

(1 John #29) Praying the Dead to Life

by J. Glyn Owen

A Christian is a believer, a lover, and an overcomer, demonstrating love for God by obeying His commandments and loving His children.

Duration: 43:56

Topics: "Prayer"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher invites non-Christians to look at Jesus through the telescope of Scripture and see Him in the gospels. He emphasizes that weak men and women have been made strong in the grace of the Savior for thousands of years. The preacher then focuses on the importance of Christians loving one another as a way to show their love for God. He explains that the love of God is not just about singing and having a good time, but about keeping His commandments. The sermon concludes by highlighting three characteristics of a Christian: being a believer, a lover, and a prayerful person.

Transcript

Will you turn with me in your Bibles to 1 John, chapter 4, and I would like to read at this point verses 7 and 8 only. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love.

Now, our text says, Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.

And his commandments are not grievous, for whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world. And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God.

Christians have been variously represented during the last 2,000 years. Various appellations and designations of Christian people have been given from time to time. Some of them quite accurate as far as they go, some a little misleading.

Early in New Testament times, the Christian people were called Nazarenes. And we know, of course, the reason for that. Jesus came from Nazareth, and those who were his disciples followed him, and so they

called them the Nazarenes.

Later on in our Lord's ministry, Christian people were called the people of the way. Jesus said, I am the way. And those who followed him walked his way.

They went in his direction. They went in company with him. They were on the way with him who is the way.

And there are very many appellations given to Christian people from time to time. In post-New Testament times, I suppose the first and the most popular for a long period of time was the holy man. Christians were known as holy men.

The holy man. The separated man. The sanctified man.

The holy man. Or the holy person. Then we've had a number of others.

In recent times, we've heard the people speak of Christians as the men or the people for others. I rather like that. A Christian is a man for others.

He looks away from himself to his God and his Savior. And as sure as we look away from ourselves to God and the Savior, we have to look at other men and begin to live for them. Christians have been called Puritans and Methodists and what have you.

Some of them are accurate. Some of them are not. But I want to turn with you tonight to three designations of the Christian man which are absolutely fundamental.

And it's not a question of choosing the one or the other. The Apostle John has chosen in these five verses to bind these three together. He refers to these three concepts in a particular grammatical way.

We have participles here. And he wants to call attention in this particular little passage to three phases or facets of a Christian person presenting us with three characteristics of the portrait of a Christian man or a Christian woman. Now, here they are.

First of all, the Christian is a believer. You have the words to believe or faith occurring in verses 1, 4, and 5. We'll refer to them in a moment. A Christian man is essentially a believer.

The second thing that we have here is this. It's the reference to the Christian man as a lover. Again, in verses 1, 2, and 3. Three references.

The Christian is a lover. There is something romantic about the Christian life. There is something warm.

It's not just a matter of head, knowledge, and believing with the intellect. There is something warm. There is something that involves the whole of the man, including his emotions.

He's a lover. But then, along with that, he's a lover of a special kind. He's not a lover who has divorced himself from the law of God.

He is a lover who keeps the commandments. And these two things are brought together in this particular part of the epistle. They're bound together.

They're not looked upon now separately, but they belong together. He loves God, and he loves God's people, and he keeps God's commandments. Those two come together now, then, in this particular passage.

The Christian is a believer, then he's a lover who obeys the law of God. And finally, he is an overcomer. I want to stay with these three concepts of the Christian man tonight.

And I trust that as we do so, you and I will see what God expects of us. You and I will see what is required of us if we are to be assured of our faith. And what is more, if other men are to be assured of us that we are really men and women of God.

Let's take them one by one. First, the Christian is a believer. Look at verse one.

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ. Then, verse five, the first verse and the last in the passage, he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God. And in between you have the word faith, which is exactly the same word, albeit a noun, not a verb, as the word to believe in verses one and five.

Who is he that overcometh the world? Or what is it that overcomes the world but our faith? A Christian, then, is a believer. He's no longer a skeptic, neither is he sitting on the fence as an agnostic. But the Christian is essentially one who believes in the central things of our faith, particularly those things that relate to Jesus Christ.

