

72 – Christ’s Victory

John 12: 31

On Sunday, five days before He was crucified, Jesus said this: “Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out” (Jn 12:31).

This world is under God’s judgment because of sin, and the “ruler of this world” is the devil. So on that day Jesus was announcing that His death on the cross and His resurrection would potentially release all humans from these two forms of bondage: the judgment of God and the control of the devil. He was announcing that He had come, like a warrior, to set us free from condemnation and bondage.

On this “resurrection day,” as we celebrate Jesus’ victory over death, we need to realize that His victory means our victory. Through His cross and resurrection a great spiritual transaction took place: The barrier of sin that prevented God from helping us was removed, so that He could be merciful to us and give us an entirely new dimension of God’s Spirit so that the devil’s control over us would be broken. The cross removed our condemnation, and the resurrection released God’s power. When we put our full trust in Jesus Christ; when we completely surrender our will to Him and let Him become our Lord; when we receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit whom the Father has freely given to us in Christ, everything changes. The forces that tried to ruin us in the past don’t cease to exist, but they have been defeated. As we learn to lay hold of Christ’s victory we discover that we are, at least, able to begin walking on the path God planned for us before we were born. We discover who we really are. An entirely new person emerges who makes very different choices and pursues very different goals. Finally we are able to act like the son or daughter whom God saw when He fearfully and wonderfully formed us in our mother’s womb (Ps 139:13-16). Until a person has been set free from the condemnation that their sin has brought upon them; until a person has been set free from the deception and oppression hurled at us by “the ruler of this world”; until a person has been set free from the cravings, passions and confused thinking that arise from these dying bodies we live in; and until a person has been set free from the anxiety and depression that haunts us because of our fear of death (Heb 2:15), a person is unable to experience what it means to be “His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). But once Christ’s victory is released in that person’s life, once those forces that held us have lost their grip, God immediately goes to work healing, restoring, guiding, training, correcting, disciplining, teaching, comforting and strengthening until we become who we were meant to become.

There are no exceptions to this process of restoration. No one is too old or too young. No one has sinned so badly that God cannot rescue the design He placed in that heart. Yes, we might end up being who we were called to be in jail, or in the midst of a family that our past behavior devastated, or in a body that’s been damaged by neglect or terrible choices, but the gifts and calling of God are not changed by our circumstances (Ro 11:29). Like seed planted in good soil they instinctively begin to emerge, and we learn to express them in whatever opportunities we have left, that is until we ourselves are resurrected into the new bodies that Christ’s victory has made possible. Then someday we will step into a whole new season of ministry as His representatives in the new kingdom of God (Rev 20:6).

Liberating the captives (Lk 4:14-21)

Early in His ministry Jesus returned to the small worker-village where He grew up, called Nazareth. His step-father and mother had moved there when He was very young, and because He had been raised in a devout family, He had regularly attended that synagogue. So on the Sabbath He went in to worship and was asked to speak to the congregation. He was handed the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, and He scanned through it until He came to the passage that said this:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord” (Lk 4:18-19; Isa 61:1; 35:5).

Then Luke tells us He closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And He began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (vs20-21). What He meant by that statement was, “I am the Person about whom Isaiah was prophesying. I am the Christ, the Messiah, and I have come to do those things for you.” He had recently been baptized by John (the Baptist) in the Jordan River, and when He came up out of the water the Holy Spirit had come down from heaven like a dove and rested upon Him (Mt 3:16). At that moment the Father had empowered Him to fulfill this assignment. So He explained to His home synagogue that He had been sent to preach a message of hope to people who were spiritually hopeless; that He had been sent to proclaim release to people who were held in bondage; that He had been sent to reveal the true path to salvation to those who had never understood it; that He had been sent to proclaim freedom to those who had become prisoners; and that He had been sent to tell people that a season had arrived in which God would be amazingly merciful to anyone who would repent.

But none of that good news would be possible without the cross and resurrection. Jesus Himself would have to provide the victory that would set people free from those enemies.

