

# The Victor! Sin Defeated

April 2, 2021

John 19 and other texts

As we come to this Easter weekend, I'd like to spend my time with you contemplating Jesus as the Victor, and in this context He was the Victor over sin (tonight) and the Victor over death (Sunday). I'm drawing from John's account of the death and resurrection of Jesus as well as other texts that build on this same theme.

I draw the sense of Jesus as the Victor from my understanding of the Psalms. If you remember, so many of the Psalms are dedicated to either the choirmaster, or the director of music or some such inscription, and yet the word there is not really known. And in actuality, the original word probably could just as easily be translated as "to the Victorious One who comes at the end" or in my paraphrase, "to the Victor!" And, sure enough, all of such psalms point us either directly or indirectly to Jesus. From my perspective, these psalms are specifically meant to point us to the Christ as the Victor. And in this regard, they so often point us to His completed work, His death, even His resurrection. So, it seems appropriate to see the death and resurrection of Jesus through the lens of the Victor. He won!

Tonight we take on the victory over sin. Jesus' death on the cross accomplished the needed, necessary victory over sin, not only for Himself but for all of those who are His followers. In other words, His death, though tragic and undeserved, accomplished the greatest mission ever set forth by the plan of God. He died as an acceptable sacrifice, reversing the consequences of the mankind's culpability for all of their sin if they only trust Him to do so. He does the impossible. He does what only He could do. Hear once more John's account of the crucifixion of Jesus. READ John 19:16-30.

Main point: In living a complete life without sin, Jesus defeated sin's curse on all who put their trust in Him.

I think especially of the final words of Jesus that we just read, “It is finished!” There is much in such a short phrase. It points to victory, not defeat. He was not announcing His death or a giving up. Instead, it announces the completion of the mission, the defeat of the one who sought His demise. He won the war! It was a declaration of victory. He won. We might say it as, “Game over!”

So, as we contemplate Jesus’ victory over sin in these next few minutes, I ask you to keep in your mind His declaration of victory as His last words. As He died, Jesus declared victory! (2 parts)

I. Jesus’ victory was over an enemy “all in” to bring Him down.

This battle had been brewing since the Garden of Eden, indeed since the even earlier battle in heaven that condemned satan and kicked him and his followers out of heaven. Since those earliest events, everything has been pointing to this exact moment when Jesus would either be defeated or be able to declare victory and accomplish the impossible. But first He had to win the war!

I pick it up in the Garden, on the heels of mankind’s first sin. Before God even addressed the consequences of that sin with Adam and Eve, He pronounced the curse on satan, the serpent. He was to go from the highest created being of all time to the lowest created being of all time. And, one day, there would be One sent from God, the Seed of the woman, who would crush the serpent’s head in an event where the Seed would suffer as well. There it is, the flow of Scripture points us directly to the scene at the cross.

Ever since then, mankind’s hopes have been pinned to that day when the serpent’s head would be crushed by the Son of the woman. Satan’s power over mankind hinged on that event. Until that point, satan could enslave people in their sin. If the Savior was successful, such enslavement could be stopped. Mankind’s eternal destiny was directly tied to the crushing of the head of the Serpent.

Indeed, the main message of the Old Testament is that mankind needs what he cannot provide. There has to be an atoning for all of that sin, but mankind

collectively and every person individually fails to meet the standard to accomplish the task. There had to be an approved sacrificial death. No animal death would suffice. No “every week” sacrifice, no “all we have” sacrifice or offering would do it. There were no Saviors in all of those generations, not Abraham, not Moses, not David. They all showed themselves to be sinners who sinned and they themselves needed a Savior, an atoning sacrifice for their sin. No one qualified, only the promised Seed of the woman could accomplish the task. That message is clear from the beginning to the end of Scripture: there neither was, nor is, nor will ever be an alternative to Jesus’ mission to defeat sin. This one time event is mankind’s only hope.

So, let’s skip forward to Jesus’ conception and birth. It is in the birth of the Victor where we encounter the point at which every single other possibility has fallen short...and everyone knows it. David himself declared that he was conceived in sin, the son of a sinner father. All since Adam and Eve have been conceived and born with sin. We have received a sin nature, and with it a propensity to sin from our fathers. No, this Seed of the woman would have to be born without a sin nature, with no earthly father...and He was with the virgin birth. So far so good. But even at birth, satan devised plans to take Jesus out. King Herod was willing to kill all of the baby boys in his kingdom just so he could eliminate this threat and he had the power to carry it out. The mission was almost wiped out at the very beginning. But God protected His Savior Son by leading Him and His family to Egypt. When it was safe, they returned.

