

Victory: Winning the Spiritual Battle

Number 5 in a series of messages on the unseen world

August 22 & 23, 2009

Intro:

People were asked on a survey *what one reason* kept them from becoming Christians. The *single biggest hurdle mentioned* was what philosophers call *the problem of pain: The existence of evil calls into question the existence of God.*

How can we believe in God in a world that is so twisted?

It's an unpleasant paradox: If a good and powerful God exists, then *why doesn't he do something about all the suffering?* It seems that he is either *unable* or *unwilling*. Now, consider those two options: if he *can't do a thing*, then he's not God. And if he *can do something* but won't - which is worse - then we wouldn't want to follow a god like that!

But if God is *neither indifferent nor incapable*, then he *will* destroy evil. And this is what the Bible teaches: that God will straighten things out someday. The Bible doesn't promise we will like or even understand God's timing, but it does reveal his character: he is *both* good and powerful. Lee Strobel: "*You don't read half a novel and then criticize the author for not resolving the plot.*" No, the author has the right to make you wait. He resolves the plot in the back of the book and that is where we will turn today. We'll peek to see what happens in the end. We've been studying angels and demons, in this message we'll learn about...

1. The final conclusion of the conflict:

Evil will come to an end in a final battle.

There will be resolution to the tension and an end to sin and suffering. **Rev. 20:10** - *And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.* Jesus mentioned this in **Matt 25:41**. The result, for God's people,

is an end to all misery: **Rev. 21:4** *God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.*

Evil had a beginning: it came about as a result of free beings rejecting God's authority. And *evil will have an end* when all beings will acknowledge God's rightful rule. **Phil 2:11** *every knee will bow.*

We don't know *when* this will be, but it *will be*. This is a motivating realization. **Rom. 16:20** - *The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.* It will happen. Good will prevail. God is not in trouble. Though the battle rages and it *may look* like a close contest from our limited vantage point, the outcome is not up in the air. It has been determined. **Jn 16:11** - *the prince of this world now stands condemned.* He's just awaiting final judgment.

T - *The fulfillment* of these verses I've just read *is still future*, but our experience is not just tied to *what will happen*. It is also tied to *what has already happened*. We *look forward* to the *final conclusion* through eyes of faith, trying to envision just what that will be like. But we *look back* at Christ's victory with absolute clarity. We have the written record of what he has already accomplished for us. This leads to...

2. The single secret for spiritual success:

Jesus already triumphed against the powers of evil.

So, we don't fight for victory, we fight from victory!

The most important step to *experiencing* victory is to grasp that *the end result* is already a *sure thing*. Think of the difference between fighting *for* victory and fighting *from* victory. *Imagine watching a suspenseful movie. Rather than always using military metaphors, consider a romance: is the guy going to get the girl? Will she accept him? If you already saw the picture of their wedding on the cover of the DVD, then you know how it ends! We have a picture that*

reveals the happy ending of humanity's story. The cross shows what Jesus already did. **Heb 2:14-15** Jesus came as a man so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery.... Jesus sets the prisoner free. He paid the ransom. He served the sentence. **Rom. 6:14** - sin shall not be your master. Heard the expression: *The victory is ours?* Know why? Because he gave it to us!

Listen to what God has already done: **Col. 1:13** He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. Like I said last week, we are in Christ, and that is the single secret for spiritual success. **Col 2:10** you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority. He rules!

I feel like a skinny kid following his big muscular friend into a scary situation. When bullies threaten me, I point to my bodyguard: *I'm with him!* We're safe because of Jesus. **1 Jn 3:8** - The Son of God appeared to destroy the devil's work. *He's stronger than whatever threatens us!* **Col 2:15** Jesus disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. *This is past tense. It already happened.* It isn't our goal to achieve, but our starting place. We don't fight for victory, we fight from victory. **Rom 8:37** - we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. The victory we share should lead us to praise him! **2 Cor. 2:14** - thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ... *The parade is underway! It's a victory dance!* **Phil 4:13** - I can do everything through him who gives me strength. The work of Christ is not only what saves our souls, it's what strengthens us to stand up against attack.

T - Though the final victory is sure, we continue to battle temptation. The outcome of the war has already been decided, but a lot of struggle and suffering is still ahead of

us. So, *what can we do* in order to win a few battles this side of the final one?

3. Simple strategies for spiritual success:

• **Don't play dead**. Don't say, *well he's too strong so I'll just roll over and give in!* No! You *can* resist and you *should!* **1 Pet. 5:8-9** - Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...

In honor of this verse, I've been featuring some cat stories. This last one is about mountain lions. One was spotted down by our house. Warnings were posted in the adjacent park. So, I got informed about what to do: *If you are attacked, fight back. Never succumb. Under no circumstances fall to the ground and roll into a fetal position. If you do this, your chances of survival are limited. Once you are down the cat has the advantage.* The idea is to remain standing and resist!

