

## Christ the Victor

Date: 6 April 2025, 5th Sunday in Lent

Location: St George's Battery Point

Series: The Cross of Christ

Texts: Psalm 3; Colossians 2.6-15, Mark 3.20-30

What is the story behind your name? My parents had been married for 10 years when I was born. They'd been missionaries for all that time working in majority world countries. In many of these countries peoples lives were dominated by fear of hostile spiritual powers. If someone got sick in PNG people often wouldn't go to the hospital, they'd go to the witch doctor. People would blame evil spirits for all sorts of things: crops dying, sickness, the roof of your house falling in. People would keep these evil spirits on side through various offerings and sacrifices. In cultures like this people would often only become Christians when they were convinced that Jesus was more powerful than the spirits. Living in this kind of world must have had a powerful effect on my parents. I remember them telling me several times that they named me Victor, because we have the victory in Christ.

This is the 5th in our series on the Cross of Christ. We're looking at the different pictures that the Scriptures use to teach us what Jesus' death for us accomplished and how each of these speak to a different aspect of the human condition. Today our theme is what theologians call *Christus Victor*: Christ the winner; the picture of Jesus' death on the cross as a victory. We started this series by considering who it was who was crucified. Jesus is fully human and represents us. He is not some innocent unrelated third party, but fully God, come in the flesh taking our place. We saw that he is our sacrifice, dying for sin, cleansing us from guilt and shame and giving us access to God. Last week we saw that in his death he reconciled us to God. These two pictures of *sacrifice* and *reconciliation* address the fact that we as human beings are the author and agent of our sin and subsequent alienation from God. Looking at Jesus' death as a *victory* brings into focus the fact that we are also victims. There are hostile forces arrayed against us and so often we feel powerless, oppressed, captive, enslaved. But on the cross Jesus defeated our enemies and rescued us so that we can live in freedom and peace. This morning we're going to look at first who our **enemies** are, second, Christ's **victory** over them, and we'll finish with how we are to live in the light of his victory, or as the baptism service puts it, "**fight** bravely under his banner".

### Enemies

I've taken it as given that there are hostile powers that stand against us, but is this really the case? If so, who and what might they be? I think this is one of those moments where our culture engages in doublethink. On the one hand the story we tell is that we inhabit a purely materialist universe. We don't believe in the spiritual or supernatural. On the other hand, we're fascinated with things like ghost stories and horoscopes. Mental health issues are all around us. People battle all kinds of addictions. We're anxious and fearful. The popularity of yoga and mindfulness says we're looking for spiritual solutions to gain control over our lives. On the edges we have an inkling that people might be under the oppression of dark forces that are outside our consciousness.

Maybe you've had strange experiences of a darkness or oppression that left you breathless and terrified. Maybe you've found yourself in circles and circumstances which have compelled you to do something you know was wrong. Maybe you battle thoughts that attack and condemn you and you feel trapped and the only relief you seem to find is in self-destructive behaviour.

The Bible is honest about life. It says we're in a spiritual battle with enemies who would destroy us. It speaks about these enemies in a variety of ways. In Romans 5 Sin and Death are linked together. Sin entered the world in Adam's Fall. And with Sin came Death. Death is part of the curse. James writes that when sin is full grown it gives birth to death.<sup>1</sup> Sin and Death now reign over humanity. Paul writes that the whole world is a prisoner to sin.<sup>2</sup> Jesus says "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin."<sup>3</sup> I know this is how I've experienced sin at times. I've gone into something knowing it's wrong. But it has scratched an itch. It's enjoyable, otherwise it wouldn't be tempting after all! And I've been hooked. It has an addictive cycle. Breaking out of it has been terribly difficult.

