

What Now?

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father also loves the one born of him. ² This is how we know that we love God's children: when we love God and obey his commands. ³ For this is what love for God is: to keep his commands. And his commands are not a burden, ⁴ because everyone who has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith.

⁵ Who is the one who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? ⁶ Jesus Christ—he is the one who came by water and blood, not by water only, but by water and by blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. The Christian Standard Bible.

Let's say you just got word that you inherited one million dollars from a distant relative, and to top it off, that relative paid all the taxes on it already. That would be exciting. But what would you do? You don't let it sit there. You want to do something with it, but what? Maybe you want to share the wealth, so to speak, and take some of it and share it with charities, your church, your kids. Good. What about the rest? You have so many options. Maybe you want to set up a retirement fund. Maybe you want to set up a trust with it. Maybe there are some debts to retire. You should seek some professional help to guide you in the best way of investing and using that inheritance.

We just celebrated Easter. We saw Christ die on the cross and rise from the dead. That was last week. What now? It is good to seek some professional guidance. God has some excellent advice for us in our readings today, especially in our epistle reading in 1 John. Let's humble ourselves before God and pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we ask ourselves, "What now?" First, understand that we are part of a very special family.

I. God has made us a part of his family.

There is an organization out there called, "23 and Me." They use DNA testing to help you trace your ancestry for a fee, of course. They also help children find their parents. That is what Easter means to us. It means we have found our Father. **"¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God."** Any person who believes in Jesus Christ is now a child of God. They are now born of God. So when we pray, "Our Father," we mean it. This makes me think of John 3 when Nicodemus visited Jesus. It is there Jesus says something profound. No one can enter the Kingdom of God unless he is born again of water and the Spirit. That means if nothing happens to us, we will forever be outside the Kingdom of God. But we enter it when we are born again.

I dated a certain girl for a while in high school. She was Christian, but not Lutheran. She convinced me to attend a youth event with her and her family. It was pretty good. At the end they had what is known as an altar "call" where people can come to the stage and tell the audience when they had found Christ. I was tempted to go down and say, "August 12, 1962." Only I didn't find Christ then. That is when Christ found me. That is my Baptism date. That is what Jesus meant when he said born again of water and the Spirit. Something fascinating has happened to us. We were children of God. He created mankind in the Garden in his own image. But you know what happened. Mankind decided to obey and follow the devil and not God. By one man sin entered the world and death by sin. The devil ruled over us. Then Christ came. He crushed the devil's head on the cross. He rose from the dead and when we believe, we become once again the children of God.

And we have many brothers and sisters. **"¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father also loves the one born of him."** There is an assumption in this verse. Did you catch it? It assumes that believers love God the Father. That is true. If you don't, then you are not a believer. We love God more than anything else, more than our lives because of what he did for us in Christ. It also assumes we love every other believer, and not just the ones who sit at the dinner table with us, or sit in pew next to us, or in the sister church ten miles down the road. We love those gathering in a small hut in Africa or a tiny church in Mexico or in China, Cuba or Russia. The Bible calls it one body with Christ as its head. We call it the Invisible Church. We are family with every believer, closer in many ways than our earthly families.

Christ has risen. What now? Remember that his resurrection means we are part of a very special family. Good. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ. What now? God tells us: love all the others born of God. Of course, we are to love everyone, even our enemies. This doesn't mean we stop loving them. In fact, because of Christ we can start loving them. But this focuses our attention on our brothers and sisters, the family of God. Love them.

II. Love them by obeying the commands of God.

"² This is how we know that we love God's children: when we love God and obey his commands. ³ For this is what love for God is: to keep his commands. And his commands are not a burden, ⁴ because everyone who has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith."

How do I know I love my fellow believers? When you love God. And how do you know you love God? When you do what he says. You know the Ten Commandments. But you can summarize them into two commandments. Love God, Commandments

1-3, and then love your neighbor, commandments 4-10. Did you know you can summarize them even further? Romans 13 tells us: ***“Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”*** Did you think of them that way, that the Commandments show us how to love? Want to love your neighbor? Then don’t steal from him, or kill him or take his wife as your own. The Commandments are good. Who in their right mind can say they are not? Look at the Fourth telling children to obey their parents. It will go well for them and they will live long on the earth. That makes sense. If children listened carefully to the instruction they get from their parents, of course things will go well. Look at the rest. The Fifth tells us not to murder. It also tells us not to do anything that may hurt or harm our neighbor. The sixth protects marriage. The Seventh protects property. Again, don’t steal, but it also means to do all we can to help neighbor keep his property and improve it like calling the fire department when we see smoke coming out of the garage. They even nip things at the bud. The Ninth and Tenth Commandments tell us not to covet, i.e., to have that discontented feeling where you are unhappy with what you have and really want what your neighbor has. If you can recognize that and say no to coveting, imagine how many thefts and robberies that will not happen?

Can you imagine what will happen to crime, domestic abuse, marriages, the murder rate and so on if people made a real effort to keep these commandments? Yes, we are often scared of the Commandments. They are the Law. They tell us what it means to be holy and when we sin. They demand absolute perfection, and if you can’t reach their perfect goals, we fall short of God’s glory. That is the main reason God gives them to us. They are a mirror to show us what is wrong. A young man asked Jesus how he can enter heaven. To show him there is nothing he can do, Jesus told him to do what the commandments require. Jesus wanted the man to look into the law so he sees his sin and then see a need for a Savior. The Law makes us ready for the gospel of Christ. He came to do what we can’t, to live that holy life according to the Commandments, and so that our sins can’t get in the way, he endured the punishment for them on the cross.

Yes, the Law is a mirror to show our sins. But in the hands of a believer it becomes a guide, a way to truly love our neighbor. And to the believer who loves God, the law is not a burden. If I told you that you have to carry sixty pounds for the next three days, you will grumble and complain. But if we went hiking in the Rockies and we each carried sixty pounds of food, camp gear, stoves, clothes, etc., we would gladly do it. If I told you that you have to sit for an hour with a bag of softener salt on your lap, you would grumble. But if you had your granddaughter sleeping on your lap for an hour, you would love it. What was once a burden becomes a joy. That is what Christ does for us. The burden of the law is lifted in the hands of a believer. We want to carry it, live it, do it because we love God and we love our fellow believers.

And there is one more reason. ***“³For this is what love for God is: to keep his commands. And his commands are not a burden,⁴ because everyone who has been born of God conquers the world. This is the victory that has conquered the world: our faith. ⁵Who is the one who conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? ⁶Jesus Christ—he is the one who came by water and blood, not by water only, but by water and by blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.”*** An airplane sitting on the runway just sits there. It can’t fly because of gravity. But if you rev up the engine and put a capable pilot at the wheel, watch that plane fly. The engine and the wing design overcome gravity and the plane is free to fly.

That is what has happened to us. We have conquered the world because of Christ. We are no longer trapped on it like how gravity keeps a plane on the ground. We are free to do unworldly things, free to stop hating, stealing, cheating, being unhappy or discontented. We are free to love purely for love’s sake and not to get something in return. We are free to obey the commandments and not to regard them as a burden. We are free because we are born of God the Father. We are no longer children of this world. And one day we will see that victory as each of our graves opens up. We have overcome the world because we believe in Jesus, who by the water of his baptism started his ministry to save the world, and by his blood on the cross where he defeated sin, death and the devil, by faith in him we overcome the world.

So Easter is over. What now? Don’t just sit there. Don’t let Easter fade into the past. Why not go on living, living by faith in Jesus, living as the children of God, living with and loving our fellow believers, and living as conquerors who have overcome the world? Amen.