here is the finest possible prize and there is no one of us that is too weak or too hampered to lay hold of it and claim it for his very own. God never intended that any one of us should be a failure. He put the victorious life within reach of the last and the lowest and the least.

Now, since we can win, we ought to win. Since it is possible for us to be conquerors, it is our positive duty to conquer.
We owe it to the Christ who has redeemed us; we owe it to those about us who need our help and the inspiration that always comes from a victorious life. It is within our power, by the Grace of God, to conquer the world and since we can conquer it, we ought to conquer it.

I.

What is it to conquer the world?

It does not mean, of course, in this sense, that we are to martial armies against the world and overcome it as did Alexander the Great. Such a conquest is forever beyond our power in the first place, and in the second place, it would be a useless achievement if we could accomplish it. "I have conquered the world", said the young king, and the world held a mug of liquor to his lips and he drank himself to death. He ended, a miserable failure before his life reached its noonday.

Nor do we conquer the world by getting its wealth and its power in our hands. The rich fool with his full barns did not own the world, the world owned him. There are tens of thousands that are the bond-slaves of their own possessions. When a fly lights down on fly-paper, he may fancy, for a while, that he owns the whole business, but in reality he does not own the paper, the paper owns him.

John's idea of conquest was from his Master. When he wrote this sentence, I can imagine he was thinking of a distant night when he had had his last conversation with his Master. It was a terrible hour. Death was very near, and the forbidding
cross was casting its black shadow upon them. Yet Jesus is speaking calmly and without the slightest fear, "In this world ye shall have tribulations but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Now the victory that John won, he makes possible for you and me. To conquer the world is first to conquer the love of the world.

What a terrible foe to right living is the love of the world, that was the evil that wrecked the life of Demas. Paul wrote of him with tear-wet face. "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." Thus you see that the love of Christ and the love of the world cannot come in the same heart. When the love of the world comes in, the love of Christ goes out.

That is the teaching of the Bible as a whole. James tells us that the world is enmity against God. John says, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world, and if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Now, what is this world that we are forbidden to love? It is not a material something. It is that something in the world that keeps it from being Christ-like. What is that? It is selfishness. It is our determination to do as we please, to go our own way regardless of the rights of God or man. But John tells us that by faith we are able to conquer this love of the world.

2. Not only can we conquer the love of the world through faith, but we can conquer the anxiety and worry that the love
of the world brings. How many anxious people do we meet daily? How many there are whose faces are marked and lined with care? We are worried about ourselves; we are worried about our positions; we are worried about our children; we are worried about a thousand things so that for many of us, life has lost its sunshine. But John tells us we can conquer our worries through faith.

3. We can conquer the fear of the world through faith. How timid we are. How we fear to assert ourselves when the crowd is against us! How easily do we play the coward in the presence of a moral issue. There are those to whom we would like to speak personally of their need of Christ but we are afraid. The large part of the Church today is possessed of a dumb demon because fear has shut their lips, but through faith we may be delivered from this bondage.

II.

How is it that faith brings its victory?

1. Faith brings victory because it brings a realization of the unseen. The reason we are so early dominated by the world is because the world is so evident. We can see it; we can hear it; we can touch it. It shrieks at us through all of our five senses. But suppose Christ were to become as real to you as even the speaker, for instance? You would take your eyes off him and rivet them upon Jesus. It is thus that faith enables us to conquer the love of the world. "By faith, Abraham, when he was called to journey into a land that he knew not of,
obeyed". He did not give up his native city and his kindred foolishly. He gave them up because faith had opened his eyes to the splendors of that other city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God.

Moses did a seemingly foolish thing. He had his foot upon the steps of the throne. He was within handclasp of the scepter of the mightiest nation in the world but one day he turned his back upon the royal palace. He turned his back upon a power that was absolute and a wealth that was almost without limit. He went to share the hardships of his enslaved and oppressed people. How was he able to give up all that appeals so strongly to one who loves the world? The writer to the Hebrews tells the story. "By faith, Moses forsook Egypt".

Years ago I was in school with a bright young fellow from the State of Missouri. He was the son of wealth but in spite of all the inducements that his father, as a man of wealth, could hold out, he turned aside from the privileges of inheriting a fortune and of making it a far larger fortune, to give his life to the ministry. This he did, not because he was too blind to the opportunities his father was offering; he did it by faith. He had had his eyes open to see the wealth that was more real and more abiding than that represented by stocks and bonds.

It is easy to see how real faith conquers our worry. The warfare against worry is being waged by those who are not Christians but it is the Christian who has the only real remedy.
"Take no thought for the morrow", said Jesus. "In nothing be anxious" said his great apostle. But how are we to put these high commands into effect? Jesus gave two reasons for not worrying. First:—It is useless. That in itself, of course, is not compelling. We do a thousand useless things everyday but he gave a second reason that is compelling. "Do not worry," he says, "because your Heavenly Father knows of your needs and is able to supply them". He has you in his care. He is not too great nor too busy to attend the funeral of a sparrow, he can therefore be depended upon to look after your interests.

