

Good Friday - Victory Displayed through Defeat

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning and a happy Good Friday to all of us. So if you've got your Bibles, keep them there at that New Testament passage, Luke chapter 11.

Now, this Good Friday, we are looking at how God's powerful victory is displayed through Christ's powerful defeat on the cross.

And you see that I've got the defeat in air quotes, which means there's something funny about that defeat. Now, every good story has an evil villain.

Now, let's see if you can guess who the villain is from these movies. Hopefully that will come up on the screen. Or not. Is it? Oh, it is there. It's on the other side of the screen. Great.

Kids, are you with us in the service? Do you know the movie? Parents do know the movie. Yep. Who's the evil villain? You remember? Cruel Devil, right?

[0 : 59] She is. What I learned recently is that it's a pun on the name Cruel Devil. I never saw that. Right. And this next movie?

Lion King, right? And the evil villain in the movie? Mmm. And then this last one. Lion the Witch in the Wardrobe and there's the...

You know it? The White Witch, right. Now, the Bible story is no different. Or rather, these stories are no different to the Bible story.

Of those children's stories, the one that fits closest to the Bible is the Narnia stories of C.S. Lewis. Well, who do you think the villain is in the Bible story?

Us. Is there any other villain in the Bible story? Yeah. Well, Satan. The villain is Satan, but it's not just him alone.

[2 : 02] Strange enough, we're part of the villains in the story of the Bible. We're part of the problem because Satan has managed to capture so many of us into his service, though, you know, many don't know that they are.

And who's the hero in the Bible story? Yeah. Jesus. And God, I guess. Who defeats the villain? Well, Jesus does. And if I were to ask us how Jesus does that, most Christians will answer that Jesus died for me on the cross and that his blood paid for my sins.

Now, this is true. But the Bible story is bigger than just that part of the Bible story. The cross does something more than just pay for my sins.

And today, as we celebrate those great events of that first Good Friday, I want us to look in particular at what that something more is and how it fits into what we normally think of what Jesus does for us.

Are you with me? So normally we would say Jesus died for our sins. Jesus died on the cross and his blood paid for my sins. Now, that's obviously true. But there's a bigger story, a kind of a back story.

[3 : 13] And we're going to look at that in some detail today. So today, we're looking at how God's powerful victory is displayed to Christ's powerful defeat on the cross.

And we'll find out that Jesus' death on the cross is God's surprising yet powerful weapon that defeats this great villain, this ruler of the cosmic forces of evil that hinder God's purposes for creation.

Okay, are you with me? So, the death of Christ on the cross defeats the cosmic forces of evil and allows Jesus to plunder their kingdom and possessions.

Now, because we're so used to thinking of Jesus dying for my own personal sins and so that I can have a personal relationship with him, we need to hear from Jesus' own words that, yes, he did come to do that, but he's also come to defeat these cosmic forces of evil personified by Satan.

And the story of Jesus in Luke chapter 11, Jesus and the strong man helps us see that. Now, the controversy kicks off with Jesus being accused by his own people of being in league with the devil. [4 : 31] What a slap in the face. Incredibly, they can't see that Jesus has come to free them from demonic oppressions, what he did the whole time that he was with them. So, Jesus gives him this parable, when a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe.

But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder. Now, Jesus is talking about a strong man who is fully armed and someone prepared for a fight, for a battle.

That's why he's got armor on. He's got all these possessions securely in his grasp. And the only way that those possessions can escape or get free is if someone stronger than the strong man comes along, fights him, attacks him, Jesus says, overpowers him, strips him of his arm and carries off his spoils.

So, Satan here is represented as the strong man. It's in the context of Jesus casting out demons. Someone with enough power to keep his possessions safe, to keep people in enslavement to him. And the only way that people are going to be freed from being under his control is if someone stronger, in other words, Jesus himself, comes and challenges him for his goods, overpowers him, disarms him, and then he's able to take his possessions away, to take the people that he's got under his influence.

[6 : 02] Now, Jesus is not doing something new here in the New Testament. This is exactly how God operates in the Old Testament. And the reading from Isaiah highlights that for us, the same thing that Jesus is doing here.

I don't have to turn now. It should be up on the screen for us. Isaiah 49. God is asking his people, Can plunder be taken from warriors or captives be rescued from the fierce? The answer is no. Because they're warriors and they're fierce. And we don't have the power to do that. But this is what the Lord says. In other words, this is what God says he's going to do. Yes, but captives will be taken from warriors and plunder retrieved from the fierce.

