

FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

Lesson 5 | The Conquering King

“For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.” – 1 Corinthians 15:25

One of the reasons the Jewish people rejected Jesus is because they wanted a Messiah who came as a conquering, ruling King. A crucified Messiah (an executed hero) didn't make much sense to them. They wanted a lion, not a lamb. What they didn't understand is that the lamb who was slain would eventually return as the roaring lion they were expecting. So while they might have gotten the timing off, the Jews were right to expect a King who would conquer and reign. Jesus came to suffer and die, but in doing so He was not defeated. Rather, it was through His suffering and death that Jesus defeated the power of sin and death. Now we look forward to the day when he will come back to conquer evil once and for all and finally destroy the devil. As we continue studying spiritual warfare, it is worth pausing to think about our victorious Captain.

How will meditating on Jesus's role in fighting and defeating evil be a help to us in our spiritual lives?

If we look at the role Christ plays in fighting against evil, we will see three high points where He wins decisive victory. Each victory builds on the last until at last evil itself is vanquished and Christ reigns supreme. In this lesson we will briefly study each of these events: Jesus's victory in His temptation, His victory in His death and resurrection, and His victory in the final battle of Armageddon. Thinking about the final victory of Jesus is important for us for at least three reasons. (1) First, as we fight the good fight against evil and against the forces of darkness, we should look to Christ as our example. In so doing, we are following the command of Hebrews 12:3 to “Consider him” as the example for our own faithful living. (2) Not only this, but meditating on the victory of Christ gives us hope as we prepare to take up arms in the battle. The final outcome of this war is not a questionable issue; Christ will have the victory! (3) Finally, studying Christ's power and ultimate victory will inspire worship in our hearts, which is the ultimate purpose of our existence.

How can our hope in Jesus help us in the face of the discouraging situation we often see around where it seems like Satan is winning?

Why does God not immediately eliminate all evil right now?

Jesus's Victory over Satan in His Temptation

The first battle between Jesus and Satan took place in a desert immediately after Jesus's baptism. Here Satan attempted to get Christ to sin by trusting His own wisdom against that of His Father. Jesus instead remained submitted to His Father's will and in so doing modeled perfect obedience and proved His righteousness.

Jesus Modeled Perfect Obedience (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9)

James and Peter tell their readers that they should resist the devil by submitting to God. Looking more carefully at the context of each of these verses, James seems to be focusing more on Satan's attempts to get us to live for our lusts whereas Peter seems to have a greater focus on Satan's attempts to crush us through suffering and persecution. Regardless, whether we are facing the internal pull to sin or the external pressure of suffering, we should resist the devil's attempt to get us to respond in pride and unbelief.

How are Satan's attacks similar when it comes to suffering and temptation? How do they differ?

That both James and Peter talk of resisting the devil is interesting, and probably they are both thinking back to the example of Jesus in the desert and His resistance of Satan. As James observes, resisting the devil and submitting to God go together, and we see that Jesus resisted Satan by instead submitting to God and His Word. Satan tried to appeal to Jesus when He was physically suffering with hunger and starvation, he attempted to twist Scripture and appeal to Jesus's pride, and finally he offered Jesus everything in the world in exchange for worship. In every case, Jesus recited Scripture and clung to its truth rather than listen to the lies of Satan. Jesus shows us what it looks like when David says "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, That I might not sin against thee." (Psalm 119:11) His example should teach all of us a lesson – the way we overcome temptation is by knowing Scripture and living it out.

How can we prepare ourselves like Christ to be ready when the attacks of Satan come?

What kinds of things prevent us from living out Scripture?

Jesus Lived a Life of Righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 5:8)

But Jesus does more than leave us an example when He refuses to succumb to the lies of the devil. Through His obedience Jesus proved Himself the perfect sacrifice worthy to take the debt of our sins. If Satan had succeeded and Jesus had sinned, then Jesus's sacrifice on Calvary would not have been accepted, and we would still be in our sins. In order for a sacrifice to be accepted, it had to be unblemished. In order for Jesus's to die for our sins, He had to be perfectly righteous. The obedience of Jesus is necessary for our salvation, but often gets less attention than His death. Yet Scripture is clear that Jesus "learned obedience" (Hebrews 5:8) and it is through such obedience that He was worthy to die on our behalf.

