

Sermon by A. N. Gilbert,

PREACHED IN THE CENTRAL ST. CHURCH OF
CHRIST, TORONTO, SUNDAY EVEN-
ING, JUNE 7TH, 1891

SUBJECT "The Fruits of Christian Victory."

"To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in that stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it. He that overcometh the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels. To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out, and I will write upon him a new name and the name of the city of my God, that is, the new Jerusalem which cometh down from heaven. He that overcometh and keepeth roy works unto the end will I give power over the nations, and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers, even as I received of my Father, I will give him the morning star; to him that overcometh will I give to sit with me on my throne even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne."

I have read a series of passages from the book of Revelation, that highly figurative book of the New Testament. In these passages, and in still others that might be named, we have presented to us the idea of a contest going on between God and a great enemy, going on between the servants of God, the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ and the servants of the great enemy of God. I do not pretend to say just what is the exact meaning of any other passage that is contained in Revelations xii., but in one passage is brought out very clearly this idea of a contest. We are told that they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the weight of their testimony, and that they loved not their lives unto the death. In the passages I have read we have presented to us the Fruits of Christian Victory, and we have there presented to us the means by which that contest is waged and that victory is won; first, the blood of the Lamb—the foundation of all victory, the source of forgiveness, of purity, of strength, the atoning of our Lord Jesus Christ, and secondly, the word of their testimony, that is their fidelity in word to the word of the living God. And third, self-sacrifice;—they loved not their lives unto the death. Faith, fidelity, self-denial, self-sacrifice. These are the means by which the contest is waged and the victory won. The beginning of victory is when we profess our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and take up his cross in baptism. This is a warfare; it is a campaign, not a battle; it is a series of battles. He who has entered into Christ has not finished the fight; he has only begun a series of contests that he has to wage with the evil one. He shall no sooner have entered into Christ than Satan shall endeavor to draw him away from Christ. No sooner had Jesus emerged from the waters of baptism, the Anointed One, than he is led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, and there through forty days of fasting, with a frame broken down, with a nervous system unstrung, emaciated, weak, he is called upon to meet the evil one and fight the same great battle that you and I are called upon to fight. He was victor in that contest.

I have said that the beginning of

this contest, of this triumph of the Christian is when he is confronted with the question, Will you confess the Saviour? Will you put yourself upon the side of Christ against the evil one? Will you march henceforth under the white banner of the Prince of Peace instead of under the black banner of the Prince of Evil? Under one or the other you march. Under the one or the other you fight. "He that is not for me is against me." These are the words of Jesus. There is no neutrality in this contest between Christ and the evil one. There is no half way ground between confession and denial; a refusal to confess is denial. A refusal to fight for Christ is to fight against him. Just here is the first battle fought. That battle is raging in the hearts of some in this audience to night. Your noblest impulses, your heart aspirations are impelling you to array yourself on the side of Jesus Christ, to stand for righteousness and truth instead of for the evil one and all the brood of iniquity that he represents. If Satan shall be victorious on this point, if you shall not be the victor in this battle, there are no battles beyond it. Satan will not annoy you, knowing that he has you and has you as his own. Oh, dear friend, I beseech you to see to it that you win the victory at this point, not because it will be a final contest, but because it is absolutely essential to the series of victories that shall eventuate in this magnificent result that I have read to you from the book of Revelation. Your heart in its best impulses is prompting you to come to Christ. I beseech you to come to Christ. Say to Satan, get thee behind me; I will have none of thee; Christ shall be my Lord, my Saviour and my Redeemer. And accordingly as the first great battle is fought and the victory secured we have the promise that meets us here. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth saving he which receiveth it."

"I will give him to eat of the hidden manna." There was a tradition among the Jews that Joshua had hidden manna that was once in the sacred inner room of the tabernacle, and that this would be restored when the Messiah would come. Simply a rabbinical tradition, and Jesus when he was upon this earth knew how to use these things which come to us in daily life as the vehicles of spiritual thought and teaching, and so upon Patmos to John he seizes upon this thought and says I will give to eat of the hidden manna. I speak the language of the heart of every true and devoted Christian here to night in the habit of having communion with God—I speak but the language of your hearts when I say that you have food to eat that the world knows not of, that you have eaten again and again of the hidden manna, that you have had hours of communion with God so exquisite, so sweet that human speech cannot describe them, that you have had comfort in affliction when this world was utterly unable to whisper one word of comfort, that you have had strength in trial when you would have failed otherwise. You have realized what the words of the Saviour mean, "I have meat to eat that you know not of." O, dear friends, I have stood in the home of poverty, by the side of the sick bed, by the side of those who seemed to lack all elements of earthly comfort, whose lot seemed to be utterly without alleviation, and I have sat by the side of such a couch looking into eyes that glauced with happiness that never belongs to the rich worldling; in the midst of poverty and suffering

