

Jesus' Victory

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[0 : 00] Amen. So, keep your Bibles open as we will make reference to a number of verses in this passage. I know it's a long passage, but I promise I have planned not for a long sermon, okay? Well, unless we have a different standard of what is a short or a long sermon, but then, who to blame? I have my Facebook page and various friends, most of them Christians, some of them not necessarily Christians, others definitely not Christians at all, and some almost quite atheist activists. But we try to keep the friendship and the fellowship and the conversation in good terms, acknowledging the differences, agreeing to disagree. And a friend who is a Christian, he is a Christian working in a church in Dundee, he posted an answer to someone from the Atheist Society, I can't remember the exact name of the organization, that she is a chair, a chairwoman or a president, whatever. And I think it's scientific society. Something in the word, in the lines of, just a reminder, dead people don't come back to life.

And I was wondering about that, because if you're a scientist, or if you like science, you know, there's something missing in that statement. Because, you know, science knows, by experience, that it can't ever be 100% sure. It can be 99.99999999% sure. But they never dare to say 100%. Why?

Because science knows that its knowledge is incomplete. It knows a great deal. But it's always in the scientific spirit of approaching and working with the tools of science, that you always have to keep an openness for new information, for a new event, for something that hasn't yet looked properly into some piece of evidence that people in the past might have forgotten to examine properly. So, probably the woman should have said, that's a fair statement. And I can agree with that, because it is true. In Jesus' time, it wasn't different.

That's another prejudice that we have sometimes in our hearts towards people from the past, especially 2,000 years ago. And we forget that those people would have the same brain capacity that we have today.

Even if it's just, you know, on a more commonsensical way, they could look around and see what's happening in the world and would have a fair assessment of things and situations in life. And they could then, like Thomas say, unless I can see him with my eyes, unless I can touch him, unless I can see the scars, well, probably here rather than here, unless I can see his side that was pierced with a spear, unless I can see that, I can see that. Sorry folks, I won't take your word for granted. And that's registered in John's Gospel.

[4 : 07] And Jesus appears to Thomas, and Thomas falls on his knees and declares Jesus to be his Lord and to be his God.

Yes, normally, dead people don't come back to life. Normally, that's what happens. That's what happened to Thomas.

That's what happened to John, Peter, and Paul, and all the apostles, and all the witnesses we see described here in the passage. Yes, normally, that's what happens. But that day wasn't a normal day.

That day was a different day. So much so that nothing like that happened before, and nothing like that has ever happened again.

It's different even from the miracles Jesus performed. You know, the Bible tells us about miracles of Jesus Jesus, going to places where people had just died, like a girl. And he takes her by the hand, and he uses those, you know, Aramaic words, and girls come back, and there she was. And she's breathing again. But that girl, she came back to life, back to her parents' embrace and love. She might have grown up, maybe got married, had children.

[5 : 48] Maybe she grew old. And one day, it was time for her to go home, to leave this world. And she passed away.

And she said, So the resurrection of Jesus is different, is someone coming back to life, that will never, ever again taste death.

And that's the kind of resurrection that he has promised each one of us. That one day, like him, it will happen to us. The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead brings with it a message of hope and encouragement to all who believe in him.

It is good to remember that in the resurrection, there is this essential aspect of the gospel. Paul. Have a look at verses 3 to verse 4.

For I received, for what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to scriptures.

[7 : 02] The death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ are essential aspects of the gospel message, of the Christian message, to the point that when you start to question that, I have to start to question your Christian profession of faith.

So it's so important here that Paul uses similar words that he had used before in chapter 11, verse 23, when he says, For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you.

And he then teaches the congregation about Holy Communion, the breaking of bread, the drinking of wine, and he says, I received that from the Lord.

Paul received the teachings about the death of Christ first from the Lord. He received the teaching about the resurrection of Jesus Christ first from the Lord.

Only later he will check, you know, the information and realize that both him and the apostles in Jerusalem, they were preaching the same, the very same gospel.

[8 : 09] To declare that Jesus was alive on the third day and he continues to be so for eternity is part of our non-negotiable message of salvation.

There's a Bible commentator, his name is Leon Morris, and he says, when he looks at verses 14 to verse 19, And he understands that this matter is so important that he says, if the resurrection did not take place, then the whole thing is a sham.

The whole thing is a sham. And we are playing like children can play of a number of things. We're playing with religion, but this religion is empty, is useless.

