

Easter Sunday - 2017

"Victory"

Text: 1 Corinthians 15:57-58

*"Awake my heart with gladness, see what today is done;
Now after gloom and sadness, comes forth the glorious Sun.
My Savior there was laid, where our bed must be made
When to the realms of light our spirit wings its flight.*

*The Foe in triumph shouted, when Christ lay in the tomb
But, lo, he now is routed, his boast is turned to gloom,
For Christ again is free; in glorious victory
He who is strong to save has triumphed o'er the grave!" (TLH 192)*

Dear Fellow Christians:

Victory! That is what we celebrate on this day – Jesus' victory, which God in his Word assures us is also *our* victory.

There is in fact something exciting about the very word, the very sound of it – Victory! It somehow seems to indicate more than simply winning. You "win" a hand of cards or a game of checkers. Victory indicates something more. The word itself typically indicates a triumph won at great cost after a long hard struggle. Everyone today wants to be a winner; it's something different to have the will or and the stamina to be a victor.

Jesus did. He had both the resolve and the endurance to stay the course, and that is what this day is all about – the ultimate, eternal *victory* of our Savior God. It is therefore altogether fitting and right that the Lenten season just completed would culminate this morning in the celebration of the greatest victory in the history of mankind. The text on which we will base our Easter Sunday worship is found in the 15th Chapter of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians. Though the entire section is included for context, we focus this morning on the final two verses:

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 15:51-58** *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,* ⁵² *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.* ⁵³ *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.* ⁵⁴ *When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."* ⁵⁵ *"O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"* ⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* ⁵⁷ ***But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*** ⁵⁸ ***¶ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.***

These are the verbally inspired words of our God. We prepare our hearts to study these sacred words with a prayers our Savior himself once spoke: ***"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth. Amen."***

Dear Fellow Servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is, and will, never be a day when it is not good and right to be a Christian, but *this* particular day – Easter Sunday – *this* is the greatest of days for all who share the Christian faith. This is the day on which all doubt was forever swept away; the day when the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ was declared to be full, complete and satisfactory by God the Father in heaven. Jesus Christ is risen today! Hallelujah!

Good Friday is clearly a great day for all mankind, but though Christ's work was completed, we had not yet received God the Father's verdict concerning the work of his Son. You remember the test – a very simple test really, but the importance to all of creation can never be emphasized enough. The plan arranged by God the Father was that Jesus, his own Son, would live a perfect, sinless life, and then offer that perfect life as the payment for all sin, every single one of them. He would give this life by dying a criminal's death, abandoned by all upon a lonely cross outside of the city of Jerusalem. The test was this: if God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, the message was that God the Father has accepted his Son's perfect life and innocent death as a full, complete, permanent payment for all sins. If Jesus remained in the tomb his mission was a failure, his payment inadequate, and the only hope for mankind was gone. Such were the stakes leading up to that first Easter morning. Life and death for all mankind, heaven and hell, hung in the balance.

And God the Father declared Jesus victorious by raising him from the dead. He declared the sacrifice that he offered to be full and complete – perfect and adequate in every way.

Savor that simple fact, for that is what makes this day so special. When Jesus was raised from the dead, *all mankind* shared in the victory. Jesus did not suffer and die for himself. He suffered and died for sinners. That means he suffered and died for you and me. Some of you will recall the hymn what we used to end our Good Friday service. Virtually all of you know the hymn well: "*On My Heart Imprint Thine Image.*" This is the image we want indelibly printed upon our hearts this morning – the image of shared victory in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are victorious because he was victorious.

You've all seen those game shows where famous actors or athletes compete not for themselves but for the benefit of their favorite charity. That is something like what Jesus did for us. We are Jesus' favorite charity. He struggled, lived and died for us, for *our* benefit. His victory was therefore our victory. When you come to truly grasp our own personal, individual participation in Jesus' resurrection, a child of God simply cannot fail to be absolutely thrilled on this great day!