rejoicing in the glory of God, and happy in that which would have overwhelmed the worldling in affliction. They were eating of the hidden manna; they had meat to eat that the world knew not of." "And I will give him a white stone."

What is the meaning of this beautiful figure? Among the ancients there was a custom of exchanging what were called the tessera of friendship or love. It was a little tablet made of wood or ivory or marble or perhaps gold or silver. On one side was inscribed the name of one friend, and on the other side was inscribed the name of the other. It was then broken in two and each of the friends received a half to retain. It was a pledge of love, a pledge that could be produced in years to come. Whenever produced, years it might be afterwards, it entitled him who produced it to the offices of friendship of him with whom it had been exchanged. Sometimes on the precious tablet not the ordinary name by which the friends were known to others would be inscribed, but a new name, a pet name, a love name, known only to themselves. O the beautiful thought that the Saviour presents to us in this. He presents himself in such intimacy of friendship and love that those that have given themselves to him have with him exchanged the tessera of friendship and that in all the emergencies of life he is to offer the sweet offices of his friendship and love. Sometimes I have thought it might be more specific. You know when the tablet is first broken in two the two sides of the fracture will exactly fit and thus the parts of the tessera are identified. Now the Saviour has presented to us as his choicest gift, death, burial and resurrection. The three great facts upon which rest all our hopes of the future, and when we are exchanging with him the tessera of affection, what do we present to him? Confessing his name before men, we die and are buried and rise again in the beautiful institution of baptism. It may be only a fancy, but the fracture just comes together; death, burial, resurrection from Christ to us; death, burial, resurrection from us to Christ.

"And in the stone a new name written." Jesus has a new name for those who give themselves to him. There is a sweetness, a richness, a beauty that makes it the sweetest name that sounds in the sinner's ears.

"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment." White raiment was the emblem of purity. The baptismal robes of the early centuries were white as the omblons of the purity of those who having gone into the baptismal waters in faith emerged cleansed from their sins in the blood of Christ, and John in this great book presents to us an immense multitude clothed in white raiment, palm branches in their hands, that is cleansed in the blood of Christ and victorious over the evil one. "I will not blot out his name." Alas, O alas, the implication, that some names may be, that some names will be blotted out! It is an awful thing to enter into the service of Christ and to go back. It is a terrible thing to have a crown of righteousness inscribed with our names and laid up in the treasures of heaven, and then to lose it. It is an awful thing to taste of the good word of life and then to lose its sweetness forever. But it is not a necessity. If we shall overcome, if we shall be faithful our names shall not be blotted out of the book of life, they shall be confessed before the Father and his angels.

When the first great Napoleon was on the throne of the Empire of France there used to take place occasionally in the city of Paris a most magnificent

pageant. There was a great field in the city called the Champ de Mars, the field of war, and upon certain days all the army within easy reach of Paris was brought into the city and drawn up in ranks in this great plain, and on one side of the plain was the throne of the emperor. There he sat, the cynosure of all eyes, and round him was gathered the splendid great of Paris, the marshals of the empire blazing with their decorations, the beauty and chivalry of France were there surrounding the imperial emperor, the most brilliant one in all Europe. Napoleon had learned the names of the soldiers that had distinguished themselves in battle, and when the time came the emperor arose and called out the names of those who were distinguished and confessed their names before that multitude of people as those who deserved well from the country. As they came before the space in front of the throne the emperor with his own hands placed on them the decoration of the Legion of Honor and proclaimed the deeds which they had achieved, and every man's soul swelled with emotion as that great emperor whom they almost adored decorated them thus before the assembly of beauty and chivalry of France. O, dear friends, there is to be a pageant of this world of ours by the side of which this shall sink into utter insignificance, when not the emperor of France, but the Emperor of the universe is to sit upon the throne, and side by side with him his august Son, when not the beauty and chivalry of earthly empire will surround, but the angels, the archangels and hierarchies of heaven are to surround the throne and make all radiant with beauty and splendor; when not the army of an empire, but the "nations of the earth" that have lived through the centuries of time are to stand in their armed ranks, and then Jesus Christ the Son of the living God is to confess aloud the names of those who have confessed his name when they were here upon the earth. O, does not your soul exult with the thought of that great glory? Him who confesses me before men will I confess before my Father and his holy angels. My brother and sister, it is worth all the labor, money, and self-denial you can exercise, all the self-sacrifice you can make, to stand in the midst of that throng and test the glorious sensation of that moment when Christ shall confess you before his Father and his holy angels.