But of course, that's not the case. It's just Paul using his argument about it. It is good to know that it's quite different. The reality is quite different because of the weight of evidence from eyewitnesses Paul presents.

Topped up with his personal witness of meeting the risen Lord Jesus Christ. At the end of chapter 15, Paul's conclusion is that resurrection means victory.

[9 : 32] Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your stink? It's gone. You've lost it. You thought you were winning the game until when it was approaching its end.

Jesus Christ, he defeated you with his final blow, crushing the head of the serpent, dying on the cross, suffering the penalty for our sins, rising alive, glorious, victorious on the third day.

Paul's conclusion is that resurrection means victory. It is Christ's victory. It is your victory. And in this passage, we can find four aspects of that victory.

And I'll be very brief with these four. First, victory over sins. Verse 3. For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins.

A dead sacrifice wouldn't do much better than all the other sacrifices offered before. Why the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is so special when compared to what the Jewish people had been doing for more than a thousand years, ever since they left Egypt and started to worshiping God in the tabernacle.

[11 : 01] Day in and day out, sheep and goats and pigeons and doves and bulls and the shedding of blood, the offering of sacrifice and burnt offerings and thanksgiving offerings with grains and cereals from the harvest and the libation, the pouring down of oil and wine through a number of rituals established in the Old Testament to bring to mind the need for someone to take upon itself or themselves the weight of our sin.

But they were already doing that. What's different about this? In Hebrews chapter 10, we find this argument. And there we read that Christ was offered as a sacrifice once and for all.

The sacrifice that fulfills all that had done before. But why is it special? Why being done once and for all solves all the problems?

Fulfills all the meaning that those sacrifices from the past were conveying. But then Hebrews 10 will say that Christians, because of Christ's sacrifice, enter into God's holy presence because we have a great priest of the house of God.

The sacrifice on Good Friday is the high priest on resurrection day interceding for you and me.

[12:45] Assuring us that the bloodshed on the cross has permanent, eternal effect on your life and my life to keep me right with God, to retain the state of forgiveness.

It is finished, he said on the cross. And now we endure, or sorry, we enjoy that forever and ever. Victory over sins. Second, victory over death, verse 4. And we read, And we can see a number of verses that make reference to this verse 4 here.

Verse 22 to verse 23 we read, Verse 26, Verse 54 and 55, When the perishable is being closed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true, Death has been swallowed up in victory.

Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? Death has lost its grip on Christ. Death has lost its grip on you.

[14:23] Probably here, like us back in Brotiferi, we had the unfortunate task of saying goodbyes to dearly loved members of the congregation, at least one or two of them, because of COVID, or other life-threatening conditions.

And there was a deep sense of consolation throughout that time of mourning and grieving, the passing of loved friends.

That despite having to endure the sadness of death, it was still promotion. It was still a blessing. Not because of death itself, but because death no longer pulls us down, away from the presence of God. But as with Paul's words to another church, he says, if you ask me what I'd like to choose, this is what I tell you.

I'd rather go and be with Christ, because it's better by far. Death has lost its grip on him, and death was defeated by Christ in its own territory.

[15:48] He is now alive forever. He recovered what was taken from him, his own life, promising to do the same with each one of us. Third, victory over opposition to his rule.

Have a look at verse 9. For I am the least of the apostles, and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Verse 25. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. Paul was an enemy of the cross.

Paul was an enemy of Christ. Paul was an enemy of the church. Paul was one of those who was prepared to kill people if they carried on saying that Christ died, and then he rose on the third day according to the gospel.

And yet, he was conquered by the risen Christ. A dead savior cannot pose any threat to the enemies of his kingdom.

[16:59] And that has been the case throughout the centuries. When church is persecuted, when the church is oppressed, when the church is repressed, in places like North Korea, in places like East Africa, in places like Nigeria, and you wonder, they do not have political power.

They do not have military power. They are actually quite disenfranchised, particularly in those parts of the world. Why they bother so much with them?

Humanly speaking, they are already nothing. Or are they? One answer is, because the savior they believe in is not a dead one.

It's alive. And we see here that he wins over persecution. Those who persecute the church of Christ, like Paul, will either be conquered by the risen Christ's love, or will be hardened, being stored for judgment on the last day.

Verse 24 mentions every rule, authority, and power. We read, then, the end will come when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed all dominion, authority, and power.

[18:28] And this includes both demonic and human power and dominion, from the lowest to the highest level in their own hierarchy. They constitute the powers of this godless world, Christless world.

