

1 Quasimodo Geniti – John 20; 1 John 5

People often speak about how important their faith is to them. When a Christian is going through a difficult time in his life, he might say, “I don’t know where I would be without my faith.” This is certainly a good thing to say. Without faith, you would despair of God’s goodness. You wouldn’t be able to see God’s gracious hand in anything. Without faith, you would only see death and a hopeless end. Faith is vitally important. It’s also powerful.

Why is faith so powerful? Why is faith so important to you? Why does it help you through difficult times? If you poll the general public, you will hear a variety of answers. Some will say that faith gives them a sense of purpose by connecting them to something bigger than themselves. Others see faith as that which gives them a moral compass and structure for their lives. Many see faith as something that connects them with a community, giving them a sense of belonging. Some will talk about the physical and mental benefits that come from believing in a higher power and an afterlife.

The world likes the idea of faith. Our flesh does too. But we cannot, by our own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ. The world and our sinful flesh therefore turn faith into a generic emotion or attitude about life and God. Often the name God isn’t even mentioned. Instead, they just talk about some spiritual force or a higher power. In an attempt to be more inclusive, people speak about faith in vague and ambiguous ways. They might speak of God being real, but they don’t speak clearly about what God has done. They say that God has a purpose for your life, but they don’t articulate what specific things God has promised in his Word. They talk about being accepted the way you are with all your imperfections, but they don’t speak plainly about sin, repentance, and forgiveness in Jesus’ name.

When people in the media talk about faith, it is rare that you will hear a clear articulation of the Son of God coming into the flesh to bear the sins of the world. It’s rare that you will hear about God’s wrath being satisfied, reconciliation with God, eternal life, and salvation from sin, death, and hell. It’s rare that you hear about the true object of faith. What does your faith cling to? In other words, what do you actually believe? When this is watered down, then faith becomes simply a coping mechanism, helping you keep a positive outlook on life, without a bold declaration of God’s saving works and words in Christ.

With all this talk about faith, the world misses just how powerful faith is. Faith is much more than the ability to cope with difficulties. It’s more powerful than a sense of belonging or a connection to some higher power. None of these generic explanations truly grasp how strong faith is. But St. John tells us how powerful faith is. He calls faith the victory over the world. Faith doesn’t just help you get through this world’s troubles. Faith conquers the troubles of this world.

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How? It isn't because faith is so strong in itself. It isn't because of the fruit that accompanies faith. Faith overcomes the world, because Christ overcame the world. "Who conquers the world," St. John asks, "but he who believes Jesus is God's Son?" Faith is strong because it rests in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He fulfilled everything his Father sent him to accomplish. He bore all of our sin and guilt. He won for us complete forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. This means that all this world's problems are solved in him. All this world's problems are the result of sin, and Jesus has taken away the sin of the world.

Of course, the world still lives in sin. We still carry our sinful nature around our necks. We still need to face conflict, disease, and death. But we overcome it all by faith. Because Christ has won the victory. He has defeated all our enemies of sin, death, and the devil. He has put all things under his feet. Coming forth from the tomb, having conquered death and all the forces of sin and hell, he comes to us and declares peace. This is no mere sentimental talk of peace. No, this is peace that comes from a victory. He didn't make a compromise with sin, death, and the devil. He conquered them. He did everything his Father commanded, obeying the law perfectly on our behalf, and he won peace with God by the blood of his cross.

If this is yours, then you have victory. If this is yours, then you have conquered the world. No height nor depth, no angel nor any authority, no persecution or temptation, nor anything in this world can take this victory away from Christ.

But how does your faith have this victory that Jesus won? It is by his Word. Jesus says that his words are Spirit and life. He says that the Holy Spirit takes what is his and declares it to us. This means that everything Jesus did for us is given to us by the Holy Spirit through the Word. Jesus' entire public ministry is a testimony to this. From his baptism in the Jordan River where he stood in the place of all sinners to his death on the cross where he shed his blood for all sinners, Jesus's entire work is inseparable from what the Holy Spirit gives to us in his Word. If you have his Word, then you have his Spirit, and you have everything he has done. This is why St. Paul says that we are baptized into Christ's death. We share in his resurrection. His body and blood are his New Testament given to us for the forgiveness of our sins. There is nothing Jesus did that the Holy Spirit does not also deliver to you in his precious gospel.

What the Spirit gives you in the Word is nothing short of what the Father has sent his Son to accomplish. Jesus is the Truth. The Spirit is the Truth. Wherever the Spirit of God is, there is therefore Christ and his victory. Where anyone is baptized with water and the Word, there is Christ's victory. Wherever God's children eat and drink Christ's body and blood,

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there is Christ's victory. Whenever the Holy Spirit delivers Christ to you through his Word, he is delivering his victory over sin, death, and the devil.

This is what faith rests in. This is why faith overcomes the world. It isn't because we accept the testimony of men. Faith isn't agreeing with what the crowd says is true. No, faith is trust in God's testament about his Son.

Of course, it is important to listen to the testimony of the apostles who saw Jesus die and saw him risen from the dead. They saw the nail prints in his hands and his feet, as well as his pierced side. John saw water and blood pour out of Jesus from the cross, and he witnessed that same Lord alive, breathing his Holy Spirit out on his apostles. But when we listen to the testimony of these eyewitnesses, we are not resting merely on what men say. God's testimony is greater. The Father has testified about his Son that he is the resurrection and the life, and whoever believes in him has eternal life. Faith doesn't make God's testimony true. God has already told the truth. Christ has already won the victory. He has already taken away the sin of the world. Faith doesn't make this true. Faith simply holds onto the testimony. Those who don't believe are calling God a liar. But God can't lie.

So if you are struggling with your faith, don't look in your own heart for the strength to believe. Instead, ask yourself this question. Is God a liar? Did Jesus lie when he said that he has made all things new? Did he lie when he said that he gives you eternal life? Did God's prophet, John, lie when he called Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? Did Jesus lie when he said, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven?" Did he lie when he said, "Whoever keeps my words will never see death?" And then consider what Jesus did. He died, just as he said. He rose from the dead, just as he said. He fulfilled everything the prophets foretold. He is the anointed one, God's Son. And he declares God's peace to you.

Jesus told Thomas not to doubt but to believe. He says, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Believe, he says. Have faith. This is the power of the gospel. This is why the Holy Spirit inspired the prophets and apostles to write down God's Word. St. John writes, "These things are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son, and by believing you may have life in his name."

Your sinful flesh will lie to you, but that's only because it is dust and is returning to the dust. This world will lie to you, because it is also dying. The devil will lie to you, because he's the father of lies. But Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, and he will never lie to you. He declares forgiveness, life, and eternal victory to you. His Spirit delivers it all through the testimony of his Word, through which he has given you a new birth. This is your faith. It is not a lie. It rests on the truth. And it overcomes the world. Amen.

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It's common for a Christian who is going through a difficult time in life to say something like, "I don't know where I would be without my faith."