I read of one attack when a lion pounced on a hiker named Jim Hamm. His wife, Nell decided not to just sit back and watch. She began to hit it with a log and even got a pen from Jim's pocket and jabbed at the lion's eye. The lion fled and the man survived.

It's the same way with attacks from Satan. Don't play dead. Don't give in. Resist him. No matter the pressure of temptation, you *can* say no. **Prov. 1:10** - do not consent! Listen to this quote from a woman who battled with anorexia *"What really made me victorious was realizing that even though the enemy could implant a thought into my mind, it was my choice whether or not to act on it. I chose not to starve through the power of Jesus Christ."*

You do have a choice. Don't assume defeat as if it's inevitable. You don't need to fail. There is a way out. **1 Cor. 10:13** - No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are

tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. You can resist anything he brings. 2 Thess. 3:3 – The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

Another verse about not rolling over and playing dead tells us what this looks like: James 4:7 – Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

• **Stay on guard.** The enemy won't give up his attacks so we can't give up on being vigilant. We never know which direction he will come from next or when the next assault will be. Luke 4:13 – And when the devil had finished at every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. Like any effective fighter, he takes advantage of timing so we must always be alert. When you've won a round, he'll come back again and attack when you least expect it. He sneaks up right after an accomplishment when we're vulnerable to think we did it on our own! Or right after a failure he will hit us with discouragement.

If we are to **stay on guard** then we must remain armed (covered Eph 6 last week). The sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. Remember Jesus set an example quoting Scripture in a direct conflict with Satan (Matt. 4). God's Word is the basis for right thinking.

Satan wants to fill your head with lies. For instance, to make you feel worthless if you've lost your job. When negative thinking threatens to take you down, you follow the counsel of 2 Cor. 10:5 – we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. We counter Satan's lies with God's truth. Phil 4:8 – ...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. You can decide which way to point your mind, up or down. Refocus and gain perspective. 2 Tim. 2:26 refers to those with a

knowledge of the truth. What does it say about them? They will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. You want to be free? **Stay on guard** with truth as your defense.

• **Don't get overconfident.** Let me *define* overconfident. Overconfidence in the spiritual sphere is *self-confidence*. *Pride comes before the fall.*

Don't have that, "*It could never happen to me,*" attitude. Before its maiden voyage, *the Titanic was deemed unsinkable.* 1 Cor 10:12 – So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! We're all vulnerable! Let's not pretend that we have adequate power in and of ourselves. 1 John 4:4 says, Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world! Greater is *he*, not *greater are we!* Jesus is the one with power. *He* is the one we trust. We are not to handle spiritual warfare in our own power. Acts 19:13-16 – Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. A cavalier attitude will get you into trouble. This is not a game. We must rely on God. Jesus said, Matt. 26:41 ...pray so that you will not fall into temptation.... Praying is a way we demonstrate our dependence upon God.

Two more texts make a point about not being reckless. Jude 1:8,9 and 2 Peter 2:10,11. Even powerful angels do not regard demons flippantly. We must take into account that the powers and battle are real. Even when we do get to

wield spiritual power, we should not slip into pride. Jesus said, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).

The focus should be on Christ and what he has done, not on our abilities and what we can do. Remember, Satan's agenda is to lead our minds astray from sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Cor 11:3). Let's thwart the devil's plans by remaining confident in Christ alone!

T - Jesus instituted a way that we can appreciate and worship him for what he's done. It is called **Communion**: It makes sense that we close this service and this series by remembering together the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. After taking part in the Lord's Supper together, we will respond with worship in song and in giving. At the end of the service, celebration prayer team members will be available to minister to you with support and encouragement. Let's have the ushers come up to distribute the communion elements.

Explain: We need not wonder if God is powerful enough and loving enough to do something about evil. It has already been done. The cross broke the power of sin and sets us free.

Pray with Cynthia about Dwayne's job loss

More Meat (unused extra ideas and verses):

Remember what I taught about the armor of God? In summary: put on the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 13:14).

John 16:33 - I have overcome the world.

Jude 1:8,9 speaks negatively against slandering celestial beings. ...Even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil..., did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

2 Peter 2:10,11 Refers to those who despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord.

Even now James 2:19 demons fear and tremble.

The final solution is certain but its effect has not been realized yet.

You're not a helpless victim. Not a product of your past.

Gal 5:1 - It is for freedom that Christ set you free so keep standing firm so don't go back into slavery.

Problem of pain: Most attempts to harmonize this dissonance seek to diminish or deny one of the concepts.

Some aim at resolution by denying evil. A cult or two, as well as some major world religions, attempt an easy way out, teaching that evil is only an illusion. This path doesn't deliver us from the dilemma, for the existence of evil is undeniable. Life is a perpetual struggle against depression, disease, and death. Selfishness and hatred are universal.

Others suggest that God must not be good. Maybe he's a capricious, irritable tyrant, acting on His anger arbitrarily from a distance. Is God aloof, unmoved, and unmotivated to get involved? Able, but unwilling? Powerful but

disconnected? If this is the case, we're in sorry shape. This view produces people who are insecure, resentful, and frightened.

