

The Cross: God's Victory

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Bible Text: John 12:27-36

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I would like us to turn to John's gospel and to have also a finger in Galatians chapter one. There is one verse there that I want to take us to. But John chapter 12 is our reading, first of all. And then I will make some comments about Galatians 1:4 a little later.

This is at the time when Jesus is aware that his *hour* has come. All the way through John's gospel there has been the question of when would his hour come and what would that hour mean. We read that "This was not yet his hour" or "His hour had not yet come" (e.g. Jn. 2:4; 7:30; 8:20). And it becomes very clear that the hour that he was waiting for was the hour—the event, the occurrence, the significant time—of the cross and all that that meant. And now his hour has come.

John chapter 12 verse 27.

"Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, "Father, save Me from this hour"? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name."

Then a voice came out of heaven: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again."

So the crowd of people who stood by and heard it were saying that it had thundered; others were saying, "An angel has spoken to Him."

Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."

But He was saying this to indicate the kind of death by which He was to die.

The crowd then answered Him, “We have heard out of the Law that the Christ is to remain forever; and how can You say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this Son of Man?”

So Jesus said to them, “For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.”

These things Jesus spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them.

Now, the next part of that passage which we have not read goes on to quote part of the vision of Isaiah in the temple where Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up and exalted above all things. It becomes very clear that there Isaiah saw Jesus—not the incarnate Jesus—but the eternal Son, the Word become flesh...and those words from Isaiah about his commission Jesus applies to himself.

Now, if I were to ask you “What would be one of the hallmarks of, say, Mark’s gospel?” I think you would probably say to me that it was a gospel marked by spiritual conflict. It was a gospel marked by the action of Jesus engaged directly with spiritual forces of wickedness.

And, indeed, if you were to look at Mark this is so. Mark’s gospel records many exorcisms beginning at the time that Jesus began his public ministry and his first preaching, all the way through, virtually to the time of his crucifixion. It seems as though evil forces were constantly around Jesus, constantly trying to interrupt his ministry, always seeking as he says in the parable of the sower to snatch away the Word from the hearts of the hearers.

And those demonic forces in Mark (as also in Matthew and Luke) seem to be extremely active at the time of Jesus’ earthly ministry and he is engaged, it seems, in a full on onslaught towards them and they towards him.

But when you come to John’s gospel as I said to one of my classes recently, “How many exorcisms would you think would be recorded in John’s gospel?”

It comes as something of a surprise to realize that there are no exorcisms recorded in John, not one. And so the question might arise, then: “Is John speaking about some different Jesus?” And the answer must be no. He must be speaking about the same Jesus. So in what way, then, does John draw our attention to the spiritual battle in which Jesus was engaged?

John the apostle, moved by the Holy Spirit, later wrote “For this purpose the Son of Man came into the world, to destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn. 3:8). John knew that everything from the incarnation all the way through to this hour to which he has now come (and beyond), was involved in the destruction of the works of the evil one. So why

does he not record any of the exorcisms which are so prominent in Mark and Matthew and Luke also?

The answer seem to be this, that if you have a look at that passage from chapter 12, the only time that you get exorcism language in John is in verse 31. “*Now* judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be exorcised, *cast out*.”

In other words, John has made the cross—or not that he has made it. He is just in the Spirit describing the cross—he has described the cross in his theological system. He has pointed us to the cross as the one great, final, definitive place where the prince of this world is cast out.

Now John is very aware of the spiritual battle in which Jesus was engaged from the beginning and it is not written in terms of demonic encounters directly, but it is in terms of themes. And three of the main themes that describe that actually all are introduced to us in the very opening verses of John.

Firstly, there is the theme that runs all the way through John’s gospel of contrast and conflict between light and darkness. The Light has come into the world and the darkness has not overcome it or, in some translations, the darkness has not comprehended it. It has not understood what the Light had come for.

Jesus is the Light of the world. “I am the light of the world. He who believes in me shall not walk in darkness, but he shall have the light of life.”

And here in the passage that we have read from John chapter 12 that same theme of the conflict between the light and the darkness emerges again. And you will notice at the verse which I have read from 35 and 36, (though translations handle it differently) put a capital L for light. “Jesus said to them, ‘For a little while longer the Light is among you,’” with a capital L. And I think that is a helpful translational hint to tell us that when Jesus is speaking about the light in these passages, it is right for us to identify capital L light with Jesus.

So for a little longer, I, the Light of the world am among you. While you have the Light, that is while you have me, believe in the Light. That is, believe in me. So that is one way in which John treats the spiritual battle in which Jesus seemed to engage, the contrast between Light and darkness, darkness and Light.

