

Life is Good Because
We Have Conquered the World
1 John 5:1-6

Life is good! That's been our theme for our services during this Easter season.

Life is good! We've been looking at John's first letter, 1 John. John tells us that life is good because God is good and we are children of God. God created us to share with us the goodness of life.

The way to fully enjoy the goodness of life is to experience and celebrate all of life. We don't want to limit ourselves to the goodness of our own lives. We want to experience life through God and through the people around us. John tells us that life is good when we abide in God and God abides in us. And he tells us that life is good when we love one another. When can feel what others feel and see what they see, when we share one another's joys and sorrows, we experience the fullness of life.

This morning John tells us that life is good because we have conquered the world.

Now, we have to be careful to understand what John means by "the world." What is this world we have conquered? For a lot of folks, when they hear the words "conquer the world," picture a monk living in a monastery, as withdrawn from the world as possible, spending almost all his time in prayer and meditation and saying, "I have God. I need nothing else. I have conquered the world."

Is that what John means by "conquering the world?"

No. When John talks about conquering the world, he is talking about being freed from the great deception which has enslaved humanity from the foundations of the world.

It comes from a fundamental misunderstanding which is at the heart of sin. Satan was the first to be deceived by this lie. Satan never enjoyed the goodness of life. He thinks the reason he doesn't enjoy life is because he is not God yet. He thinks the way to the good life is to be worshipped and served by all creation, to have the ultimate power and control over everyone and everything. Satan believes that if he could just be God, then life will be good.

And Satan has been spreading his mistake ever since. He told Eve that if she ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, she would be like God. Then life would really be good. Adam and Eve fell for the lie, and they taught it to their children, who taught it to their children. All the world has been taught that if we could just be like God, having power and authority, being worshipped and served by the people under our authority, then life would be good.

The world says to us, "If you can become big enough, or strong enough, or pretty enough, or smart enough, or respected enough, or powerful enough, or loved enough, or rich enough, or important enough, then life will be good." The people of this world are working hard to obtain the things this world teaches are necessary to have the good life.

There are two problems with this: First of all, people who buy into the idea that their lives will be good someday, when they have done whatever is necessary to have the good life, aren't enjoying the goodness of life right now.

I remember talking to a man who was in his 80's. He was a thinker, and I knew that he had thought much about life. We got to philosophizing about life, and I said, "Tell me, if you had one word of advice for young people, what would it be?" He said, "Don't hurry through life."

He said, "I hurried through life. I was always in a hurry to get to the next thing. I just knew that something better was waiting for me. But, when I was in my forties, I looked back and I saw that there had been good things to be enjoyed in every stage of my life, but I missed them, because I was looking forward to something better. If I had it to do over again, I would enjoy the good things that I had at the time, instead of looking for something better."

We don't have to wait for life to be good someday. Life is good right now.

Enjoy every moment of life. Whatever your circumstances, life is good. Enjoy every stage of life. Every stage of life has its special joys. Every stage of life has its challenges. Don't make the mistake of saying, "When I am one of the big kids I will be happy. When I get to high school, then I'll be happy. When I get married, then I'll be happy. When I am the president of the company, then I'll be happy. And on and on." Some people spend their whole lives planning on enjoying life someday and never get around to enjoying the goodness of life now.

Do you think life will be better someday? It won't. If you don't learn how to enjoy life at this stage of life, you won't enjoy life in the next stage of life. If you have learned to enjoy the blessings of life at this stage of life, you will enjoy the blessings of the next stage of life. They will not be better than the blessings of today. They will be as good. If you know that, when it comes time to leave the blessings of this phase of your life, you will do so gently and gracefully, knowing that good things await you in the next phase of your life.

Life is good right here and right now. Enjoy the blessings that come with the stage of life you are in now. Face the challenges with the confidence that God will give you the victories that will prepare you for the challenges of the next stage of your life. Enjoy the goodness of life now.

The second problem is that the things the world says will make your life good someday won't.

Some years ago Harold Kushner wrote a book entitled "When All You've Ever Wanted Wasn't Enough." He wrote it because people kept coming to him who were successful. They have achieved what they intended to achieve. And they found they still weren't happy.

The people of the world live unhappy lives, doing whatever is necessary to climb the ladder, believing that if they can reach a high enough level, then life will be good. If they can just get enough power, wealth, fame, respect, security, knowledge, then they can finally enjoy life. Many people have found that the problem with achieving their dreams is that it didn't make them as happy as they thought it would. It's because the promise of the world is not true. It's false advertising. It's a deception.

Christ has shown us the way to enjoy the goodness of life. Christ lives the very opposite of Satan. Christ had all the things the world teaches will bring the good life. Christ had the power and authority and glory. What did he do? He gave it all up to become one of us. He gave up everything, even life itself. Why? To give us life. Why would he do that? Because he gets far more pleasure out of seeing us enjoy life than he does from having power and authority.

Christ has shown us the true way to enjoying the goodness of life. The goodness of life is not to be found in gaining as much as you can, but in giving as much as you can. It is not found in lifting yourself up, but in lifting others up.

There's nothing wrong with being successful. The question is, what will you do with your success? Those who know the truth use it to benefit others.

I remember a preacher's meeting in which we did a values clarification exercise. Each of us was given a stack of cards. Each had a value, something that people want to gain. We were asked to place the cards in the order of the importance of the values. We went around the room and talked about what values were most important to us and why.

The last to speak was our District Superintendent. His name was Compton Riley. He was a great man in our conference. He died many years ago. Dr. Riley revealed that he had placed power as his greatest value. I thought to myself, "I knew it. He's just another power-hungry D.S." But Dr. Riley went on to say, "The more power I have, the more good I can do for others." And Dr. Riley did his best to help his preachers be effective in serving their churches, and he did his best to help the churches in his district be the best churches they could be.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to be successful, if you can escape the temptation of seeking success as an end in itself. If you are successful, use your success to benefit others.

Jesus said, "You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The truth is that life is best enjoyed when we share the goodness of life with others. That's the truth. When we truly understand believe that truth, it sets us free from the false illusions which the world uses to enslave us.

There are two paths that lie before us. We can't walk them both. We have to choose which direction our lives will go. There is the path of the world that says, "When you get enough of what this world has to offer for yourself, then life will be good."

Then there is the path of Christ, which says, "Life is good now. It's even better when you share the goodness of life with others."

When we have enough faith in Christ to follow the way of life he has shown us, then we are freed from the lie that has enslaved the world since the days of Adam. When we have enough faith to live a life of love, we have conquered the world.

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