Then there is the World. Sometimes the world means God's good creation. But often it refers to the world, corrupted, that does not know God and is set against him. Jesus says the world hates him and those who belong to him.<sup>4</sup> Greek Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart writes,

The [world] is an empire of cruelty, aggression, envy, misery, violence, falsehood, greed, ignorance, and spiritual desolation: it is death working in all things, the power to dominate or slay, but not to make new. It is that "present evil world" (Gal. 1.4) to which Paul says we must never be conformed (Rom. 12.2).<sup>5</sup>

The New Testament describes our fallen condition as being subjects of a dark kingdom and enthralled to powers that challenge God. This age is ruled by 'thrones, dominions, principalities and powers', and "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."<sup>6</sup> These may be both the structures of this world that are meant to serve the common good but which become perverted and instead oppress and dominate. And they are also certainly malevolent spiritual powers which deceive and oppress. Chief of these is the one whom Jesus calls the devil, the prince of this world, the father of lies. He is also called Satan, which means the Accuser. 2 Corinthians names him "the god of this world", and 1 John says, "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."<sup>7</sup> Jesus says his purpose is to steal and kill and destroy.<sup>8</sup> He blinds us to the truth about God.<sup>9</sup> As citizens of his kingdom we follow his ways and the ways of this world. He is at work in those who disobey God.<sup>10</sup>

These are the enemies that stand against us, Sin, the World, the Devil, and ultimately Death. They make our lives a misery. They rob us of good things. They despoil and crush and condemn. They are our enemies because they are God's enemies and would destroy his good creation which he loves, especially those made to be his children. And for many people, maybe for you, life is a battlefield, and you're taking bullets. But over these great and terrible enemies towers the cross. On the cross Jesus stepped in as our champion. He went into mortal combat and emerged victorious in triumph. So

---

<sup>1</sup> James 1.15

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 3.22

<sup>3</sup> John 8.34

<sup>4</sup> John 15.18-19

<sup>5</sup> David Bentley Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, 65

<sup>6</sup> Ephesians 6.12

<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 John 5.19

<sup>8</sup> John 10.10

<sup>9</sup> 2 Corinthians 4.4

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 2.1-2

how is it that the cross, what looked like utter defeat and humiliation is the supreme victory of God? How is it that Jesus has defeated these foes by this death?

### **Victory**

Sin, Death, the Devil, all the evils of this world were never God's intention for his good creation. And at the point of the entry of evil into the world God promised that one day evil would be defeated. He says to the snake,

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.<sup>11</sup>

That promise Jesus fulfilled in the cross. There are two key texts which outline how Christ's death is his victory.

The first is Colossians 2.14-15

He forgave us all our sins, **14** having canceled 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. **15** And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Paul says Jesus defeats two enemies. First there is the written code. Paul here is talking about the Old Testament Law. The law is holy, righteous and good. But because of sin, we break it and so we fall under its curse and it stands against us in judgment. But on his cross, Christ bore that curse for us. The judgment of the law fell on him and was exhausted. We are forgiven and freed from its penalty. Paul uses the picture of the written charge that was nailed above Jesus on the cross. Because Christ has borne our sin on the cross, that was also the written charge that condemned us. And Jesus took it and nailed it to the cross so its claim on us has been canceled, the charge has been wiped clean. So Paul can say in Romans 8, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ." And he asks, "Who can bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?" The answer is no one. "Who is it that condemns?" Only Christ has the authority to condemn because he alone is the judge.<sup>12</sup> But he has died for us and now lives to intercede for us. And so one of Satan's great weapons against us, the power to accuse, is broken because it is shown to be false.

Paul then describes how the cross has defeated the the evil powers. The picture he uses is taken from the battlefield. In the ancient world when an enemy was defeated the victors would humiliate them by stripping them of the weapons and armour. They would be taken as captives back to the victorious general's home city where they would lead in his victory parade called a triumph. On the cross Jesus hung stripped naked in humiliation and defeat. It looked for all the world as if the powers of darkness had triumphed over God and his anointed king. But Jesus' apparent defeat was actually his glorious victory and the humiliation of Satan and his forces. How did he do so? First he resisted the temptation of the devil. That temptation began in the desert where Satan offered him kingship without suffering. It continued as he hung on the cross with the invitation to save others by saving himself. But unlike our father Adam, resisted the temptation in the garden and said to God, "Not my will but yours be done". His obedience to death undid the death brought by Adam's disobedience. He refused to repay evil with evil, but overcame evil with good by giving his life in love. And so Satan's power was broken. Against the powers of this dark world who conspired to murder him, he could