The second way in which John speaks about the spiritual battle, again, is introduced to us right in the very beginning of John’s gospel where we learn that, in fact, there are two families in the world. There are the children of God, who are given power to become children of God by the gift of God. In John chapter one verse 12 and following John makes it clear that this is not a family which comes by natural birth. These are those born not of the will of men, nor of the desire of a husband, or of natural flesh and blood. These are those who are born of God.

As the conversation with Nicodemus in John 3 makes plain, Jesus teaches that we must be born again. You must be born from above. And at that point I do not think, by the way, that Jesus is giving Nicodemus a command. He is not saying you must get yourself born again. He is just making the observation that unless you are born again you will not see the kingdom of heaven. Being born again comes from above, not from us. And, again—as we go down this *cul de sac* just a little bit further—if you look at most of what our advertising industry is about, it is telling you how that you can get yourself a “new you”. Buy this product. Buy that diet. Buy this exercise machine. Buy that ab buster. Buy this holiday. Buy that career. Buy this car. Buy that lifestyle. The whole world wants to be born again, but it only wants to be “born again” by the will of man and the power of the flesh. It wants to create a “new you” without the moral regeneration which comes as a gift from the Holy Spirit.

But follow me back out of that little *cul de sac* and back to where we were. There are two families, the family which is born from above and conversely there is the other family, the family which is marked by Cain and Abel in 1 John chapter three, the family which is marked in John chapter eight by Jesus’ description of those who are opposing him, “You are of your father the devil and you desire to do the deeds of your father.”

And they were offended greatly and said, “But we have Abraham as our father.”

And he said, “No, if you had Abraham as your father you would do the deeds that Abraham did.” In other words, “You would live by faith. You would walk by faith. You would believe in me. But, as it is, you desire to do the deeds of your father who has been a liar and a murderer from the beginning.”

So Jesus understood that he was the Father’s Son. And as we are told in John 11:52, he knew that he had come to gather the Father’s children scattered abroad from amongst the nations. He had come to gather his flock as we are told in John chapter 10, to gather the Father’s family...and that gathered flock (and Jesus in gathering them) was going to meet all of the resistance and hostility of this other family who did not have God as their Father, but had the devil as their father.

Now it is perhaps rather a confronting point, is it not, to realize that there are only two families in the world? You either belong to the family of God by new birth or you belong to the family of Satan. And there is no other place in which you can stand. It is one or the other. You are either of the line of Cain or you are a person of faith, through grace, and you are of the line of Abel. It is not a very politically correct, multiculturalist, pluralist message, is it? But that is the way it is.

And the third way in which Jesus speaks about this spiritual conflict and which is highlighted in John is the concept of “the world” on the one hand and the “Father’s family” on the other. The world is contrasted with the family of the Father. The Son came from the Father into the world.

Now “the world” in John does not, first and foremost, mean the creation. The “world” is that whole system which is marked by its evil opposition towards God and which is headed up by the prince of this world, which is Satan himself. And the sons of this world despise the sons of the world to come. The sons of this age despise the Father’s family.

The world does not recognize Christ when it comes. Indeed, the world hates him. And he says to his disciples—you can follow these things through in John 15 and John 17 quite easily—“Do not be surprised if the world hates you because it has hated me before it has hated you and it has hated me without a cause.”

The hatred and rebellion, the hostility of the world towards God is irrational. You can’t explain it. Human sin is illogical. There is no rational explanation for it. Why we should hate the God who is love cannot be computed by human logic. And, indeed, human logic would not even consider that as a possibility. But the world operates in hatred and hostility towards God and it does not recognize either the Son of God who comes from above or the sons of God who are born by God’s grace into the kingdom of God.

So, he says, “Do not be surprised if the world hates you, but you do not belong to the world,” he says in John chapter 17, “even as I don’t belong to the world”. By grace you as my disciples have been brought to me. All that the Father has given has come to me and there will many yet come to me who believe not on account of my direct ministry, but through the account of the testimony of these that I have appointed. And all of those that come to me, this great flock scattered abroad from all the nations; they will all be the Father’s children. They all cry with one voice, ‘Abba, Father.’”

And the world as a whole system hates them, but that family—and it is, in some senses, a most remarkable and almost unbelievable statement—that family is not of the world any more than Christ is of the world. So complete and so final and so secure is the work of Christ in rescuing that family from the world that they do not belong to the world in any shape or form.

And there is the battle, because the world wants to tell us every day that we do. And unless we know that we don’t, we will think that we do. And then we act as if we do, but we don’t. And that is why so many Christians have very deeply troubled consciences because they know that the way they have acted and believed and thought are not the way they really are.

