

Against the World

by Charles Spurgeon

We know there have been great battles where nations have met in strife, and one has overcome the other; but who has read of a victory that overcame the world? Some will say that Alexander was its conqueror; but I answer, nay. He was himself the vanquished man, even when all things were in his possession. He fought for the world, and won it; and then mark how it mastered its master, conquered its conqueror, and lashed the monarch who had been its scourge. See the royal youth weeping, and stretching out his hands with idiotic cries, for another world which he might ravage. He seemed, in outward show, to have overcome Old Earth; but, in reality, within his inmost soul, the earth had conquered him, had overwhelmed him, had wrapped him in the dream of ambition, girdled him with the chains of covetousness, so that when he had all, he was still dissatisfied; and, like a poor slave, was dragged on at the chariot wheels of the world, crying, moaning, lamenting, because he could not win another. Who is the man that ever overcame the world? Let him stand forward: he is a Triton among the minnows; he shall outshine Caesar; he shall outmatch even our Wellington, if he can say he has overcome the world. It is so rare a thing, a victory so prodigious, a conquest so tremendous, that he who can claim to have won it may walk among his fellows, like Saul, with head and shoulders far above them. He shall command our respect; his very presence shall awe us into reverence; his speech shall persuade us to obedience; and, yielding honour to whom honour is due, we'll say when we listen to his voice, "Tis even as if an angel shook his wings."

The Christian overcomes the world. A tough battle: not one which carpet knights might win: no easy skirmish that he might win, who dashed to battle on some sunny day, looked at the host, then turned his courser's rein, and daintily dismounted at the door of his silken tent—not one which he shall gain, who, but a raw recruit today, puts on his regimentals, and foolishly imagines that one week of service will ensure a crown of glory. Nay, it is a life-long war—a fight needing the power of all these muscles, and this strong heart; a contest which shall want all our strength, if we are to be triumphant; and if we do come off more than conquerors, it shall be said of us, as Hart said of Jesus Christ; "He had strength enough and none to spare;" a battle at which the stoutest heart might quail; a fight at which the bravest might shake, if he did not remember that the Lord is on his side, and therefore, whom shall he fear? He is the strength of his life; of whom shall he be afraid? This fight with the world is not one of main force, or physical might; if it were, we might soon win it; but it is all the more dangerous from the fact that it is a strife of mind, a contest of heart, a struggle of the spirit, a strife of the soul. When we overcome the world in one fashion, we have not half done our work; for the world is a Proteus, changing its shape continually; like the chameleon, it hath all the colours of the rainbow; and when you have worsted the world in one shape, it will attack you in another. Until you die, you will always have fresh appearances of the world to wrestle with.

We rebel against the world's customs. And if we do so, what is the conduct of our enemy? She changes her aspect. "That man is a heretic; that man is a fanatic; he is a cant, he is a hypocrite," says the world directly. She grasps her sword, she putteth frowns upon her brow, she scowleth like a demon, she girdeth tempests round about her, and she saith, "The man dares defy my government; he will not do as others do. Now I will persecute him. Slander! come from the depths of hell and hiss at him. Envy! sharpen up thy tooth and bite him." She fetches up all false things, and she persecutes the man. If she can, she does it with the hand; if not, by the tongue. She afflicts him wherever he is.

She tries to ruin him in business; or if he standeth forth as the champion of the truth, why then she laugheth, and mocketh, and scorneth. She lets no stone be unturned whereby she may injure him. What is then the behaviour of the Lord's warrior, when he sees the world take up arms against him, and when he sees all earth, like an army, coming to chase him, and utterly destroy him? Does he yield? Does he yield? Does he bend? Does he cringe? Oh, no! Like Luther, he writes "Cedo nulli" on his banner—"I yield to none;" and he goes to war against the world, if the world goes to war against him.

The true-born child of God cares little for man's opinion. "Ah," says he, "let my bread fail me, let me be doomed to wander penniless the wide world o'er; yea, let me die: each drop of blood within these veins belongs to Christ, and I am ready to shed it for His name's sake." He counts all things but loss, that he may win Christ—That he may be found in Him, and when the world's thunders roar, he smiles at the uproar, while he hums his pleasant tune. When her sword comes out, he looketh at it. "Ah," saith he, "just as the lightning leapeth from its thunder lair, splitteth the clouds, and affrighteth the stars, but is powerless against the rock-covered mountaineer, who smiles at its grandeur, so now the world cannot hurt me, for in the time of trouble my Father hides me "in His pavillion, in the secret of His tabernacle doth He hide me, and set me upon a rock." Thus, again, we conquer the world, by not caring for its frowns.