---

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 3.15

<sup>12</sup> Romans 8.1, 33-34

have met force with force. He could have commanded 12 legions of angels to come to his rescue. But he declined to resort to worldly power and instead was crucified in weakness. He refused to disobey God, or hate his enemies or imitate the world's use of power. He remained uncontaminated, free in his love. And so in his death he exposes the powers and principalities for what they are: hollow and false. His death was a victory because the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength.<sup>13</sup>

Hebrews describes his victory like this.

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.<sup>14</sup>

In sharing in our humanity, suffering all that the powers of this dark world could throw at him, remaining uncorrupted and bursting forth from the tomb in life, Jesus has broken the hold Satan has over humanity. We need not fear death because in Jesus there is life and hope.

Jesus described his work in that story we read in Mark 3. Satan is the strong man and Jesus has come to tie up the strong man and steal his possessions. He demonstrated this by casting out demons and freeing those under their oppression. And in his death he has bound Satan and freed those held captive by him. John writes that “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”<sup>15</sup> His death is a ransom that frees us from the power of sin and death and the devil. His death redeems us from slavery to sin and the devil. And so Paul can say, “[God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”<sup>16</sup>

## **Fight**

The risen Christ is now ascended and reigning at the Father’s right hand. His victory was decisive. The powers have been dethroned. Satan’s destruction is assured. But he is still at large and wants to take as many as he can down with him. The war has been won, but we can still expect skirmishes with the retreating foe. We live between Jesus’ victory on the cross and the day when he comes in glory and all evil will be destroyed. As Paul writes, “Christ must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.”<sup>17</sup> And so as those who have been rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought into the Kingdom of the Son, we are called to fight bravely under his banner. So what does this look like for us?

First let me say the enemies are real and they seek your life, but Christ is stronger. The occult, ouija boards, horoscopes, seances, magic, all that kind of junk is a gateway to darkness. Don’t go there. If you do experience spiritual oppression, then you need to turn to Jesus. To come under his protection you need to reject any allegiances that you have made and give yourself wholly to Jesus as your king. This is why in their baptismal vows people reject Satan and all that is evil. Please, if this is an issue for you do not put off speaking to me or a mature Christian whom you trust.

---

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 1.25

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 2.14-15

<sup>15</sup> 1 John 3.8

<sup>16</sup> Colossians 1.13

<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 15.25

Second, I want to speak to those of you for whom life very often is a battle because of the wounds that have been inflicted upon you in the past. These do not define who you are. Jesus does. He has won the victory. You may feel weak. But he is strong. He is your champion, your shield and your protector. Nothing can separate you from his love. Remember that Satan is the Accuser and the Father of Lies. Those words of accusation you hear are false. You don't need to believe them! Jesus says "the truth will set you free". So hear God's words of truth about who you are in Christ, "You are my daughter, my son, whom I love. With you I am well pleased."

Christ has won the victory. So we can stand in his victory. "Be strong in the Lord, and the strength of his mighty power" Paul says. It's only as we stand in Christ that we can resist the assaults of the evil one. How can we fight against the powers of this dark world? There are three basic things we can do. First, we must pray. The Lord's prayer is our guide. We pray "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil." Second, we speak. We proclaim the victory of Christ and urge people to call upon him as Saviour and follow him as Lord. As people turn to Christ, they are freed from Satan's power and God's kingdom advances. Third, we walk in the way of Christ. We follow his example. We fight not with the weapons of the world, but with truth, and grace, and humility, and service, and suffering, and forgiveness, and love. But more on that next week.

*The Collect for Peace from the service of Morning Prayer*

O God, the author and lover of peace, in knowledge of whom stands our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom; defend your servants in all assaults of our enemies, that, surely trusting in your defence, we may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**