

Conquerors for Jesus

Revelation 12:10-11

Jesus Speaks!

Jesus is the author of all scripture, but He declares Himself the author of the Revelation in a special way. In chapter one Jesus appears in a stunning vision and announces this message for the churches in Asia. Listen now as Jesus speaks to us from verses 10 and 11 in chapter 12.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

Prayer for Illumination

Grant us, O Lord God, the knowledge of your divine words, and fill us with the understanding of your holy Gospel and the riches of your divine gifts and the indwelling of your Holy Spirit. Enable us with joy to keep your holy commandments and accomplish them and fulfill your will, and to be accounted worthy of the blessings and the mercies that are from you now and at all times.

We Are Conquerors

We are at the end of another semester, and we are tired. Some of us are sick or injured, some of us are hurting from our mistakes, and some of us are just discouraged. Ministry is hard. We labor day by day, and often it seems as though progress is slow or non-existent. At times like this Jesus has words of encouragement for us.

Jesus sent this Revelation to Saint John to encourage His church when she was under attack. As the first century unfolded, persecution set in and picked up speed. First the Jews persecuted the church, and several decades later the Romans joined in. Christians saw their friends and leaders jailed and killed, and of course they began to wonder where this was leading. To a church under attack and suffering greatly, Jesus sent this message of hope and encouragement. And the heart of that message is that He *has* conquered Satan and *will* conquer the world with the gospel. To frightened, discouraged believers, the book of Revelation was an exhilarating message.

We happily resonate with the news that Jesus has conquered. This is the heart of the gospel! That God took on human nature, successfully lived the perfect life we could never live, died to pay for our sins, and rose to rule from heaven – what a thrilling message! And when God set out to release us from bondage to sin and set us free to serve Him, He succeeded in His mission. On the cross Jesus said, “It is finished.” And afterward He accomplished all He promised to do – rising from the dead, ascending to the Father, and sending the Holy Spirit. Jesus has conquered sin and Satan, and is ruling at the right hand of the Father. Hallelujah!

But this passage from the middle of Revelation declares a victory, not by Jesus, but by His followers. The wonderful news here is that *followers of Jesus* conquer Satan. We, the weak and insignificant ones who believe in Jesus – many of whom are poor, uneducated, only partly sanctified, struggling to get through life – we Christians conquer Satan. Campus ministers – worn out by a hard semester, underfunded, mistake-prone, tempted, sinful, discouraged – also conquer Satan. Even students – we love our students. We love them so much. But wow! Students, in all their immaturity and foolishness, also conquer Satan. Isn't this startling news? Who would have guessed such a thing?

Now no doubt there are skeptics who find these ideas disturbingly Charismatic or Pentecostal. Listen to this – you don't have to be Charismatic or Pentecostal to believe Jesus when He speaks – and I know that you all *do* believe Jesus. So let's listen more closely to what He says. Jesus has three things to say about our conquering Satan.

The Blood of the Lamb Conquers

First, we conquer Satan by the blood of the Lamb. This is the foundation of our life and the hinge of history. Before Jesus, the whole world was blinded by darkness and enslaved to sin. No one could conquer Satan – rather, Satan ravaged the earth. This is abundantly clear in the accounts of the ancient world – a horrible place in spite of the glory of those cultures. Even in the Promised Land demons ran rampant over the countryside, possessing, tormenting, and destroying people. There was no exit from the demonic house of horrors – until Jesus came. The gospels show how Jesus set people free and chased the demons from Israel. The climax occurred when Jesus paid the price of our sins and smashed the power of Satan on the cross. The universe convulsed as Satan was defeated, and as the sun rose on the first day of the week, a new universe emerged upon the battlefield.

Before this, the old world was cloaked in darkness, and although “here and there a deed/Of prowess done redressed a random wrong,” man's ability to exercise dominion was weak and limited. Now, with all debts settled and Satan's power broken, man is free to rule the world under God, as God always intended. Now, after the climactic battle on the cross, man has the ability to conquer Satan in day-to-day struggles. We are still, as before, beset by sin and limited in our abilities, but we are no longer pinned down by Satan. The blood of the Lamb enables us to go against the forces of darkness, and win, and push back evil from the land. Now, the followers of Jesus conquer Satan, and the power to do so is found in the blood of the Lamb. And we who follow Jesus do so by the power of that blood.

The Word of Testimony Conquers

Second, we conquer Satan by the word of our testimony. I, perhaps like you, was raised to think of a testimony as an account of God's miraculous work in my life, rescuing me from the misery of sin and leading me into the joy of salvation. And we knew that the more miserable we had been, the more miraculous God's grace – or at least the story was better! No doubt it *was* a miracle when God saved you and me, and we would be monsters not to rejoice in that day. But in the New Testament, especially John's writings, testimony has more to do with the covenant than with my life story. The Greek word is μαρτυρία, and of the nine times it occurs in Revelation, seven of those are in the phrase “testimony of Jesus.” In John's writings, the testimony is not my life story, but Jesus' life story. It has more to do with what Jesus said than with what I say. In other words, the testimony is closely related to the gospel.

So we see that we do not defeat Satan by reciting how we came to faith. We defeat Satan by declaring what Jesus has done. And of course the central thing Jesus has done is to pour out His blood for His people. The testimony is the declaration that the blood of the Lamb has covered the sins of the world. In this context our testimony is not what we have done, but what Christ has done. The gospel is the power that defeats Satan.