Again, fast forward to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Satan determines to pounce on Jesus at a vulnerable point: a time of preparation in the desert. He tempts Jesus with pride, power, provisions. And yet, Jesus resisted all of those temptations. He handled them in ways we would have not. His mission was still intact. He remained sinless. Then, as He went about His Father’s mission, the enemy set traps at each step along the way, by sending people to bring Him down. He sent religious people to try to trap Him with difficult situations where any answer would have been the wrong answer. Jesus turned all of them around on them.

He sent a traitor among His most trusted disciples, Judas. He sent crowds of people to either wear Him down or instill in Him a sense of pride. (I think of

the time the crowd tried to “take Him by force to make him king” Jn. 6:15). He sent storms on the high seas and spirits who tried to disrupt His teaching. There was a prostitute who showed Him how much she loved Him by rubbing His feet and anointing Him with expensive perfume. There was even the time when satan spoke through one of Jesus’ trusted disciples to attempt to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem (Mark 8:33). But Jesus called him out, “Get behind Me, satan!” Yes, Jesus was tempted in every way that we are yet without sin.

He could have fled like Jonah, cursed God like Job’s wife encouraged Job to do, gotten angry like Moses, or lusted after his neighbor’s wife like David. But He withstood all of those things for the sake of the mission, all the way to the end.

We know the temptation to quit was real and powerful, Jesus actually prayed to that end in the garden, “Father, all things are possible for You. Remove this cup from me.” But even this request was put into proper context with the next statement, “Yet not what I will, but what you will!” Again, Jesus passed the test. He could have taken up arms like one of His disciples who cut off the servant’s ear or struck back when the officer of the Chief Priest slapped Him. He could have rightfully defended Himself before His accusers, He could have made a deal with Pilate. But He did not fall to any of those temptations as we all would have. He was focused on finishing His mission faithfully and completely. He could have spoken in anger or harbored ill toward those who beat Him, mocked Him, spit on Him, jammed a crown of thorns upon His head.

Instead, He willingly walked to the place of His execution, carrying the very instrument upon which He would hang. Did you notice in the passage we read from John’s gospel that the soldiers divided up His garments? Included in that account is the quotation of prophecy, “They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.” Do you know where that quotation came from? Psalm 22, dedicated to the Victor. This would be one of the many ways you could identify the Victor. Indeed, if you were to read Psalm 22, you would have a running account of Jesus’ crucifixion from the very first words of the psalm to the very last words, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” And “It is finished!”

There, hanging on the cross, Jesus was not cursing God or cursing His enemies. No, He was taking care of His mother, committing Himself to His Father's care, asking for something to drink, and pleading for forgiveness for those who were killing Him. No, Jesus was faithful to the end. He did not waver, shrink back, fall into temptation, use His unlimited power to deliver Himself from the situation. He didn't strike back, lash out, run away, or blow His top. He simply patiently endured to the end, bore the pain, gave Himself for His people. He did it. He ended His life having committed no sin, having left nothing undone that He should have done. He fulfilled the mission checklist. He defeated sin. He was the Victor, declaring such as His last dying words, "It is finished!"

II. As the perfect sacrifice, Jesus' death provided the means for sin to be defeated in us.

We have been focusing on Jesus' completion of the sinless life as He hung on the cross. He finished His life having NEVER sinned, either by birth or by action, either in deed, word or thought, either by doing things He should NOT have done or not doing things He should have done. He did it. He proved the point that a faithful man could enter into satan's territory, withstand his full on attempt to bring him down by trusting in His heavenly Father to protect, provide, and guide. And on the cross He finished the mission. But now, we focus on how His death has profound implications for us, providing the means for us to receive what we cannot provide for ourselves: the overcoming of the consequences of our sin. His victory over sin means we can have victory over sin.

You see, He did not just die as an innocent man, a sinless man. He died as a perfect sacrifice. He died as a fulfillment of all that was required and pointed to by all of those Old Testament laws, by all of those laws about burnt offerings, sin offerings, blood offerings, guilt offerings, sacrifices of blood, bulls, goats, lambs, firstfruits, grains, Passover lambs, scapegoats, firstborn sons and so many more. All of them point to Jesus, none of them could be fulfilled by anyone or anything else. Nothing worked to get rid of sin except for the sacrifice of Jesus and the pouring out of His lifeblood. Without such a shedding of blood, there IS NO forgiveness of sin! As the author of the book of Hebrews teaches, we know that a better sacrifice, a perfect sacrifice was necessary because under the old system such offerings and sacrifices had to be continually made. If

they worked, they would not have to be repeated. They only worked because they were just a temporary and partial solution. So, everyone knew, everyone knows that sinners have a sin problem. The Bible puts in the terms of righteousness.