Are you a believer? Have you a suspicion in your heart that the Lord Jesus Christ is not what the New Testament makes him out to be, and what the Christian church testifies concerning him? A Christian is a believer. Two things are involved in believing according to the New Testament, and I think they are reflected right here, though we shall not go into the details tonight. Christian believing involves, first of all, the acceptance of the testimony that God has given concerning his Son.

You heard from our reading tonight, which goes on beyond the passage we are occupied with now, that God has borne testimony concerning his Son. Christian believing means, first of all, that we believe what God has said about his Son. God has said, in various ways, that his Son is not the child of his age, that Jesus of Nazareth was not simply born of a woman, but he was conceived of the Holy Ghost.

God has borne testimony concerning Jesus Christ that he is one who is outwith the human race, the one of us, sharing flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone, entering into our temptations. But he is more than we are, he is bigger than we are, he is greater than we are, he is different than we are in this, that he is the incarnate Son of the living God. He is God become man.

Not only has God borne testimony to him in that sense, he bore testimony to himself. In one way or another, the question is constantly being asked him in the Gospels, what do you say about yourself, who are you, where did you come from, what is your authority? Invariably, Lord Jesus Christ refers to the signs of his Sonship, to the implications of the fact that his relationship with God is absolutely distinct and unique. He comes in the line of the prophets, but he is greater than the prophets.

He opens the way for the apostles, but he is greater than the apostles. He commissions them to go in his name, and at last he says to them, all authority has been given in the heavens and on the earth, and because of that I send you out into all the world to make disciples for me. Those are either the words of a megalomaniac or of a monarch.

Jesus bore testimony concerning himself, the Holy Spirit bore testimony to him, and his apostles bore testimony of what they saw in his life, heard from his lips, came to know as they sat at his feet. Now, all this testimony you have in the words of Scripture, so that from the men to come this, the acceptance of the testimony to Christ that we have in the Scriptures. You cannot be a Christian man or a Christian woman unless you believe the testimony, because Jesus is what the Scriptures say he is, and who the Scriptures say he is, and the Christian is a believer.

Therefore, the first question is this. Do you and I believe the testimony born to the Son of God? But Christian believing goes beyond that. In one sense, that is almost entirely an intellectual exercise, reading what is said, listening to the testimony of one and another which we have in the Scriptures.

But Christian believing goes beyond that. It is not only receiving what has been said concerning him, but it is a trusting of oneself to him, and a trusting him with oneself. Now, you see, this goes beyond the past.

This is a matter of accepting the testimony born to him, and of now coming to him and saying, Jesus, I will trust you, trust you with my soul. Guilty, lost, and helpless, thou canst make me whole. The testimony concerning you is such.

It says that you can save, and you can keep, and you give life eternal, and you transform the sinner to become like yourself. I believe you are that, and in consequence, I trust you for that. A believer.

I suppose that one of the saddest things in the world of today is that so many segments of the supposedly Christian church are better known for their unbelief and denials than for their affirmations of faith and of belief. It is a veritable contradiction in itself when sometimes we hear people in high places propagating their doubts rather than proclaiming the faith. A Christian is a believer.

Believest thou what the Scriptures say? Believest thou that Jesus is the Christ? Do you believe? Let us be honest and frank about it. If the Scriptures are true, you and I have no right to claim the title Christian unless we believe that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of the living God. That's what my text says.

Now, mark what happens. John is concerned in this area of his epistle to prove who are genuine Christians. And this is what he says.

He who has a settled and a genuine confidence or trust in Jesus Christ in this twofold way proves that he has been born of God. Let me read. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been begotten of God.

That's the literal translation. I wonder whether this takes somebody by surprise. Jesus did not say, and John does not say, if you believe you will be born again What he says is this.

The fact that you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God means that you have been born again. You know, the mystery of the rebirth is such that the Bible doesn't try really to explain it to us in detail. But what the Bible does is this.