Defeated enemies

The Bible mentions four powerful forces that have captured the human race. No one is exempt. They afflict all of us, but as we’ll see, Christ’s victory has made it possible for us to escape from their control. Here’s a list of those four enemies and an explanation of how Jesus has given us victory over them:



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1) Sin: The separation between God and humans began in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve were given a choice of whether to let God be the One who decides what is right and wrong, or whether they would decide right and wrong for themselves. By leaving the fruit on the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" they were saying, "God, we submit to You, and will obey what You ask us to do." By picking and eating the fruit they were saying, "God, we have decided to make our own moral choices, based on our own wisdom." We all know the choice they made. They picked the fruit and ate it, and immediately their relationship with God changed. That action started the problem. The relationship God had with humans became distant, and the impulse to be independent and rebellious was passed down from one generation to the next. A barrier of sin, like a wall, went up between us and God, so that the help and blessings He wanted to give us couldn't happen. Yes, God was still there but not in the close, beautiful way He was supposed to be, not in the way we needed Him. And the worst part of it all was that when we died, we would still be separated from Him forever.

By His cross, Jesus defeated the power of sin. He bore our guilt so that the barrier that had arisen between us and our heavenly Father could be removed. God could draw close to us once again, bringing with Him the help we so desperately needed. With God in our lives, in His rightful place as our Lord, we can heal and make good choices. The damage begun in the Garden of Eden is ended. We've put the fruit of the "knowledge of good and evil" back on the tree. God is again, our God.

2) Devil: You'll recall that Jesus called this fallen angel, "the ruler of this world," but the devil is not the rightful ruler, God is. The devil must steal his power. He gains control over the human race, which God intended to rule the planet, by tempting and deceiving us. By encouraging us to sin we fall back into shame and bondage, and through deception he leads us to believe lies about God, ourselves and others. He and the demonic host that serve him really do exist, and if allowed to have their way will enslave us until we do, say and think things that we never thought possible.

By His cross and resurrection, Jesus not only forgave our sins, but He granted us spiritual authority. He gave us the privilege to stand "in His name" to bind the enemy's power. He said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18), and then told us to "go!" and said He would always be with us. The devil is a very real and terrible force, but as the apostle John told us, "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world (the devil)" (1Jn 4:4).

3) Flesh: When Jesus saves us our human spirit becomes new. We now love God and want to please Him, but until the day comes when we are resurrected into new eternal bodies, we still have to live in these old fleshly bodies of ours. They aren't new yet; they still contain old appetites, emotions, impulses, weariness, illness, memories, and even old ways of thinking that are still wired into our brains. Paul described our predicament this way: "If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness" (Ro 8:10). The new you must learn to rule over your old flesh. But Jesus' resurrection has given us the power to do that. Listen:

"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal (dying) bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you" (Ro 8:11).

That means that the same power that raised Jesus' dead body back to life, in fact to a new, immortal level of life, lives inside us and will help us "put to death" (Ro 8:13) the wrong impulses of our flesh and empower us to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit. We are not slaves to our bodies anymore.

4) Death: Jesus is the first human being to escape the grip of death, and because you and I are joined to Him by faith, the moment He escaped from death, we escaped with Him. Listen, again, to Paul:

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Ro 6:3-4).

A deep awareness now fills our heart, that death is not the end, that we will only step through a veil into a new, higher level of existence. None of us wants to go through the process of dying, but the fear of death is gone (Heb 2:15). We live with a different perspective: Life for us has just begun.

Conclusion

So, there are our enemies: sin, the devil, our flesh and death. Each has the power to destroy us, but by His death and resurrection Jesus has defeated every one. Christ's victory is our victory.

"Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Co 15:57).

Hallelujah! His is risen!

Questions

- 1) Pick one of those four enemies and tell us how Jesus has given you victory over it.
- 2) God always begins the process of healing our lives by restoring our relationship with Him. When did you first trust Jesus as your Savior?