The significance of this day was certainly not lost on the Apostle Paul. His entire life, from his conversion on the Road to Damascus on, was singly devoted to sharing with others the news of their victory in Christ. He expressed the joy that filled his world with these words in our text for this morning: "***But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***"

There are several things that make Jesus different from every other human being who ever walked the face of the earth, but we focus on one thing in particular this morning: Jesus was the only man to earn his way into heaven by his works. He was the only man to whom God the Father did not give heaven as an undeserved gift. Jesus earned it. Oh how he earned it. Think of it. Think of the forces that were arrayed against him. Do you imagine that you are at times sorely tempted? We simply cannot imagine what Jesus must have endured. Satan and his legion of devils knew full well who Jesus was while he walked this earth. They knew that he represented the only force, the only power, the only entity capable of defeating them. Imagine the furious offensive they must have launched against him, over and over again – for 33 years. They had everything to gain and nothing to lose. Defeat Jesus, and all mankind would be lost. This was a struggle, a fight, unlike anything we will ever know. No human being could have withstood such an attack. Our lives and constant failures are a testament to that fact. Jesus, on the other hand, never once failed, never once gave in to temptation, never once failed to do the right thing.

We know this to be true because of the empty tomb. The empty tomb represented God the Father's grade on the life and death of his Son. The fact that the tomb is empty means that God the Father accepted Jesus' sacrifice as perfect in every way.

Our text, with those words, "***But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ***" ties Jesus' great victory to you and me. This makes it certain that *his* victory is *our*

victory. God the Father has decreed it. Jesus paid the penalty for all sin, and his victory has now simply been *given* to us: "***But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory...***"

Stop for just a moment and think about that fact. It took Jesus, the Son of God, to make such a thing possible. No ordinary human being could have offered such a payment. If an ordinary human being could somehow be born without original sin (which no one can) and could somehow live his entire life without ever once sinning, what would such a human being earn by his actions? He would earn heaven for himself by his keeping of the law. That, in fact, was the system under which man was created. The point here is not what such a thing would earn but what it would *not* earn. It would *not* earn salvation for any other human being. It took the perfect life and death of *the Son of God* to pay such a bill.

Recognize from this the terrifying fix we were in. We had no solution for the sin-problems we had created. That means we had one chance and one chance only to escape an eternity of torment in hell. God had only one Son, and none but the Son of God could possibly satisfy such a debt. The devil was certainly not ignorant of this fact. What fury our Lord Jesus must have endured for our sakes.

And he was victorious. Which means that we too are no victorious.

Note well the finality, the non-rescindable tone of what Jesus had accomplished. God, who is not bound by time, has declared the victory to have been won. It is not therefore that we *might* win. It is not even that we *will* win. We have *already won* in Jesus Christ. The power of Satan has already been broken. Listen to the certainty, the finality, of the verses that precede our text: "***Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.***" This is not a wish on Paul's part. It is stated under divine inspiration as a certain fact. He goes on to describe what has already been determined: "***For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption (note that there is no doubt that this will happen) and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory.***"

We have won. The victory is ours. What then remains for us? Are we supposed to spend the rest of our time of grace on this earth trembling in fear, hoping only to survive and thus join our Lord in paradise? Absolutely not. Our Lord wants us to power forward to the very end. That is, in fact, why we are still here on this earth. There are others who do not yet know that they too are victors – that Christ Jesus has also paid for *their* sins. Use the time that you have left to tell them. The message is so simple and so full of joy and comfort, yet it needs to be shared before it can be believed. The "mystery" needs to be revealed and you and I have this incredible power and this unparalleled honor to share the message of victory with a world that desperately needs to learn what has already been accomplished for them in Jesus Christ.

On this great morning then we ask our God to fill our hearts to overflowing with the facts of the Resurrection and the resulting power of forgiveness, peace, and confidence in Jesus Christ our Savior.

*"Christ the Life of all the living, Christ, the Death of death, our foe
Why, Thyself for me once giving to the darkest depths of woe,
Through Thy sufferings, death, and merit I eternal life inherit.
Thousand, thousand thanks shall be, dearest Jesus, unto Thee." (TLH 151:1)*

Amen.