All is now prepared for the grand entrance upon the eternal joy. Then books are opened; the name is found written in the book of life; it has been publicly announced by Jesus, the white raiment is upon them shining as the sun, the grand procession moves into the gates of the great city of God, and one of the first sights upon which I shall hope to gaze is the tree of life. Whoso ever eats of its fruit shall die no more. What we have been longing for but could not attain shall be ours. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God." No flaming sword now turning every way and warning men from the tree of life, no angel there to prevent us from partaking and renewing our youth, no clouds now between us and our God. The way to the tree of life is wide open. What we long for in this world is permanence. We have our hours of rich joys but they, alas! expire so soon. They are so fleeting. Smiles now, but the next hour tears flowing. Joy now, but the next hour sorrow and anguish bursting from the heart. O, we long so for permanent joys, but when we overcome these will trouble us no more.

"Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the house of his God. In

the ancient architecture, remember that a pillar was not mere ornament but an essential part of the construction, not a mere appendage but invaluable as the temple itself. The pillar the emblem of permanence. When it is declared that we shall be pillars in the house of our God it is to signify that our joys have begun and that they are to have no end. That which we longed for in life shall be ours permanently over. "And I will write upon him the name of my God." More than twenty years ago I was travelling in Europe and visited the city of Paris. The third Napoleon was then upon the throne. There were many magnificent public buildings there, and on them in the enduring stone were carved the monogram of the emperor. It was considered as a symbol of permanence. He expected to transmit his throne to his son and to his son's son. Only a few years passed, and if you had gone to the city of Paris you would have found that the buildings were there but that the monograms had disappeared, and there was in their stead the symbol of the republic. And so we work for permanence and think we have attained it, but our joys are fleeting. Do you know what the new name of Jesus is, this new name that is to shine from our brows and that is to be an eternal symbol of the permanence of our honors and joys? "King of kings and Lord of lords," the 19th of Revelation, 16th verse, declares to be the new name of Jesus Christ, and this is to be the name that will shine from our brows and secure to us the permanence of our joys. But Jesus draws his people still closer in these figurative promises. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne." O marvelous words! Surely your heart must thrill as you realize that these words are for you. We have had promised us the choicest food, the "hidden manna," the "white stone," the "white raiment," the book of record, the public acknowledgment, the permanent dwelling the identification by his name upon us, the delegated power over the nations; but at the close of the series, as though to give the highest possible idea of the future glory, no longer are we to be styled as the honored servant, no longer the trusted friend, no longer the powerful official, but in this last magnificent promise we are presented as the actual sharers in the kingly honors of the Son of the living God. We need not trouble ourselves with the question whether it is literal or figurative, whether there is an actual throne to sit upon, sufficient be it that the figure used by the Savior himself exhausts the possibilities of glory. We are to share the throne; we are to go no more out forever.

O that throne, its steps are blazing suns, its ornaments are solar systems, the flaming avenue that leads to it is paved with stars, around it circle ten thousand times ten thousand blazing angels, its choral harmonies are the music of the spheres, as incense there arises before it the adorning praises of a million worlds. Its occupant needs not to visit his empire, for his unlimited glance sweeps out to its remotest recesses. His power is so great that if this should be insufficient he can form another universe, and upon this throne, Jesus, the human Son of Mary but the divine Son of God, is set down with his Father side by side with him. Who does not grow breathless with wonder as he marks the figure by which the glory of our future is expressed. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit in my throne. Majestic thought. Do you say, where shall be the empire over which this mighty course shall rule? Ask the scientist of to-day as he adjusts his instrument that reaches