As many of you have become quite accustomed with me by now, we must see our sin problem in terms of righteousness. I like to think of righteousness as this invisible STUFF that you must have to be right before God. You HAVE to have it, righteousness. But since we are all sinners, we have NONE of it. None of us is righteous, no not one. Therefore, we cannot produce righteousness, stuff that makes us right before God. None of us is capable of doing anything righteous...because we are sinners doing it. In fact, we all have an abundance of the exact opposite of righteousness, we have unrighteousness. We all have an abundance of unrighteousness. And God's standards for unrighteousness is that we cannot have ANY. I think of unrighteousness as the stain that remains on us, the stains that come from blood guilt, and we can't get it off. There is no soap on earth that can cleanse us from blood guilt. We can't hide it, scrape it off, cut off the limb where we see it, carry enough stuff with us that God will forget it is there. The result of sin is unrighteousness and all of us have it. THAT is our sin problem!

And that brings us to the good news that is the completed work of Jesus on the cross. His bodily sacrifice, His shed lifeblood takes away sin! It removes the blood stains, completely. It is not like a bandage that covers it, hides it. No, it removes such stains from us as far as the east is from the west. When we trust Jesus to deal with our sin, Scripture says He forgives us our sin and cleanses us from ALL unrighteousness. It is gone!

Further, in place of the unrighteousness, Jesus gives us some of His righteousness. He and He alone has righteousness to give. Abraham does not have righteousness to give, Moses doesn't have any, nor David, nor Isaiah or Elijah. Peter doesn't have any, nor Mary or any of the saints of old. Only Jesus has righteousness to share. And He promises to give us as much as we need. He never runs out. You can't out sin His grace, His mercy, His righteousness. So, He gets rid of the bad and replaces it with the good. He takes away what we

cannot have in the presence of Holy God and gives us what we MUST have before Holy God. Isn't that good news?

So what's the catch? There has to be a catch. There's always a catch, right? Well, there is a catch. Jesus' solution to our sin problem might be available to all, but not all will take advantage of it. In fact, the way Jesus put it in the Sermon on the Mount is that few will find it, many will end up on the road to destruction. There will even be many who will think they have it, many will complain that they thought they did everything right, or enough right to just sneak in. But that is the whole problem. They will think that because they are sure of themselves. They will be convinced that THEY were good, or not too bad, or did enough good things or didn't do too many bad things. They will be counting on their own righteousness. The Bible calls such people self-righteous. They will be tragically and sadly wrong.

Instead, the path to righteousness is through faith in Jesus, entrusting your status before God to Jesus and Jesus alone. God said that such faith will substitute for righteousness with Him. It is not as if belief in Jesus is itself a righteous deed. No, God said He will credit it to us AS IF it was righteousness. In other words, to give more honor to His Son, He will count it toward us if we believe in His Son Jesus. I don't know about you, but I see that as really, really good news.

So, how much belief do we have to have in Jesus? A boatload or a mustard seed? A lifetime or a dying declaration like the thief on the cross. Again, the good news is that there is no quantity or longevity standard. Instead, it's an "I'm all in" standard. It's a standard that says, "If not for Jesus, I'm toast!" I'm willing to stake my eternal destiny on His declared victory over sin when He died as a sacrifice for MY sin. I'm willing to make such a declaration. How about you?

Can you see that this puts nothing on us and everything on Him? By definition it does that. When I declare that I am completely dependent on Him to save me from my sin problem, by definition it puts everything on Him and nothing on me. I can't add to His work. I can't add anything of my own. No, complete dependence is what we are declaring. He declares that it is finished and we declare that we are totally dependent on that being true. That is the catch!

Now, to be sure, such a scenario doesn't change just a few things. That changes everything. It means we quit trying to earn God's approval. It means we start embracing our new identity. It means He is our Lord, our boss, and we listen to what He says. It means we approach Him, not in fear and trembling, but in the highest of humility and thankfulness. It means we start living as He has called us and empowered us to live and fight in His style against the enemy who still seeks our destruction. We live not as good people but as a freed people, followers, disciples of Jesus Christ.

And so, tonight, we once again remember the event at the center, the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, the event where He defeated death. And now we mark that event in a way He told us to do: we one more time declare that Jesus' sacrifice and blood offering are good enough for me by taking simple bread and simple grape juice and we publicly eat it, drink it to His honor, to His glory. We don't do this so that we can be right before Him. We do this BECAUSE we are right with Him. We do this as a remembrance of the central core of our faith, that Jesus died on that cross to pay the price of all of our sin. He did it, He declared victory, and we are declaring that we are trusting that to be true.

In our tradition, our celebration of communion is open to all who can honestly make such a declaration, whether young or old, long time member or first time visitor. But it is only for believers, for followers of Jesus. If this is you, we invite you to participate with us. If it is not yet you, we invite you to talk with us about it. We'd love to have THAT conversation. Followers of Jesus, welcome to the table!