They may look invincible. They have the powers of communication. They have the powers to enforce whichever laws they want to pass in order to coerce and to impress upon us whatever ideology they think is suitable or helpful for their own agendas.

And yet, Jesus Christ wins over them. He is victorious over them. They may look invincible to us, but no one can resist the risen king.

And there is victory over all forms of insubordination to God's rule. All forms of insubordination, not only those who are powerful in this world. the average guy who walks on the street, who couldn't care less about Christianity or Jesus Christ.

All forms of insubordination to God's rule, verses 27 and verse 28, for he has put everything under his feet. Now, when it says that everything has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself who put everything under Christ.

[19 : 55] Such insubordination insubordination can be both passive and active. You probably have friends who respect the fact that you are Christian, but they can't care less. They are not friends with you because you are Christian.

It's in spite of that. And there is that respectful, cold indifference. They think we should be allowed to have the right to have our buildings and have our times of worship.

They go along with us all the way up to the point, but do you believe, do you recognize Christ as for what he claims himself to be for all the evidence from history that we can say that these things actually, truly happened?

No. No. Is there anything left out in Paul's argument here? Well, these verses cover that.

All things mean all things. Back to verse 25, we see that he is already reigning. Christ is already reigning and his manifesto.

[21 : 12] Well, next month, I hope you are going to the polls and cast your vote. pray about that. But the kingdom of God has its own manifesto as well.

He is already reigning and his manifesto is being implemented as planned until all his enemies, all of them, the passive, the aggressive, and the passive-aggressive, all of them, with no exception, will be put under his feet.

fourth and last, resurrection means victory over futile religious expressions.

Verse 14, and if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. Verse 17, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you're still in your sins.

verse 19, if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

[22 : 24] Paul is making the point that religion that excludes Jesus, meaning the whole package as laid out in verses 3 to 4, what I have received from the Lord, so Paul is saying that religion that excludes that is futile.

He's also declaring that any form of Christianity that denies that Jesus rose from the dead, and we are talking about here physical, visible resurrection, that kind of Christianity is also futile.

So Paul is not only pointing fingers around saying you who do not believe in Christ, you who do not believe in the Son of God who came, who became flesh, who walked on this earth, and then at the age between 30 and 33, he was put down to death, a horrible death, being crucified by a powerful and brutal empire, the Roman Empire.

If you take this all out of your confession of faith, you are futile, but if you who professes to be a Christian, starts to come up with things like, you know, it was not real.

It was an emotional reaction. It was a deeper spiritual insight. It was a deeper, transformative, liberating sense and realization that Jesus carries on living, whether as an idea or as a spirit that's no longer here on earth.

[24 : 08] That's not what Paul is saying here. What Paul is saying here is, I saw him. What Paul is saying here is, you know, James, the big guy in Jerusalem, the leader of the whole church in Jerusalem, he saw him.

I can name 500 people and if you want to check, some of them are still alive. Go and talk to them and they will tell you the same truth, the same story.

They saw him, physical, real. When God saves, he saves the whole lot, not just part of it.

Our salvation is not simply to be like a ghost, you know, a ghost to heaven. Our salvation means to enjoy and to have a share in Christ's resurrection victory.

If he is alive, you know, one day in the body so will you be. Christianity teaches that the very light of the world came to us in our darkness and transformed and changed everything.

[25 : 32] We can keep trying to find religious ways of making life meaningful, but only the risen Christ can actually fill, as we were talking to the kids, that emptiness inside.

only something alive can do something to our heart, to our existence. Jesus rose from the dead in accordance with scriptures.

Our preaching is not in vain, your faith is not in vain. So, although today we still deal with the presence and the effects of sin in the world, things have forever been changed since Jesus rose from the dead.

death is now tamed, even though it's still a dangerous beast. Although it's still inflicting pain and suffering, it has lost its taming.

Like any animal whose aggressiveness, whose aggressive behavior is out of control, death will be put down, whereas those who believe in Jesus will live with him for his glory forever.

[26 : 43] victory over sin, victory over death, victory over every opposition to his rule, victory over futile religious expression.

Let us pray. Thank you God and Father for victory throughout as we Lord have been celebrating from Good Friday up to today.

Victory on the cross victory displayed through the empty tomb, victory incarnate in the risen Christ who lives forever and ever, who rules over all, who is seated on the throne, the Christ we believe in, the Christ we trust in, the Christ we follow, the Christ who comes to us, who sustains us, who restores us, and who assures us of his own victory.

We praise you Father for Jesus, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.