

Defeat For The Devil

The Meaning Of The Cross

Does it ever strike you as being a bit odd that the early Christians were so upbeat? I mean, they were just brimming with confidence. Listen to what Paul wrote to some of the churches.

"But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 15:57)

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Rom 8:35- 37)

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him." (2 Cor 2:14)

Anyone who saw Christ die on the Cross would be astonished at statements like those. Jesus as a Conqueror? Not likely! The Cross as a victory? Hardly! Jesus was rejected by his own nation, betrayed by a friend, denied and deserted by his disciples and executed by authority of the Roman Procurator. Powerless, he was spread-eagled and skewered on a Cross, pinned there by nails, ropes or both. To anyone who was there, the cross looked like a total defeat. Yet the first Christians didn't see it that way at all. They saw the Cross as an amazing victory. They had a completely different perspective. Let's look at the Cross the way the disciples saw it. They saw the Cross as a defeat for the Devil. That defeat unfolded in six stages.

1. Stage One - Conquest predicted.

God himself predicted the Cross right back in the Garden of Eden when he pronounced judgement on the serpent.

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Gen 3:15)

The woman's offspring is Jesus, the Messiah. God's plan was that through the Messiah God's rule of righteousness would be established and the rule of evil would be eradicated.

2. Stage two - Conquest begun.

The battle began to hot up when Jesus was born. Right from the time he was born, Satan tried to get rid of Jesus, because he knew that Jesus would be his future conqueror. He tried through Herod murdering the children of Bethlehem. He tried to get Jesus to avoid the Cross when he tempted him in the wilderness. He tried to get the crowd to crown him as a political King. He tried through Peter to talk Jesus out of going to the Cross. All through his earthly life, Jesus was advancing God's Kingdom and Satan's Kingdom was retreating. Demons were cast out. The sick were healed. Even nature was being restored when Jesus rebuked the wind and the waves. The whole of Jesus' ministry on earth was a three year battle with the evil one, and Satan was losing the battle. When Jesus set his face to go to the Cross he was setting out on a mission to defeat Satan. He took on Satan and all the powers of darkness, challenging them in a confrontation to do their worst. Jesus went to his death knowing that his death would rob Satan of his power.

3. Stage Three - Conquest achieved.

The Cross was the final conquest when the powers of darkness were routed. Paul writes to the Colossian Christians:

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and

authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross". (Col 2:13 -15)

The Cross was the cosmic overthrow of the principalities and powers. On the Cross Jesus paid our debt, but also destroyed the document on which it was recorded. On the Cross Jesus stripped Satan and his demons of their weapons and disarmed them. But he also stripped them of their dignity and might and degraded them. He made a public spectacle of them exhibiting them as powerless powers. All this was happening in the unseen world. There were things happening in the heavenly places that onlookers just didn't see. Jesus overcame the Devil by totally resisting everything that was thrown at him. He refused to step down from the Cross, and so won a great victory over the powers of evil. He remained free, uncontaminated, uncompromised. The Devil could gain no hold on him, and had to concede defeat.

General Erwin Rommel was one of the most astute of the German Generals of World War Two. He was once discussing the day when the Allied armies would seek to recapture Europe from the Germans. He used a phrase to describe that day. He said it would be "The Longest Day." He knew that if the Allies managed to establish a foothold in Europe on that day, eventually victory would be theirs. Rommel was right. At the end of the longest day, the war was in effect over. There was a lot of bitter fighting to be done and the mopping up was a long and painful business, but the eventual outcome of the war in Europe was decided on the longest day.

When Jesus died on the Cross, the war between good and evil was decided. There is still a lot of painful fighting to be done, and the mopping up is a slow and costly business, but the eventual outcome is assured. Satan's sting has been withdrawn. He is a defeated foe, and he knows it.

4. Stage Four - Conquest announced.

The resurrection was the conquest confirmed and announced. The Cross was the victory won, and the resurrection the victory endorsed, proclaimed and demonstrated. The evil powers which were deprived of their dignity at the Cross, were now put under his feet and made subject to him. Satan thought the Cross was his victory, and it certainly looked like that, but the resurrection proved that all that Jesus had won on the Cross had destroyed the Devils power. After the resurrection, Jesus had nothing more to do with Satan. Satan could no longer touch him.

5. Stage Five - Conquest extended.

As the church goes on in it's mission to preach Christ crucified and calls people to repent and believe in him, so the Kingdom of God is extended and the kingdom of darkness is driven back.