It tells us how we may recognize whether or not we have been born again. And it tells us this. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and you believe that he is the Christ, the Son of the living God, then you have already been born again because you could not believe.

For you are not born again of the Spirit. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God or has been begotten of God. You will note how believing here, therefore, is the consequence, not the cause of the rebirth.

The evidence that a person has been born again is to be seen in this. That I come to the Lord Jesus and see what the Scriptures say of him, believe that, and then entrust myself to him and never draw myself back. I am content to trust.

My friend, does that describe you tonight? Have you a contentment in trusting the Christ of God, the Son of God? If not, may I ask you another question? Is there a yearning in your heart so to do? Do you find some strange impulse in your soul, some desire, some yearning, or some sense of conviction, I ought and I want to, but how? Then, my friend, obey that impulse. A Christian is a believer, a believer, one whose confidence is settled upon God in Christ, God the Son and God the Saviour, the Messiah. Let us turn to the second.

Will you notice that John does not stop there? If he would, he would only give us one solitary aspect, albeit a most important aspect, of the Christian life and of the Christian profession. But John goes beyond that. A Christian is a lover.

Verses 1 to 3, the end of verse 1 right through to verse 3. And everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not burdensome.

Now, it is assumed there, and it's taken as axiomatic in the whole passage, that every believer, every true believer, loves the Father. It isn't said here, it is assumed. It is assumed that every man who believes, every woman who believes in the Lord Jesus, in the sense that we have been discussing now, of necessity feels a sense of affection for God the Father, who sent the Son to be our Savior.

That's been taken for granted. It is then stated that everyone who loves the Father who begat us, who gave us the new birth, everyone who loves the Father who begat, will love the children begotten of him. And along with this love, will you notice in this passage, as I've already indicated, John insists that not only do we love God and love his children, but our love for God is of a special kind.

It's not simply an affection, but it is an obedience to his law. Now, let's look at one or two things that are central to this concept of the Christian as a lover. The Christian loves his heavenly Father.

This is the basis of everything else. This, of course, is true on the human level, in normal circumstances. It is normally true to say that a child will have an affection for those who have brought it into the world, who nurture it, care, protect, provide, and so forth.

Generally speaking, and normally speaking, there is an almost automatic sense of gratitude and of affection in the heart of a child for those who are responsible for its nurture and its care. Now, occasionally, far too occasionally, not sufficiently occasional, far too often for us to be complacent about it, children do not thus love the parents that begot them and feel no sense of gratitude and no sense and no bond of affection. Now, this is sad.

But whenever that happens, you can ascribe it to one or other of two causes, two sources. A child has no affection for its parent, either when the parent concerned has done something to dishonor himself or the

child, or herself. The parent who doesn't gain the respect and the confidence and the affection of a child is a parent that has done something which has grieved the person concerned.

And he or she has lost the right to affection. Or, on the other hand, the child concerned has become perverted. And something has laid hold upon that natural propensity of gratitude and of respect, has twisted it and perverted it so that what is normal and what is natural is no longer there.

And so we have the phenomenon of children who are brought up by parents, lovingly cared for and provided for, who know nothing of what it is to be grateful and who know nothing of genuine affection. Now, this is perversion. This is sin.

This is part of the fall. This is evidence of the tyranny of Satan in life. In man's relation Godward, the father can never be a disappointment.

The child of God will never be able to say to his father, Look, you've done something wrong, and I can't respect you, and I can't love you. Never. His wisdom and his understanding are matched by his compassion and his power.

So that he not only knows what his children need, but he is able and will provide that which his children need, not necessarily what they want, but what his children need at any given time. Forgiven of our sins, then, born anew of his Spirit, now sharing in the new nature, the nature of our Heavenly Father, what happens to a Christian is this. He instinctively senses a flush of affection for the God that made him, and the God that redeemed him.

Do you know that? Do you love Him that begat you? The Father whom you can't fault, the God whom you can't criticize, in whose hand your life is, and from whose heart your salvation comes. But now notice, it doesn't end there. And I suppose I would have to say that the way this next point comes out has been the great discovery for me, the great discovery of the last year or two in reading and studying this epistle of John.