Conquerors Face Death

Third, we conquer Satan as we lose our lives for Jesus and the gospel. This at first sounds radical, but it is nothing more than what Jesus said from the beginning. In Matthew 16:24-25 Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” He who loves his life more than Jesus will not follow Jesus. He who loves his life more than anything will lose his life, because he will not be in communion with the One who gives life. And that means there may come a day when you lose your life in order to gain it.

Notice that just before Jesus said these words in the gospel, Peter had rebuked Jesus for announcing His impending death. At that point Jesus turned His back on Peter and said, “Get behind me, Satan.” Jesus makes it dramatically clear that anyone who clings to life is on the side of Satan. So of course, to defeat Satan, one must relinquish his hold on life. By giving up your claim on life and accepting the reality of death you rob Satan of his grip on you.

Powerless Lion

Peter tells us that Satan is like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Jesus tells us in this Revelation to Saint John that He broke Satan’s power. But it is evident that evil still resides in this world. The astonishing news is that we, the followers of Jesus, destroy what is left of Satan’s power as we rely on the blood of the Lamb, as we proclaim the gospel, and as we let go of our lives.

You know, real lions do not roar when they hunt. They silently stalk their prey until they are able to spring upon the helpless animal. Held by its powerful claws, gripped by its fierce teeth, the gentle antelope shudders its last the lion tears its flesh apart. By calling Satan a roaring lion, Peter tells us that Satan is a wounded beast. His roaring is the cry of agony as he suffers from a terrible wound. Jesus delivered that wound on the cross, and now Satan is enraged and in pain – and roars after his prey. The good news is that anyone with ears to hear is warned when Satan approaches. Furthermore, the good news is that Satan is weak and dying. He who terrorized mankind is terrified by the ferocious Lamb and his terrible followers. He who preyed upon men and women is now prey for the followers of Jesus.

We Are Conquerors

Make no mistake, Jesus does not teach that Christians have the power to defeat Satan. This is no naive triumphalism. Jesus teaches us that *His blood* and *His testimony* in the hands of true followers will defeat Satan. There is nothing in *us* which can conquer evil, but we have access to the tools of success. Jesus tells us here that as we testify to the testimony of Jesus, we beat back the realm of Satan. We who by God’s profound grace are ordained to the ministry of this gospel are generals in this war, and all followers of Jesus who declare the wonders of Jesus’ salvation share in this battle.

This means that when you stand up to preach – as you look out upon your students, you see some who are attentive, or appear to be so; some who look bored, and others who are probably on Facebook. You see the guy struggling with pornography – still! after all these months – the girl who hates her mother, the student who is failing his course work, the guy who is proud of his righteousness, the girl who gets drunk on weekends, the leaders who are not there – and you wonder why you are here when it is apparent that you are having so little effect. Jesus tells us why you are here. Because in the next 30 minutes you will accomplish a great victory. You will not see it with your eyes, but as you proclaim the gospel you will heal and sanctify and save your people. Satan is roaring after them, but as you testify to the power of Jesus’ blood, Satan flees from your people. As you proclaim Jesus you kick in the teeth of the lion. Your words – feeble as they may be – and so many of us struggle to preach well – minute by minute, reduce your vicious enemy to a bloody mess as you inflict terrible wounds upon him.

It all seems so normal. The whirl of the projector, the stir of people in their seats, the following conversation about classes and weekend activities, ordinary students going back to their rooms. Do not be deceived! You drive back home and wonder what happened. You kick yourself for messing up your best illustration, you think of a better way to phrase your key point, it hurts that no one thanked you for your sermon. Do not be deceived! You drive through the same streets lit by the same street lights, your house is the same, your children are in bed – just like every other night. But this is not like every other night. Do not be deceived by appearances! Just as on every other RUF night, this is no ordinary evening. This night was amazing. God accomplished a great victory by His blood and testimony – and you are the person He used to do it. The lion who has been roaring about your campus has been crushed and is fleeing from you

ministry. No, this is no ordinary night. This is a night for rejoicing and celebration. Satan has fled! Jesus has triumphed again!

When your student Bible study leader opens up the testimony of Jesus in a dormitory among a group of fellow students, the power of this gospel is unleashed. The spiritually hurting are healed, the lonely are comforted, the sinful are brought to repentance – and Satan is driven from the place. When your intern has coffee with an outcast and reminds her of the love of Jesus, Satan is put to flight. When a soccer player shares his faith with his teammate, Satan’s power convulses a little more. None of this is glamorous. In fact it is all invisible. Those who go around boasting about their power over Satan are either very immature in the faith or mere attention-seekers. The real power, the cosmic power, is in the hands of the weak and insignificant in the world’s eyes who hold to the testimony of Jesus and are willing to die for him – you, and your students.

Jesus says that there will come a day when you do lay down your life for Him. On that day He will say to you, “Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your lord.” On this the last week of the fall semester, Jesus also says to you, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” You have held fast to the gospel and have shaken the universe. You have proclaimed salvation through the blood of the Lamb, and have kicked in the teeth of Satan. Men may think not much happened this semester, but they are wrong. You have conquered Satan by the blood of the Lamb and the testimony of Jesus. And now, with the angels of heaven and your brothers here in this room, go home rejoicing in the fruit of your labors. Celebrate the incarnation of our Lord. Play with your children. Know that soon you will be called again onto the battlefield, and your work will not be in vain.

Prayer

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December 10, 2015