Because I, God, Yahweh, will contend with those who contend with you, and your children, I will save. God is saying that only he is powerful enough to defeat the kind of enemies that his people are facing.

Can you see that? You're with me so far. But crucially, it's how he does that that is of interest for us today. Because he does it in the most unexpected ways, with the most unexpected saviors.

[7 : 13] Can you think of some of the strange stories in the Old Testament, where an unexpected saviour saves God's people in an unexpected way? Some stories that might jump out at you.

Do you remember David and Goliath, right? It's probably the prime story. A huge giant warrior, in full armour with sword and spear and shield, defeated by a small shepherd boy with a stone and leather sling.

But this story pattern, this kind of pattern happens all the time in the Old Testament. Think of Joshua defeating one of the strongest cities in the ancient world, Jericho, with what?

Trumpets and priests, like the brass section of the worship band. And the walls come tumbling down. Think of the story of Deborah and Barak in the book of Judges, where this mighty Canaanite general, Sisera, with 400 iron chariots at his command, is defeated by a woman and a tent peg. Strange story in the book of Judges. Then there's the story of Gideon and how 300 men defeated the much larger force of Midianites. And Samson, using a donkey bone to defeat a Philistine force of over a thousand men.

[8 : 34] And so, the Bible establishes a pattern of not just that God saves, but of how he saves. And the pattern is this.

God works mighty miracles through a designated leader that he raises up, who confronts seemingly overwhelming forces, forces of evil, and overthrows them in a totally surprising and unexpected way.

Are you with me? Can you see that that's kind of how God works? It's exactly how God works in the Old Testament. And the main point about all of that is that God is showing people that they're not able to save themselves.

They need a Savior. That's the whole point of having a Savior. If you didn't need one, you would be able to save yourself. You would be your own Savior. And God says, no, no, you're not able to.

One of the first things that people have got to realize is they're not able to save themselves. That they need a Savior. So, now this pattern culminates in the most surprising of tools in the New Testament.

[9 : 41] The death of the one who has come to do the saving. Symbolized for us by the cross. Or represented, really. Not just symbolized, it's an actual Savior.

Thus, the cross is God's ultimate salvation weapon. I don't know if you've ever thought of it like that. The cross is God's ultimate salvation weapon. Now, we started our look at this in the book of Luke. I want us to continue looking at this in another passage in the New Testament. Because the New Testament actually represents the cross in this kind of way. Although, we sometimes don't look at it like that. But this is how Paul talks about this in Colossians chapter 2.

I should have that up on the screen for us. But if you want to turn there, you can. And Paul is writing to the church in Colossae. By the way, that's down the road from many of the churches in Revelation that we've been studying.

Particularly, Laodicea and Ephesus. And he's reminding the Christians of how they got saved. He says this in Colossians chapter 2 from verse 13.

[10 : 46] When you were dead in your trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. Now, notice the active ingredient there.

God made you alive with Christ. It's God that is doing the saving. We are doing the deadening. It's a terrible verb. But we were just being dead in our trespasses.

And then God says, no, I'm going to make you alive. But how did he do this? Well, he forgave us all our trespasses, having cancelled the debt ascribed to us in the decrees that stood against us.

He took it away. Nailing it to the cross. But that's not all he did. Remember I said we're going to expand the story of what Jesus does on the cross?

And he also, verse 15, having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them, also by the cross.

[11 : 47] And this verse combines what Jesus has done for us, what Jesus has done for us, that's people he saves, and what the cross does against Satan.

Alright, so firstly, what does the cross do for us? Firstly, the power of the cross is that Jesus saves his people by forgiving their trespasses. That's essentially our rebellion against him.

And he cancels the legal notice of debt that is written against us. And this is the debt that we've racked up with all the nonsense we get up to over the course of our lives. You know, there's going to be a pretty long list for most of us.

You know, for children, all I have to do is ask your parents how many times you've given them cheek. And they'll let you quickly find out that you've been up to all sorts of nonsense. But the problem only gets worse as we get older.

The problem for adults is that our issues, our problems, our thoughts, our words, our actions, all the nasty things we do and think and say, they do more damage because we're bigger.

[12 : 53] We have more influence. And so we've got a larger debt to pay. And the payment of that debt, of a life lived for our own pleasure and comfort, will cost us our life.

And Jesus here just makes it disappear. He doesn't just wish it away, though. He takes it away. We're carrying around our debt, this legal notice of debt.

And Jesus is here, give it to me. I want that. By doing that, he takes it away and he nails it along with him on the cross. By doing that, Jesus is saying that the record of debt belongs to him now.