How could Jesus learn obedience if He were already perfect?

It is important to realize that this does not mean that Jesus was *disobedient* and then learned to be obedient instead. Rather, it means that an important part of Jesus's development as a real human was learning by *experience* what obedience to the Father looked like. Jesus grew in His obedience by facing new situations and responding with obedience, including the temptation with Satan. By living a life filled with total obedience, Jesus was able to offer His righteousness in exchange for our sin. While this obedience extended to more than just the temptation in the wilderness, this temptation was the strongest direct attack we see in the gospel, and Jesus successfully resisted it and proved His obedience.

Why do we as Christians tend to focus on the death of Christ and not spend more time meditating on the importance of Christ's righteous living on our behalf?

Jesus's Victory over Satan in His Death and Resurrection

The death of Jesus looked like the greatest victory Satan could have imagined. The seed of the woman had at last been destroyed by the serpent, or so it would seem. But paradoxically, it was through Jesus's death that He accomplished His greatest victory. As the author of Hebrews describes it "that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (2:14). But how is it that by dying and rising Jesus overcame the power of Satan? We will look at three ways that the death of Jesus defeats Satan.

Jesus Proved His Obedience by His Death (Philippians 2:8)

The first thing that Jesus accomplished by His death was the ultimate obedience we talked about earlier. Christ in His humanity wanted to avoid the pain and suffering of the cross. On the night before He died, He prayed earnestly to the Father that He might be spared. Yet despite the great agony that He knew was coming, He submitted to God's plan for His life and completed a life of perfect obedience. Paul points out that for Jesus, going to the cross was a great sign of humility and submission worthy of our praise and imitation.

How was Jesus able to go to the cross despite knowing it would bring such great suffering that He prayed and asked to be allowed to not go through with it?

Jesus Provided Forgiveness by His Death (Romans 3:23-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21)

Satan's design has always been to pit God against humanity. He did this in the garden by successfully tempting Adam and Eve to sin and break God's law. Scripture also tells us he is the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10), which means that Satan both tries to get you to sin and then immediately points the finger at you and starts crying out that you are a sinner who deserves God's wrath. When Jesus died on the cross, He paid the sin debt that you and I owe so that we can stand before God clothed in the righteousness of Jesus. In so doing, we are forgiven of our sins and are transferred "from the kingdom of darkness..." "to the kingdom of [God's] dear son" (Colossians 1:13). All of the blessings of the gospel come from the fact that we are no longer enemies with God, we are instead His children and heirs since we have been forgiven?

What does it mean that we have been transferred from Satan's kingdom to Jesus's kingdom? How should we live this out practically?

Jesus Broke the Power of Satan by His Death (Hebrews 2:14)

Satan is described as having “the power of death” in Hebrews 2:14. Through his wicked scheming and shrewd tempting, Satan has put man in a position where the righteous payment for man’s sin is death (Romans 6:23). But now Jesus has paid that death penalty and has overcome death by rising from the dead. This means that Satan’s power to accuse and bring death and destruction is destroyed by the sacrifice of Jesus. Now all who trust in Jesus may die physically, but they will be resurrected with an immortal body and will reign with Christ forever.

How should knowing that the power of death has been broken by Christ impact the way we think and live?

Jesus’s Victory over Satan at Armageddon

At the end of time, the Satan will rally the troops of the world for one final battle against God. This final defeat is depicted in Revelation 19, where Jesus comes with the host of heaven to defeat Satan once and for all. In our final lesson of the series, we will spend more time looking at the final, decisive victory of Jesus over Satan. But for now, we will have a brief overview of some of the highlights.

Read Revelation 19:11-21 and discuss the passage using the following questions:

How does this passage describe Jesus? What do you think these descriptions are meant to emphasize?

A fair amount of this passage is spent talking about the violence of this battle and the large toll it will take on the kingdoms of the world. Why do you think there is such a strong emphasis on the destruction of the kings of the world?

Why would humanity and the devil attempt to fight against the King rather than bowing before Him and begging for pardon?