So you have to the darkness which hates the Light. You have the children of the devil who hate the children of God the world which hates the sons of God. But not an exorcism, not one, until you get to John chapter 12 verse 31.

Now is the hour. And it is an hour for two things to happen which are really the one thing. It is an hour for judgment to come upon this world. And it is an hour for the Son of man to be lifted up. And those two things mean that Satan will be cast out.

Verse 31. “Now judgment is upon this world.”

Verse 32. “If I am lifted up from the earth...”

Verse 33. “...indicating the kind of death by which he was going to die.”

So there is a link between judgment, between being lifted up, and between indicating the death.

I do not think the first meaning of verse 32 is if we lift up Christ in the preaching he will draw men to himself. I am sure that is true, but I don't think that is the first meaning of the verse. The first meaning of the verse in the context is: There is a judgment upon the world now that I am going to be lifted up on the cross. The statement about the judgment and being lifted up is indicating the sort of death he is going to die, so it must be linked with the act of crucifying him. So the judgment that is going to come on the world as he is lifted up on the cross is somehow going to be the casting out of Satan. Can you see that from the passage?

So I don't know if you have ever made that connection before, but everything in the ministry of the gospel and the conflict and defeat of the powers of evil flows from that.

As I said to my class the other week you cannot defeat Satanic and demonic powers simply by casting them out. You may cast out a demon from a person. You may cast out a legion of demons from one person, and they may enter a herd of pigs, and fly off the cliff and land in the water. But put it this way. Can you put concrete boots on a demonic spirit and drown it? No, you can't, because it is a spirit.

Now there is a place for the releasing of a person from a demonic force so that the gospel may be heard. But if it is just a matter of case by case by case going through the entire world and trying to deal with it on a one by one basis you could go for eternity and still not finally win a victory because it would just be moving the pieces on the board.

And so when Paul and the others had a revelation of the cross of Christ burst into them and in upon them, they understood that that changed the game forever because, as it says in Luke chapter 11 verse 22 and following that the stronger man has come and has taken away the armor in which the strong man has trusted.

That is to say, Satan, as the prince of this world, as the head of a family of children who hate God and his works, as the prince of darkness and the leader of all that happens in that moral sphere called darkness, Satan, as that strong head who holds everyone captive, has to have his armor broken, his sword taken away and smashed, the bow that he uses to be bent and to be destroyed in the snapping of it. Something has to happen in Christ's action which disarms the principalities and powers, which disarms Satan himself.

And, therefore, the encouragement to us is that all this happens in Christ on his cross once and for all. If there is one thing that the demonic powers would love to do, it would be to distract us from this. We sometimes say that Satan trembles when he sees the

weakest saint upon his knees. Have you heard that phrase or a variation of it? And I think that it has an element of truth in it, but, if the power for the defeat could come just through prayer, you would not need a cross. If the weakest saint upon his knees is praying so that the Word of the cross would triumph across the nations, then Satan trembles in his boots. The defeat is in the cross, not merely the prayer.

Satan will do anything to distract us from preaching the Word of the cross. He would minimize so that it is not necessary: to put all of the weight, for example, on the incarnation of Jesus; to somehow modify the Word of the cross so that it is not the substitutionary penal propitiatory sacrifice that it really is; to somehow take away the scandal of the cross; to somehow dress it up so it is a cross covered in diamonds and everything that looks sparkly; to somehow remove from the cross the utter horror of what it finally meant there for Jesus to do battle with our sin in his body on the tree. If Satan can do anything in his power to shift us from that ground, he will. And that, in my view, is where the real spiritual battle facing the church is.

It is the battle that lies behind that shift to programs more than proclamation. It is the battle that lies behind the shift towards social action more than evangelism. It is the battle that lies behind the shift to a mystical faith. This is where the battle is really fought. And that is why Paul and the other apostles were so focused on knowing nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified, because that cross is the power of God to salvation. The proclamation of that cross is the power of God to release men from the captivity of Satan because in the proclamation of that cross, Satan's defeat is written large.

Now, you and I may be saying "Yes, all of that is true and all of that is good." But you may still have this question then. "How does that work on the cross accomplish the defeat of Satan? What actually happened?" And here we can't do it justice. But take one verse on Galatians chapter one verse four as a small window into what is a huge and magnificent exposition of grace. Galatians chapter one verse three says, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Verse four, "...who gave Himself for our sins so that..." (it is a purpose clause, Greek students!) "...He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Can you see very simply there is a connection between dealing with our sins and rescuing us from a present evil age? Can you see that? In other words, the only thing that has held us captive to the present evil age is our sins. He who commits sin is a slave of sin.