Jesus took our payment in his body with him to the cross. And by nailing it there, he destroys it. It's like destroying evidence or losing the evidence needed to get a conviction in court.

This actually happened to me once. Not that I was in court for doing something wrong, but I was chased down by one of the taxi drivers. And it was a big orange taxi.

[14 : 03] And so I thought it would be easy for me to identify the people in court. And the two drivers pitched up. We had a court date. And I said, oh, I don't know who those are.

They didn't look like me. And they said, what taxi do you drive? And they said, we drive a white taxi. And the judge says, oh, well, there's no evidence. Off you go. You're free. Okay, well, there wasn't any evidence. I couldn't prove that they had driven this big orange taxi and then he killed me.

So what Jesus is doing is he's taking away the evidence that will get us convicted in God's judgment court. When the time comes for us to be tried on judgment day, no one will be able to find any evidence against us.

And if there's no charge against us, we're free to go. But secondly, by the cross, Jesus then triumphs over all and any forces in opposition to him.

Over Satan and all his host of pretend authority. Now, the powers and authorities here actually has a kind of a double meaning. Because it is used both of spiritual power as well as corrupt human power.

[15 : 09] But this shouldn't surprise us. And as we've seen and as we've discovered in the book of Revelation, that corrupt human powers, authority structures, governments, have behind them this malevolent force of Satan.

Always working in the background. Getting them to overreach their God-given authority. Trying to get them to remake the world in their own image. Ruling according to whatever definition of good or evil that he is whispering in their ears.

Remember, that's how he operated with Adam and Eve all those years ago. In fact, Paul is taking a direct dig at the corrupt power of both Rome and Jerusalem. Remember how the Romans and Jewish rulers both colluded during Jesus' trial?

These powers, goaded on by Satan, are agitated by Christ's claim to kingship. They strip him naked. Hold him up to public contempt.

That's what being crucified on a cross did. The whole point of that is for everyone to see how powerless you are and how powerful the Roman governors are.

[16 : 21] But it's a horrible, horrible way to kill people. They strip him naked. Hold him up to public contempt. And celebrate over him in triumph. Or, so it seemed.

Because all the while that Jesus is on the cross, in the hours that he spent dying, and the days that he actually spent dead, he was busy disarming them.

Taking their power and weapons of war from them. See, the irony of the cross is that it does the exact opposite of what these powers think they have achieved.

One commentator says that, On the contrary, on the cross, God was stripping them naked, was holding them up to public contempt, and leading them in his own triumphal possession, in Christ, the crucified Messiah.

Now, the triumph described here is what Roman generals did to their enemies after defeating them. They would organize a huge public event, marching down the streets of Rome, leading a host of humiliated prisoners behind them, including the defeated king.

[17 : 33] And what the triumph does, what this triumphal procession does, for the people watching it, is tells them in no uncertain terms, that the king that they've been dragging behind him, his power has been irrevocably broken, and that they're no longer a threat to anyone anymore.

So by disarming Satan, Jesus takes away his ability to bully, and threaten people into submission, and scare them. Now, I was once in a fight at school, and I was armed, thankfully.

The thing about being armed, it makes you feel stronger, you see. I had a hockey stick. I played hockey. I didn't just grab it. And I wasn't causing the fight. I was trying to defend myself.

Anyway, but I was very ready to fight. I got this big hockey stick. I felt secure. But as we were about to start the fight, someone ripped it out of my hands from behind me. And then I was like, Whoa, why are we fighting?

We should be friends. You know, you turn around very quickly when your weapons of war are taken and stripped out of your hand. So the deeper irony, and the fact where God's amazing wisdom, and his cleverness, and where his power is truly displayed, is that at his weakest, most vulnerable moment, Jesus is dying, his blood is streaming out of his hands.

[18 : 59] He can't do anything. Although actually he could have. And they tempt him. Listen, why don't you call down the angels and let them bring you off the cross? And if only he had known that he has that power.

But at his seeming weakest and most vulnerable moment, Jesus was able to pay the debt for his people and defeat the forces of evil while he was busy dying, and in fact while he was dead. Now, just imagine how powerful he's going to be when he comes back to life again on the other side of death.

If that's what his death does, imagine what his life can do. But come back on Sunday to hear more about that. So this language we find here in Colossians of triumphing over evil forces and disarming them and making a public spectacle of them and stripping them of their power.