6. Stage Six - Conquest consummated.

This will happen when Jesus comes again. On that day every knee will bow to him and every tongue will confess that he is Lord. The devil will be thrown into the lake of fire. All evil dominion, authority and power will have been destroyed and the Son will hand over the Kingdom to the Father.

How do we enter into the victory Christ has won?

We are to enjoy the benefits of his victory. If God has placed all things under Christ's feet, they are under ours too if we are in Christ. However, though the devil has been defeated, he has not yet acknowledged defeat. He has been overthrown, but not yet eliminated. In fact, he continues to wield great power. We know this from experience. In Ephesians we are told we rule with Christ and that Satan is under our feet, yet in the same letter we are told that we have strong forces against us, and that we have no hope of standing against them unless we are dressed in the armour of God. So how do we handle this in practice?

Here's how you can live in the freedom that Christ gives. Imagine that you live in a rented apartment. You are way behind with the rent. I mean way, way behind - weeks, months behind with the rent. The apartment is a mess. You can't afford the rent. The Landlord is a big, mean, nasty guy who comes round every week - and demands that you pay the rent. When you can't pay he loans you the money to pay the rent, but he charges you 100% interest on the money that you borrowed. So you are getting yourself deeper and deeper in debt to this nasty Landlord. What's more, while you're out he comes in with a pass key and wrecks the place. He kicks holes in the walls, throws food around and when he comes back to collect the

rent next time he does an inspection and says, "this place is a tip. I'm going to charge you for all the repairs as well." So you find yourself getting deeper and deeper and deeper in debt to this nasty Landlord.

One day there is a knock at the door. A really lovely man introduces himself. He says, "I'm the new Landlord. I've just bought this place and I want you to know that I have paid all your debts. What's more, you can live here free - no more rent. I'm going to move into this place and I'm going to make it completely new. I'm going to live on the premises and I'm going to fix this whole place up and it's going to be just like brand new." And he does. Everything is wonderful for you. You're enjoying the company of the new Landlord. It's just beautiful living in this apartment. All your debts have been paid.

One day there is a knock at the door, and the old Landlord shows up. He demands the rent and tries to push his way in. What are you going to do? Are you going to pay him? No! Are you going to punch him on the nose? You'd love to, but he's too big for that! Are you going to argue with him? No, because he's stronger than you are, and he's very clever. What do you do? You say to him, "Listen buster, I've now got a new Landlord - if you've got a problem with the way I'm living, you take it up with the new Landlord." Got it? "My new Landlord has paid all my debts and I owe you nothing. If you have a problem with me - you take it up with the new Landlord."

That's how it is if you're a believer. You live in the freedom that Jesus has given you through His death on the cross. Don't you dare submit to the wiles of the devil where he demands and bullies and pushes and he shoves and he tries to dump stuff on you that doesn't belong any more. Just say "Listen Satan, take it up with Jesus." Why don't you just enjoy the freedom Christ has won for you on the Cross?

Introduction to worship and praise

Sometimes just a few words say it all.

Words like; "And the winner is..." "And the nomination goes to..." "The war is over..."

For the cricketer it's winning with the last ball of the last over.

For the marathon runner it's the last stride through the tape.

For the racing driver it's the chequered flag.

For the student it's graduation day.

For the farmer it's the last day of harvest.

For the actor it's the final curtain.

For the chef it's the end of the royal banquet.

For the soldier it's the end of the war.

For the prisoner it's release day.

For the Christian there are just three words that say it all...

"It is finished"

Just three words that say it all; The defeat of Satan and all his evil angels.

The finish of man made religious systems God's door thrown wide open and

his welcome mat out. The sting of sin has been pulled and its poison neutralised.

"It's is finished"

And the shockwaves reverberate through the heavenly realms as the principalities and powers who have done their worst, utterly fail to corrupt the Holy Son of God. The enemy is at a standstill, and the unstoppable God begins to rise up in power never before seen on the earth.

It's the beginning of the end. God has given his answer.

"It's is finished"

It's a shout that every demon spirit of hell hears and never forgets. It's the shout of victory that echoes around the universe and down through the centuries for all time. It's a shout of triumph that stays in the ears of men and women and boys and girls of all races in every nation on earth! It's God's full and final answer for every human need. It's the victory song of the church. It's the national anthem of the Kingdom of God. It's the best news the human race has ever heard.

"It is finished!"

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