So the spiritual victory of Christ on the cross has to be through the dealing with our sins. And he says, "I will draw the world to myself." The Lamb of God who takes the sins of the world on his shoulders, he who knew no sin was made sin on our behalf.

Now let me ask you this question. "What happens when you sin a sin?" Because the New Testament uses the word "sin" as a verb in some places so you can talk about "sinning a

sin". And the answer would be that we know guilt. But what if I was to say: "What does that guilt consist of? What is it that you feel?", what would we say?

Here you will find that within it guilt is a Pandora's Box of things. It is like those babushka dolls, one inside the other, the other, the other, the other...so that once you have guilt we know things like fear; isolation; fear of judgment; confusion of mind; accusation of conscience; a terror of heart in which God's law suddenly becomes a terrible thing; and that God himself becomes a judge from whom you must escape? There is loneliness in guilt. There is alienation from one another. There is anger. There is rejection of other people.

Have you ever been in a guilty state?

Let's say, once upon a time, that we were children. Have you ever been guilty of doing something as a child? And what happens if your mom and your dad come up to put their arm on you and you are carrying that guilt. What do you do? You want them to get away! You cast off their affection; you shrug off the touch of love. When love meets guilt it is a burning fire to your conscience...all of which helps us understand hell just a little bit.

Jesus Christ in his body on the tree was drawing the world to himself. As the Lamb of God bearing the sins of the world; as the sinless one being made sin on our behalf; as the bearer of our sins...as he comes into that experience of sin all of that terrible experience of guilt was there for him. All of the loneliness and confusion of mind and darkness and anxiety and alienation and dislocation...

So he goes into the outer darkness of our sin. And it is not just sin in a general sense. You can not have a sin that is not a personal sin. So the utter darkness he goes into is David's adultery and David's murder. The utter darkness he enters is the sin of *your* heart, of what is in the very depths, that is what he has had to enter and bear, can you see? It can't be some sort of just accounting act going on. He actually has to bear that whole wrath of God on sin. Can you see that? And we could never understand what that meant. We get a small window into it in the cry, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? Why, my God, have you forsaken me?"

But even then you can't understand it. But as he went to that place bearing our sin, he was not a sinner. And as a man filled with the Holy Spirit without measure, he bore the judgment and the weight of that sin in his own body on the tree. As one writer has said, that there under that weight of sin and its judgment, he confessed God's holiness and said, "Yes, Father, it is right."

There, somehow or another, he played it all out in the darkness so it had no sting left in it. He defeated the whole lot of it, never once ducking away from the pain of it, taking it, every bit of it, absorbing it, defeating it, until he could say with a loud voice, "It is finished."

So those that come to God by faith in Christ believe in the Light. If you do not believe in the Light you remain in darkness. But I trust here this morning by grace we are all members of Christ's body. Is that true? By faith we have come and that faith is a gift from God. It is not of ourselves. But by grace through faith we have come and we have embraced and we see that cross and we said, "Yes, it is for me." So where you are right now is utterly and completely forgiven. The certificate of debt has been taken out of the way. It was hostile to you and it consisted of decrees against you, but it has been nailed to his cross. And in Colossians 2:13ff. we are told that by that means he defeated the principalities and powers of evil.

So my encouragement to you as we close is two fold. Firstly, see where you are, in Christ! As a believer in Christ you are in Christ, dead with Christ, raised with Christ, seated with Christ in heavenly places and there is no condemnation to them in Christ Jesus ever again. Amen. That is a good encouragement. But it will be contested every moment of the day.

The second encouragement is this. What you have been commissioned to preach and to teach with your last breath, as Wesley said, is, "Behold the Lamb." But I can tell you that that is the one thing the world will not want you to preach and everything even within the life of the church will try and divert you from it, but don't. Don't go to persuasive words of wisdom, eloquent speech, because in the end people then will start to trust you in your eloquence and they won't trust Christ. You don't want to undo the cross of its power. So stay where you are in Christ crucified and risen and preach from where you are in Christ crucified and risen, perhaps even revival might come.

Let's pray.

Father, where we are in your Son is beyond human explanation, that he should identify with us so wonderfully and so deeply that all of our sins should be taken in his body on the tree and that the evil one should be robbed of his armor because the guilt of them all should be taken away.

Now, indeed, is the prince of this world cast out. And so, Father, let us live truly in the freedom that we have been given in Christ. It was for freedom that Christ set us free. Let us not be subject again to a yoke of slavery, but let us in the Spirit, Father, go on in the fulness of the power of the gospel. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.