This is fighting language and it's scattered throughout the New Testament. Least of all in Revelation that we've been studying. It's a language of two kingdoms at war with each other and of us being rescued or ripped away from the kingdom of death and darkness and safely brought into a new kingdom, one full of light and life.

[20 : 15] And the reason Jesus wants to do that is that once he's taken away these people out of Satan's grasp, he can take aim at the one causing all the problems, at Satan himself.

You see, because Satan, he's really a usurper of God's power and a bully and he's at heart like all bullies, a coward. And so what he does to protect himself, he surrounds himself with the kind of like a human shield wall.

That's what he's doing with all the people that is in his control. You know, like terrorists often do. You hear about it in the news, the human shield wall. And he does that because he knows that God doesn't really want to take us out along with him.

As we prayed earlier, God doesn't hate anything that he's made. And that's the reason that he comes down to save us because he loves us. What Jesus does on the cross is like a stealth recovery mission.

It's like a hostage release situation. Like in the movies. The hero goes into enemy controlled territory, frees the hostages, gets them out of harm's way, and that leaves the bad guys open to be taken out by sniper or missile fire.

[21 : 25] Now, I don't know about you, but you have to be pretty powerful to be dead and dying to actually get stuff done. Normally, like we get the flu, man flu, and you just can't even get out of bed.

But Jesus is so powerful that his death and dying gets all of this done. He defeats the strongest evil force in the universe, all his spiritual host of minions, and all the evil human powers in their thrall.

I don't know any hero that can compare to Jesus who is so powerful that his death means life and his defeat means victory. Well, where does this leave us?

Which side of the cosmic battle are you on? If you have not yet trusted in Christ to pay the price for your sins, can I urge you to do so now before it's too late?

Otherwise, your own life is forfeit. And you can pay that price and live. You can pay the price on your own, but you don't get to live through that payment.

[22 : 37] Likewise, if you haven't come to Christ to fool, get your sins forgiven. You're still being held hostage by the devil. Maybe you find yourself addicted to a life of sin.

And you need to turn to Jesus and let him take away your guilt and your shame. Let him free you from the claws of the devil. Humble yourself and realize you're not strong enough to handle the devil on your own.

He's too strong to break free and he's too clever for you. He'll outwit you at every place. No, you need a champion on your side that has done the work for you. And Jesus is the only option because he's the only one who's defeated both sin and Satan.

Or you can roll the dice, take a chance with the most powerful and evil being in the universe. At the end of our parable of the strong man, Jesus has some strong words for his listeners as he concludes that parable, which makes sense now that we know that we're in a war zone.

Very strong words. Jesus says, yeah, you guys must realize whoever is not with me is against me. And whoever does not gather with me scatters.

[23 : 47] And that only makes sense if you're in a war zone because in a war zone you've got to be fighting with the one together. You've got to be fighting together. You can't take a neutral stance. Least of all, in this cosmic world our own lives are at stake.

If you've not yet done so, you need to join the winning team. I mean, why serve a beast, a dragon, a serpent, or at best, your own personal intentions and your own ideas of what's right and wrong, which often comes down to getting as much comfort as you can in this life.

These things that we serve pale in comparison to Jesus, Jesus, the King of God's kingdom.

Remember how we've seen Him in Revelation? One who's like a son of man, dressed in a robe, with a golden sash around His waist, whose hair is as white as snow, eyes like blazing fire, whose feet like burnished bronze, glowing in a furnace, with a voice like rushing waters.

In His right hand He holds seven stars. His face is like a sun shining in all its brilliance. Far better to serve that kind of king than our own private, personal intentions, least of all the devil.

But, if you have come to Christ, or rather Christ has saved you, and you're living as a free citizen of the kingdom of God, good. Now, like all freed hostages, get on with the work of building the

kingdom.

[25 : 14] We are now free to serve Jesus, and in fact, partner with Him in fixing the evil in our world. The evil in the world that Satan has been caused, and the evil that we've caused.

And we get to do some of that hostage-freeing plunder work ourselves. We get to tell others about the freedom they can enjoy. And we get to apply the same life-giving love, life-giving mercy, life-giving forgiveness that we've received from the captain of our salvation.

We get to spread that to those around us. And as we do that, we re-establish God's original purpose for creation. To create a world full of goodness and blessing and life.

So our life as saved citizens of Christ's kingdom is that we get to be part of Jesus' rescue team. Is that not a life worth living? And is that not good news worth sharing?

Jesus in Revelation says, do not be afraid. I am the first and the last. I am the living one. I was dead. And now look, I am alive forever and ever.

[26 : 28] and I hold the keys of death and Hades. Amen.