Oh, one knew it before, but there is knowing and knowing. This has hit me between the eye. He who loves, says John, he who loves the Father who begat, not may love, but will love, those that are begotten of him.

This is a most challenging word, and I'm sure it will find you out as it finds me out tonight. If you love the Father who begat you and has begotten others and brought others to new life, you will also love all those, says John, that are begotten of him. Now, whereas we know of exceptions on the human plane, that is, exceptions in this sense, there are brothers who do not love brothers and sisters who do not love sisters and sisters who do not love brothers and brothers who do not love their sisters.

In the Christian life, says John, there are no exceptions, or there ought to be no exceptions, because this is what the life does in our souls as it comes to itself. If we love the Father, we must love him who is begotten of the same Father. Now, why should this be so? Because it's very challenging.

Why should a Christian man love other Christians? How is it true to say, why is it true to say, if God is my Father and has begotten me again to newness of life, then I love my fellow Christians. Why is that so? John tells us. There's no need for guesswork here.

This is the kind of text I like. It leaves the preacher nothing to do but to say what's here. And I'm a young preacher here.

I suggest to you that you always look for a text like this. You don't need to go far for your sermon. It's all here.

It's all here. There's no guesswork. Why must a Christian man who has been born again love not only the God who begat him, but everybody else begotten of the same God? Now look at what John says.

First of all, Christian people should love one another because it is the appointed way to show our love for God. Look at verse three. This is the love of God that we keep as commandments.

Now, I don't know how that takes you, but it takes me by storm. What is the love of God? Well, that we join together and sing and have a jolly good time. Not at all, says John.

Oh, they sang in these days. Sang with gusto. Paul and Silas sang in prison.

And I'm sure that was expressive of some love for God. But that's not how you really show your love for God. This is the love of God.

This is it. Now notice that. It's as clear as that.

John doesn't say this is one way you may express the love of God. This is it. Well, what is it? That we keep as commandments.

You see, love for God is a moral obligation rather than an affection. Love for God has to be shown fundamentally in my behavior, in my service, in the way I react to people and especially to God's children. In vain do I say, Lord, I love you with all my heart.

In vain do I make the professions of my lips and sing from my heart. In vain, in vain, in vain, unless I love my brother. This is the love of God that we keep as commandments.

And His commandments include these. This is His commandment that we should believe on the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another. Chapter 3, verse 23.

This commandment have we from Him that he who loves God should love his brother also. Chapter 4 and verse 21. And those of you who have been with us on Sunday mornings don't need me to go back and recapitulate any further.

It is written into the fabric of this epistle that it is impossible for us to love God in the way that God spells out that love by keeping His commandments without looking into the face of every Christian man and woman we know and say, that's my brother, that's my sister, and I love him and I love her in Christ. You know, it's as rigid as that. It's as challenging as that.

Therefore, let me repeat. If we love the God that begat us and begat them, whoever they are, we shall love them because the nature of the Father is in us and in them. That's the first reason we should love our fellow Christians.

The second is this. Christian people should love one another because they are born of God and share His nature. That's implicit in what we've said.

Let's make it explicit. In verse 2, By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep His commandments. By this we know that we love the children of God when we love God.

You know, says John, it's as clear and as absolute and as unmistakable as this. By this we know that when we love God we love His children also. By what? By the very fact that we have been begotten of Him.

He's the begetter of us and He's the begetter of our brethren. And because His nature is in me and His nature is in the other Christian, nature will call to nature. The Spirit of God in me will respond to the Spirit of God in that person.

Now, that's what John is saying. But if you want me to put it in a way in which I think we may have put it once before, God loved His people in eternity. He so loved the whole church as yet unborn, unseen, that He sent His only begotten Son into the world to die for our sins and to become our Saviour.

God Himself loved us in eternity. Right. God came in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ.