"Well," saith the world, "I will try another style," and this, believe me, is the most dangerous of all. A smiling world is worse than a frowning one. She saith, "I cannot smite the man low with my repeated blows, I will take off my mailed glove, and showing him a fair, white hand, I'll bid him kiss it. I will tell him I love him: I will flatter him, I will speak good words to him." John Bunyan well describes this Madam Bubble: she has a winning way with her; she drops a smile at the end of each of her sentences; she talks much of fair things, and tries to win and woo. Oh, believe me, Christians are not so much in danger when they are persecuted as when they are admired. When we stand upon the pinnacle of popularity, we may well tremble and fear. It is not when we are hissed at, and hooted, that we have any cause to be alarmed; it is when we are dandled on the lap of fortune, and nursed upon the knees of the people; it is when all men speak well of us, that woe is unto us. It is not in the cold, wintry wind that I take off my coat of righteousness, and throw it away; it is when the sun comes, when the weather is warm, and the air balmy, that I unguardedly strip off my robes, and become naked. Good God! how many a man has been made naked by the love of this world! The world has flattered and applauded him; he has drunk the flattery; it was an intoxicating draught; he has staggered, he has reeled, he has sinned, he has lost his reputation; and as a comet that erst flashed across the sky, doth wander far into space, and is lost in darkness, so doth he; great as he was, he falls; mighty as he was, he wanders, and is lost. But the true child of God is never so; he is as safe when the world smiles, as when it frowns; he cares as little for her praise as for her dispraise. If he is praised, and it is true, he says, "My deeds deserve praise, but I refer all honour to my God. " Great souls know what they merit from their critic; to them it is nothing more than the giving of their daily income. Some men cannot live without a large amount of praise; and if they have no more than they deserve, let them have it. If they are children of God, they will be kept steady; they will not be ruined or spoiled; but they will stand with feet like hinds' feet upon high places,—"This is the victory that overcometh the world."

Sometimes, again, the world turns jailer to a Christian. God sends affliction and sorrow, until life is a prison-house, the world its jailer—and a wretched jailer too. Have you ever been in trials and troubles, my friends? and has the world never come to you, and said, "Poor prisoner, I have a key

that will let you out. You are in pecuniary difficulties; I will tell you how you may get free. Put that Mr. Conscience away. He asks you whether it is a dishonest act. Never mind about him; let him sleep; think about the honesty after you have got the money, and repent at your leisure." So saith the world; but you say, "I cannot do the thing." "Well" says the world, "then groan and grumble: a good man like you locked up in this prison!" "No," says the Christian, "my Father sent me into want, and in His own time He will fetch me out; but if I die here I will not use wrong means to escape. My Father put me here for my good, I will not grumble; if my bones must lie here if my coffin is to be under these stones if my tombstone shall be in the wall of my dungeon—here will I die, rather than so much as lift a finger to get out by unfair means." "Ah," says the world, "then thou art a fool." The scorner laughs and passes on, saying, "The man has no brain, he will not do a bold thing; he has no courage; he will not launch upon the sea; he wants to go in the old beaten track of morality." Ay, so he does; for thus he overcomes the world.

I might tell of battles that have been fought. There has been many a poor maiden, who has worked, worked, worked, until her fingers were worn to the bone, to earn a scanty living out of the things which we wear upon us, knowing not that oftentimes we wear the blood, and bones, and sinews of poor girls. That poor girl has been tempted a thousand times, the evil one has tried to seduce her, but she has fought a valiant battle; stern in her integrity, in the midst of poverty she still stands upright, "Clear as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners," a heroine unconquered by the temptations and enticements of vice. In other cases: many a man has had the chance of being rich in an hour, affluent in a moment, if he would but clutch something which he dare not look at, because God within him said, "No! The world said, "Be rich, be rich;" but the Holy Spirit said, "No! be honest; serve thy God." Oh, the stern contest, and the manly combat carried on within the heart! But he said, "No; could I have the stars transmuted into worlds of gold, I would not for those globes of wealth belie my principles, and damage my soul: " thus he walks a conqueror. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

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