

Easter Sunday - 2023

"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 indicates more than simply winning. You "win" a hand of cards or a game of checkers. *Victory* indicates something more – a triumph won at great cost after a long and difficult struggle. Everyone today wants to be a winner; it's something different to have the will 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 arduous struggle we commemorate during Lent 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 victory celebration is found in the 15th Chapter of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians:

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 prayer our Savior himself once spoke on our behalf: ***"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth. Amen."***

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. 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 and nailed to 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 is 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 past the third day, his mission was a failure, his payment inadequate, and the only hope for mankind was lost. Such were the stakes leading up to that first Easter morning. Life and death for all mankind hung in the balance, heaven and hell.

And God the Father declared Jesus victorious by raising him from the dead. He thereby 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.*" That 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.

The significance of this day was certainly not lost on the Apostle Paul. His entire life, from his conversion on the Road to Damascus until his execution, 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, not the least of which is the fact that Jesus was the only man to earn his way into heaven by keeping the law. He was the only man to whom God the Father did not give heaven as an undeserved gift. Jesus 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 demonic legion 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 saving that which they wanted to destroy. 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 other human being could have withstood such opposition. 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.

And the Resurrection was not just a great day for Jesus, our text pulls every Christian into the picture by tying Jesus' great victory to us: "***But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.***" The Holy Spirit here assures us that *Jesus'* 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...***"

We begin to recognize how vital is that empty tomb to each of us. To deny the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ is to deny the Christian faith. The Bible is not a buffet from which man can pick and choose to satisfy his own tastes and opinions. What God's Word teaches is truth – for all. Several years ago on a talk show, a notable Christian leader was speaking with a famous actress (always a reliable source for spiritual truth). The man said, "*Jesus is the Son of God, you know.*" The actress replied, "*Maybe he is for you, but he's not for me.*" To which the man profoundly answered, "*Well either he is or he isn't.*" The actress's silly, arrogant response reflects modern thought – that truth is simply a matter of subjective opinion. The reality is that Jesus died on Good Friday and rose bodily from the dead on Easter Sunday morning. This is divine truth, and therefore anything but optional.

Again, to deny the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to exclude yourself from God's heaven. To "believe in Jesus Christ" is to believe that he lived, died, and rose again. We had no solution for the sin-problem 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 now victorious.

This is the ultimate truth revealed to us by our God. Thank and praise him this morning that he has enabled you to know and believe it. So many have not. We live in an age where it is acceptable to be seeking "God" and "truth," but unacceptable to claim to have found either. Happiness is today valued above truth, and the world believes that happiness is only achieved when we find what we want, not what *God* wants – when we find *our* truth, not God's. So the world searches endlessly for its own truth, which they believe will finally provide the comfort for which they yearn. Yet if you search for comfort, you will never find truth. If you search for truth, you will also find comfort. The Resurrection will not, cannot, provide comfort if you reject it as truth. As Paul said in our final Scripture reading this morning, ***"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."*** ^{ESV}(1 Corinthians 15:14,17) The Bible's account of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate truth, and that truth assures us not only of Christ's victory but our own. There is, and can be, no greater source of comfort.

Finally, note in our text the non-rescindable tone of what Jesus had accomplished, the finality of the Resurrection. 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 what we are told in 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. And not only ours. Jesus won forgiveness for every human being ever born. What an incredible privilege and unparalleled honor to share the message of victory with a world that desperately needs to learn the divine truth what has already been accomplished for them in Jesus Christ, as well as the true comfort that that truth offers.

On this great morning then we ask our God to fill our hearts to overflowing with the truth and promise of the Resurrection and the resulting peace and confidence that is ours in Jesus Christ our Savior.

*"Christ the Life of all the living, Christ, the Death of death, our foe
Who, 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.