And in Christ He loved the same wide world as He loved Himself in eternity. So God Himself loved us in eternity. The same God loved the same people in Christ His Son.

Now, that same God by the Spirit comes to live in you and in me. Is He going to act inconsistently? Impossible. God is not inconsistent.

If that God is living in you and living in me, He will love whom He loved in Christ. He will love whom He loved in eternity. And He will choose whom He chose in eternity.

And His elect will become our elect. We shall choose to love whom God chose to love because God by the Spirit is living in us. My friends, we can talk about being Christians.

We can sing about being Christians. Tell me, is the Spirit of God binding you to your fellow believers? Is there something about your kinship with other Christian men and women that you don't find in the club, that you don't find on the golf course, that you don't find amongst your professionals? Is there something that binds you to the people of God and you have to say to every one of them, you belong to me and I belong to you. You may vote liberal, I may vote conservative, but my word, we are brothers and sisters in the Christ.

We love one another. You know that. When you meet a brother whose skin is of a different order, a different color, can you see beneath the skin and beyond the skin the heart of a child of God whom you love? Because God is living in you.

You know, it's a serious thing to be a Christian or to take this name upon myself. That's the second reason then. The nature of the begetter is in the begotten.

The third is this. Not only should we love one another for the reasons we've given, but also because of this amazing thing that takes place when we are begotten of God. John can say to every Christian man that the commandments of the Lord are not grievous, not burdensome.

Now, this is a major difference between the Christian and the non-Christian. Will you permit me to be very personal at this point? You want to know whether you're a real Christian or not. This is the question to put to yourself.

Do I find the law of God something that I just can't get on with and I don't like? Now, mark the question. I'm not asking you to ask yourself the question whether the law of God is difficult. Of course it's difficult.

It means fighting with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Of course it's difficult. I'm not asking that.

What I'm asking is this. The test to put to oneself is this. Do I sense something within me which says that the law of God is right and I want to do it because it represents the will of my God? Now, the unbeliever, the man who is not a Christian, will always be against the will of God and against the law of God.

He'll want to get rid of it. It irks him. It makes him uncomfortable.

It brings out his ego. He wants to fight against it. He just can't be curbed by the divine law.

It's heavy. That's the word that John used. It's too heavy for him.

And he wants to get rid of it. It's a burden. He wants to shrug it off his shoulders.

But not so the Christian. A Christian like the Lord Jesus in whom the Spirit of God dwelt without measure will in some measure want to say, as he said, I delight to do thy will, O my God. My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me and to finish His work.

Now, we may have to struggle to say that, but we'll want to say it. And we'll know that it's the right thing to do. And we'll know it's the kind of place we should always be at where we can say, Thy will, not mine, be done.

Do you know that? To use Paul's words, the Christian man, properly so-called as a man, who will discover that God's will is always good, acceptable, and perfect. Or to use the words of Jesus, which are better still, Take my yoke upon you. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

Yoke? Easy? No, no, not as you look at it from out there. But Jesus says, come on, be my partner under the yoke. Come near to me.

Come into partnership with me. And in partnership with me, you'll find that my yoke is easy. Not out of partnership.

Not out of step. Not aloof from Him. And it may be there are men and women here tonight who are aloof from Jesus Christ.

And as you read the law, it's a terrible thing. You don't like it. You kick against the bricks.

You don't want to keep it. You hate it. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.

Take my yoke upon you. Join yourself to me. Enter into partnership with me.

Let me put my arms around you, and lay hold upon you, and make you mine. Then, my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. With Christ as our Saviour, you see.

With Christ by our side. With Christ in our hearts. The law is all so very different.

I was reminded in coming down to church tonight of a hymn. We used to sing the other side of the Atlantic. I don't know whether it's in the hymnary.

I had chosen the hymns before. I remembered it. Two of the stanzas go like this.

Blessed are the eyes that see him. Blessed the ears that hear his voice. Blessed are the souls that trust him, and in him alone rejoice.

His commandments then become their happy choice. Did you get that? His commandments then become their happy choice. And here's the second stanza.