We are not encouraged in Scripture to dabble in demonic affairs. Some Christians order demons around, binding Satan and so on. But this is yet future and God is the one who does that.

He's a lion, not a pussycat. Even Jesus answered with Scripture; Matt. 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only." Policy: Address only when he presents himself.

We shouldn't concentrate our energies or thoughts on Satan but on Christ.

??? Don't give him an opportunity (Eph 4:27)

Col. 3:1 - Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

2 Cor. 10:3-5 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Remember that Jesus warned us about the devil's agenda: John 10:10 - The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy.

Resist Satan's temptation to puff yourself up: 1 Chr. 21:1 - Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. Acts 5:3 - But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit, and to keep back some of the price of the land?"

I think most of us are desperately seeking something. We don't recognize God as the answer to our emptiness and loneliness so Satan suggests false solutions. It's time to turn to the only One who can fill the void in your heart. Don't settle for substitutes.

So far, we've been learning that the devil leads the angels who rebelled with him in a constant battle against God and against God's people. His modus operandi is to do whatever he can in whatever way he can to rob God of glory - in fact, to rob God of you!

He works both directly and indirectly. He works indirectly through our natural desires and through the world system to bring temptations by bombarding us with competing values, lifestyles, and worldviews. He also works directly bringing temptations (1 Thess. 3:5), oppressing (Acts 10:38) and possessing (Luke 22:3) people. In all of this, his objective is to oppose God's plan and to control people. But it won't stay this way forever.

Feel empty? Want freedom? Have you sought it on your own?

When we figure out how poorly we have done meeting our own needs we turn to the only One who can take care of us. His arms are open. Do you long to fill the void in your heart as a man dying of thirst craves water? Jn 7:37 - "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink." God

offers what we really need. Don't settle for substitutes. They will compensate for the hollowness in some ways but they will leave you more empty.

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God", for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. Instead, we have an evil triumvirate:

The world – all around us.

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 17 – The world is passing away ...1 John 5:4,5 – Faith gives us victory to overcome the world. What is he talking about? Jn 3:16 God loves it!?

The world system is ruled by Satan: John 12:31 & 14:30 refer to Satan as "the rule of this world." 1 John 5:19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. Plenty of evidence that something's wrong.

2. The world system opposes Christ's followers: John 15:18,19, John 17:14. And we're to be in opposition to the world: James 4:4 – friendship with the world is hatred toward God.

A man was given the opportunity to distinguish himself but saw compromise at the core of the offer. "Don't you want to make a name for yourself in the world?" Answered with a question: "Which world?"

Some temptations are not to be seen as direct attacks of Satan; they just go with the territory. We are in but we're not to be of the world. The world system brings temptations by bombarding us with competing values, lifestyles, and worldviews. Look through adds.

The flesh – it comes from inside us.

As there is nothing inherently wrong with the world, it was made by God as something good, so our bodies are gifts from God. But good things can be twisted and serve as entry points for evil. Rom, 7:18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not.

We don't have to say, the devil made me do it. There is plenty wrong inside of any of us to lead us astray. We are prone to wander. James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. It is in us. A bent. Equated with the old self or sinful nature.

A fleshly orientation is in opposition to God.

Gal. 5:17 The flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another ...Rom. 8:7 the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so . . .

The Bible teaches that we should reject what Satan wants for us. It reminds us to turn off his input! *Mental hospital devised an unusual test to determine if a patient was ready to be released. Brought a candidate into a room where a faucet was left on and the water was running onto the floor. Handed the patient a mop and told him to clean up. Did he have the sense to turn off the water first?*

Like those patients, we need to recognize the source and where solutions start. God's word guides us get it.

Rev. 12:10 – 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 brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night.

Look to Jesus as your example. Don't think he can't relate. He can! Heb. 2:18, 4:15. You can see him in action in Luke 4. We can learn how to respond victoriously by following the example Jesus set when He faced temptation. He was Lk. 4:1 - full of the Holy Spirit. And he answered with Scripture - 4:4,8,12.

Don't hang around. 2 Tim 2:22 - Flee the evil desires of youth. Joseph in Gen. 39:12. Some people have to get very close to the edge. They are testing God. Like at Silver Falls where the swimming area is above the falls. 1 Cor 6:18 - Flee from sexual immorality.

Rom. 13:14 - do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Rom. 12:14 - Make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Look at 1 Cor 10:20. He wanted others to bow down and worship him, even Jesus Mt 4:9
2 Th 2:4 - in the man of sin, he will sit in the temple proclaiming himself as God.

In one of the Lord of the Rings movies, Gandolf is fighting the fire demon Balrog. The thing is falling into a fiery pit and on the way down his tail whips up and wraps around Gandolf's leg, pulling him down as well. A defeated foe makes one more attempt.