"Yes," you say, but you do not know what I am up against". No, that is true, but this I can say with conviction, there is not a circumstance, nor a situation that can rob you of your peace if you keep a firm faith in God! For instance, if I wanted to find the happiest people in the world today, I would not go always to those who have the largest bank account; I would not go to those who dwell in the finest homes; I would not go to those always, who are in perfect health. I would go to those of unshaken faith. I went, sometime ago, down a mean street, into a tumble-down cabin. There was a woman there, broken in body and bereft of loved ones. But rarely have I ever been in any place where there was a sweeter and finer atmosphere of peace.

Then, this faith that makes God real, conquers our fears. Do you remember those twelve spies that Moses sent down into the land of Canaan? Ten of them came back completely cowed. They saw nothing but difficulties. There were giants in the
land. These giants were so great that they themselves, in their presence, seemed like grasshoppers. What was the matter? They saw the difficulties and nothing but the difficulties. But, there were two others—Caleb and Joshua. These faced the same dangers, they looked at the same difficulties, they met the same giants but they returned, not cowed and oppressed, but full of dauntless optimism. They said, "The land is an exceedingly good land and we are well able to possess it." When they were reminded of the giants they declared that "they would be bread for us". That is, they would not be a source of weakness but they would be a source of strength.

Why the difference? The first ones allowed their difficulties to blind them to the fact of God. The latter saw their difficulties in the light of his countenance.

What a shock the servant of Elisha had one morning. The King of Syria had determined to capture his master. During the night he had sent an army that had completely surrounded the city of Gotham where the prophet was stopping. When this servant looked out in the morning, he saw nothing but armed soldiers in every direction. He hurried to report the distressing situation to his master. What effect did the news have upon the prophet? No sooner had he heard it, than he began to pray but to the amazement of the servant, he was not asking for help, he was not crying for deliverance. This was the prayer:

"Lord, open the eyes of the young man that he may see".

And in answer to that prayer, the young man's eyes were opened and he saw the horsemen and chariots of God around about.
He thus learned the truth of the prophet's statement that "They that be for us are more than they that be against us".

Here is a little merchant vessel in the Mediterranean Sea. For almost two weeks the cruel fists of the tempest have pounded this vessel until it can stand no more. It is on the point of going to pieces. The soldiers and sailors on board are pinched with hunger and unmanned by fear. They have given up hope and the vessel is drifting to its ruin.

Then, suddenly, a strange thing happens. A man who is a prisoner makes his way on to the deck. He steadies himself by clinging to a broken spar. Then, amidst the shriek of the storm and while death is laughing with hollow laughter among the torn shreds of the rigging, he lifts his voice and shouts, "Be of good cheer"!

What is the matter with him? Has he suddenly gone insane? No, he is the sanest man on the ship. On what does he base this strange cry? Has he sighted land? He has not. Has he glimpsed a bit of blue sky that tells him that the storm is over? No. Then what has happened? This- he has laid hold of God by faith.

Hear his strengthful words:- "Be of good cheer. There stood by me this night the angel of God whose I am and whom I serve, saying, fear not, Paul, for thou must be brought before Caesar, and lo! God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer, as I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." There is nothing like faith in God to calm our fears.
III.

How are we to come into possession of this great treasure? Certainly it is a prize to be desired. Without faith it is impossible to believe God. You might leave off the last part of that sentence. Without faith, it is impossible to do anything that is worth the doing. Without faith, commerce would be impossible. Without faith, all social relationships would go upon the rocks. Without faith, every home in Memphis and every home in the world would become a wreck. Faith is essential everywhere. Above all else, it is essential in our dealings with God. How are we to get it?

1. The word of God is a great help to faith. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God". When I want to strengthen my faith, I do not turn to the enemies of the Church, I do not even turn to the secular press. I turn again, and again, to God's word. There is nothing else that I know of that is so strengthening to our faith.

2. My faith has been greatly strengthened by the fellowship of certain Christ-like men and women that I have known along the way. I suppose there are times in almost all of our lives when the candle of faith burns low. There are times when the best of us are harassed by doubts. At such times I have found the fellowship of certain choice souls an abiding inspiration. If they are not present, I go back to them in memory and sit at their feet and relight my altar fires from the flame of their glowing souls.

3. Another mighty help to a strong faith, is prayer. All the
great believers that I have known have been men and women who made much of the privilege of prayer. Prayer is a means of opening the windows of the soul up towards the heavenly Jerusalem. Real prayer increases faith and faith makes prayer more mighty. The two act and react upon each other.

4. Finally, if we would have a strong faith, we must put the faith we have into practice. Faith grows by exercise. It reaches full assurance through obedience. It grows faint and utterly dies through our persistent failure to obey. That is true for the simple reason that faith without it works, is dead.

How is it that the faith of so many of us is weak? Because we are living in disobedience. We are depending upon God to keep us when we are doing nothing. To ask God to keep us in health when we will not eat, is not faith, it is presumption. To ask God to keep us when we are neglecting our known duty, or when doing what we know we ought not to do, is not faith, it is presumption.

Do you want strong faith? Begin here and now to live up to the best that you know and your faith will take on new strength. It will become so strong that it will lead you into the realm of perfect certainty. "If any man will do His will, he shall know." This is the testimony of countless thousands.

(Big Jim).