Take his easy yoke and wear it. Love will make obedience sweet. Christ will give you strength to bear it, while his wisdom guide your feet, safe to glory where his ransomed captives meet.

Take his easy yoke upon you. Love will make obedience sweet. You love the father who begat you? Then you love the brothers whom he's begotten along with you into the family.

And you become a lover overnight. The Christian is a believer. The Christian is a lover.

My time is gone. I can only mention this. The Christian is an overcomer.

In what I have said already, John has summarized his three main tests. And he's brought them together. And he said these three belong to one another.

But the keeping of the law is fundamentally not something on its own, but something that springs out of love. And he's linked them together. Now he sums the whole thing up.

And he says what characterizes the Christian man is this. He's an overcomer. He overcomes the world.

And he puts it in two tenses. One in the past. He has overcome the world.

Two in the present. He does overcome the world. What he's saying is this.

A Christian man has overcome the world when he becomes a Christian. That's why he puts it in the past tense, in verse four. This is the victory that overcame the world.

Even our faith overcame. That's in the past. What's he referring to? Well, this.

In becoming a Christian, in trusting Jesus Christ, and in believing on him, we had to wrestle with the whole world. With sin in our hearts, with Satan's rule and dominion over us, and with society's influence around us. Every man and woman who becomes a Christian has to overcome sin within, Satan outside, and the society around us.

The way of society, the spirit of society, is always away from God and away from his Son. And you have to overcome the whole cosmos within and without. It's the rule of Satan as well, in order to become a believer.

That's why it is a miracle when a man becomes a Christian. God has been at work. We are his workmanship, says Paul.

We can't make ourselves Christians. So every Christian has already overcome the world when he came out of the darkness of death into life which is eternal. But the Christian continues to overcome.

This is the feature. He has the same battle to rage all along the way. He's overcome his own self.

Ah, but there are still old desires of the self that lurk on and he's got to overcome them every day. Satan is still there. He's given so much rope until the end of the time.

And we have to wrestle and fight and pray. And the society in which we live is still sinful. And it's the domain of the prince of this world.

And we still have to encounter all the temptations that society brings along our way. But the Christian is an overcomer. Who is he that overcometh? He that believeth that Jesus is the Christ.

In other words, by our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we draw our resources. We receive our daily provisions for battle. And we are made stronger than the strong in order to prove our identity in this world, proving that we are citizens of the next.

A Christian is a believer. A Christian is a lover. A Christian is an overcomer.

Oh, he may fall, but he'll rise again. He'll wander, he'll come back again. He'll do that which is wrong, he'll be penitent, and he'll cry his way back to the cross.

When Galileo developed his revolutionary ideas about the solar system, he invited the professors of the University of Padua to come and look through his telescope. You see, they wouldn't believe what he was saying, what he was preaching. That the sun was the center of the whole system.

The professor of philosophy refused. And he wouldn't go. And he continued to the end of his life to believe that the earth was the center of the solar system, and the heavenly bodies all moved around the earth.

He and others in the university were convinced to their dying day. In each invitation they received, they turned down. They wouldn't look through Galileo's telescope.

My friend, if you're not a Christian tonight, I ask you, come and look at my Lord through the telescope of scripture. Come and see him in the gospels living his life, dying his death, rising from the grave, ascending to the Father's right hand, sending forth the Holy Spirit, harnessing the energies of his church and empowering the weakest among them, so that for two thousand years of time, weak men and women like yourself and myself have been made strong in the grace of the Savior to overcome themselves, and overcome Satan, and overcome the world, and pass on the torch. And even tonight, on a holiday, summer's evening, men are summoned from darkness to light and from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of our God.

And I'm as sure as I stand in this pulpit that however feeble I preach the gospel of my God tonight, there will be men and women who will hear the word and come to life. Come and see him through the telescope of scripture. I dare you to.

For if you look at him long through the telescope of scripture, you'll come to believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing, you too, will have the life that loves and overcome. What then will you do with Jesus which is called the Christ? Let us pray.

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