

Midweek Message

“But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

(1 Corinthians 15:57 ESV)

We all want to experience victory regardless of what it is we might be facing. We certainly see this in the sporting world where teams battle for victory over each other's opponents. We also see this in the fans, people like you and me, who root for our chosen team to be victorious over whoever it is our favorite team is playing against. In our current situation as we face this pandemic, we're also very hopeful that God will lead our medical professionals to better treatments and perhaps even a vaccine that will give us victory over this virus. So, we know what it means to be victorious in numerous situations. However, as I said in Sunday's sermon, we who believe in and follow the Lord Jesus Christ have already experienced certain victory. As such, in this message I would like to elaborate a bit regarding a few ways in which we have victory in Jesus.

First, we have victory over sin. In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul tells us: *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:1,2 ESV)*. I often use this Scripture when we come together for communion because it's such a great statement of the hope we have in and through Jesus. **NO CONDEMNATION!!!** Do you hear that? God Himself is telling us that all our sins, those in the past, those in the present, and those in the future are completely covered by the wondrous love, mercy, and grace of God through the person and work of Jesus Christ. You see, we're completely free from the punishment of sin due us. As such, there's great freedom for believers in regard to moral failure in that we don't have to live our lives worrying about what happens if we mess things up. We have great confidence that nothing we do, think, feel, or say will ever separate us from the firm position we have in Jesus. Now, that doesn't mean we should be careless about how we live our lives. We've been changed and transformed by God's grace having been given new life in Jesus. As those who have that new life we should strive to live that new life. As we're told in Colossians: *“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Colossians 2:6, 7 ESV)*. We're to draw our strength from our union with Jesus as we strive, by the grace of God, to become more and more like Him. However, when it comes to our victory over sin, we also have victory regarding the power of sin over us. We see this in Romans where we're told:

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (Romans 6:12-14 ESV).

Sin no longer has dominion over us. However, we do still struggle with our sin and it even taints everything we do. The Apostle Paul struggled with his own sinfulness as he says:

“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

(Romans 7:21-25 ESV)

You see, through Jesus, we have spiritual power to overcome our sinful tendencies and habits. We don't have to give in to our sinful habits. We can overcome them. There's one more thing regarding our victory over sin and that's in regard to the presence of sin in us. We'll experience this at the resurrection of our bodies when Jesus returns. The Apostle John tells us in his first letter: *“Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because*

we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2 ESV). What a beautiful truth and wonderful hope as we will be completely transformed in body, soul, and spirit. That's what it actually means when Scripture tells us that we'll be glorified—fashioned into a state of physical and spiritual perfection.

Secondly, we have victory over this world. I don't know if you've ever thought about that truth but is something very important for us to grasp. Scripture teaches us:

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith."

(1 John 5:1-4 ESV)

Once again, context is very important. Throughout this letter, the Apostle John has been emphasizing the outworking of our salvation in Jesus and how we're to live differently than the people of this world who don't know Him. John is constantly speaking to the issue of Christian love and how this love, first for God but also to one another, should be the essence of Christian living. All we have to do is look at the mess the world is in today, especially regarding the political and racial unrest that's so prevalent during this pandemic. So many are caught up in striving to get their own interests accomplished without consideration for the effect it may have on others. When you add to that the violence that's resulting in so many being killed we can see how loveless the world truly is. However, as believers in Jesus, we're not to live that way. We're to walk in love which basically means we're to work for the well-being of those who are within our circles of influence. When we do that, it's our faith in Jesus, expressed through love, that actually overcomes the world. Since the Holy Spirit has come to dwell within us, He will help us do what's right in regard to all people with whom we interact, regardless of who they are or how they act toward us. In doing so, the world around us can see what the grace of God and the salvation of Jesus does in a life that's being transformed by Him.

Finally, we have victory over death. In the above verse from 1 Corinthians chapter 15, the Apostle Paul reiterates that in Jesus Christ we have complete and total victory. Sometimes when we use just one verse from a passage, we often miss the context and the great theological truth that brings us to the Scripture we're quoting. If we look back at what the Apostle Paul was writing, we find a wonderful explanation of this great victory in Jesus for which we're to be thankful. Beginning in verse 51 he says:

"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. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. 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. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:51-57 ESV)

Now, I don't know about you, but that passage fills me with great hope and expectation. I'm not sure I can even imagine what that moment will be like, but I do know it'll be more glorious than anything we could ever experience in this life. What a great hope our Lord has given us through His victory as He gave His life as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. We who are now united to Him should live every day with hope, knowing that at any moment our loving Savior could signal the trumpets and take us to be with Himself forever and ever.

Listen, I know that times are difficult for all of us as we continue through this pandemic and I do hope our God will bring an end to it soon. However, for us there's always room for joy because our God walks with us every step of the way, holding us, healing us, helping us in all that we will ever have to endure as we continue this journey we call life.

Pastor Mark