

Proclaiming Victory

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- [0 : 0 0] You're listening to the sermon podcast of Grace Reformed Church in Spring Hill, Tennessee. To learn more about us, visit our website at gracereformed.org.
- And now, today's sermon. There are two parts to today's sermon. The first is to help us think through the spiritual dimensions of our Bibles.
- And the second is to understand the pastoral reasoning behind Peter's thoughts in recounting Jesus' triumphal procession through the prisons of the spirits.
- The weird and strange parts of our Bibles have become the weird uncle that you try to avoid on Mother's Day and birthdays.
- Without even realizing it, what has happened is we become very concerned with the world's perspective of our faith and wanting their approval.
- [1 : 0 1] For example, Jesus as the good teacher who is kind to everyone and taught the golden rule is pretty much acceptable by most. We like this Jesus and we like to talk about this Jesus in our culture.
- But Jesus traveling to different dimensions in his death to proclaim his victory lap is not something we really bring into our everyday conversation.
- How do you know you are forgiven of your sins before God? It's a great question. Peter tells the church the story of Jesus going before the rebellious spirits and proclaiming to them they failed and he's victorious.
- Strange. Strange. Before we dismiss this kind of one-off passage from Peter, let me remind you why Peter wrote this letter to the churches.
- He wrote it to comfort them because of the persecution they are facing. So maybe we might be missing something if we don't understand Peter's point.
- [2 : 1 1] And I think we are missing something. What Peter is expounding upon is the gospel. That saved them not only from their sins but also freed them from the future enslavement.
- This is why Jesus is proclaiming victory. We often ignore really there's the second aspect of the gospel. We understand the physical nature of the gospel but it's the spiritual side that we struggle with.
- So there's really three points to the gospel. The first one we all know, we emphasize, the culture even understands, that Jesus Christ came and he died on the cross to free us from our sins. The guilt, the crimes that we have against our king.
- We all know that part of the gospel. We like that part of the gospel. We sing about it. And then there's the second part of the gospel. And that is to be with our God in his kingdom requires righteousness.
- It requires not that you be sinless but that you be righteous. That you have within you a righteousness. And so how do we gain this righteousness? Well it's given to us by grace.
- [3 : 1 7] Christ's righteousness, his obedience is given to us. It says we're clothed in it. That's the second part of the gospel. We love that part. We should. But there's a third part and this is what Peter's getting at and he's getting at it for our earthly comfort.

For our comfort here. And the third part is he says we are set free from the spiritual dark powers that enslaved us to the forces of evil.

They even had the rights to us in our death. This is why Jesus is proclaiming victory. Turn with me to Hebrews chapter 2. We're going to be looking all over the New Testament this morning.

To try and wrap our minds around what Peter is doing here. But in Hebrews chapter 2. The writer makes a very important. I think connection that Peter is making.

Understanding the freedom from the spiritual darkness. Is part of the gospel good news. Is part of why it is in this world. It's important for us to not only understand we're forgiven.

[4 : 21] We've been declared righteous. But also set free. That concept of set free. So this is Hebrews chapter 2 verse 14. It says this. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood.

He himself likewise partook of the same things. That through death. He might destroy the one who has the power of death. That is the devil. Now that is an interesting statement.

Read that with me again. This last part. That through death. He might destroy the one who has the power of death. That is the devil.

And deliver all those. Who through fear of death. Were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps. But he helps the offspring of Abraham.

Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect. So that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest. In the service of God. To make propitiation or payment for the sins of the people.

[5 : 23] For because he himself has suffered when tempted. He is able to help those who are being tempted. So today. Who are still being tempted. So Christ became human to take our place of death.

And to set us free from what? He says the fear of death. That is the devil. He says the fear of death. Which is the devil. So he conquered this.

The evil. That is marshaled by the power of these dark forces. Is enslaving the world. And he says that's what you've been set free from. And that's what you no longer have to worry about.

Now. This is why the writer of Hebrews says. He has the power of death. Now this can be complicated.

Because. It's now claimed. That Jesus is the one who holds the keys to death. Well for those of us. Who have been set free.

[6 : 22] By Christ. This is true. But those who are not set free by Christ. Are still in the fear of death. Because they're afraid. Of what is to come. And that's the power. That Ephesians.

I'm sorry. The power that Hebrews is speaking of. And this doesn't mean. We will not be tempted in this life. To fall back into the slavery. Or fall back into the fear of death. The fear of the unknown.

I love this verse. Hebrews 2:18. For because he himself has suffered when tempted. He is able to help those. Who are being tempted. That is us.

He is sympathetic. That's why it's described. As a sympathetic high priest. He understands. Our plight. He understands. The way in which we feel. This is part of the gospel.

That we must preach. Otherwise. We are only preaching. A portion of the gospel. And leaving out. I think. The most relevant part to us. To this world. This world.

[7 : 22] Still attacks. Those who love Christ. Who want to be. In allegiance to him. And so the supernatural war. We continue to face. Rescuing others.

Is faced with an onslaught. Of fighting. And temptations. And powers. That he is trying to comfort us. Or the writers are trying to comfort us. With.

We attempt to find our solutions. To life. This world that we live in. With physical means. We all. Trust me. When I tell you. I have sought every.

Physical means possible. To get rid of. My sickness. Including. Shots. On the other side of me. Thank God for steroids. They're really helpful.

But we. We try and do this. With our. Spiritual problems. As well. We try. And use. Physical means. To fix. Spiritual problems. And yet. The writers. The New Testament.

[8 : 16] Say that these. Can only be fixed. These can only be fought. Through spiritual powers. Why do.

We. Find comfort. In this life. Or how. Do we find comfort. In this life. Especially. After disasters. Like we have seen. Not only in the news. Around the world. With different wars. But here.

In our own town. The writers say. Because of what Christ. Has done. And is doing. Right now. By means. Of the spirit. That is at work. In us.

And by means. Of the gospel. Turn with me. To Colossians chapter 2. This is probably. Next to Peter. The most. Helpful example.

In this idea. Of this third section. Of the gospel. Of Jesus. Conquering evil. That is still at work today. So Colossians chapter 2.

[9 : 11] And verse 13. Meaning. Again. Paul. Giving the gospel. Says. And you. Who were dead. In your trespasses. And the. Uncircumcision.

Of your heart. God made alive. Together with him. Having forgiven us. All our trespasses. Now we know this. This is a very familiar passage. But it's the next verse.

That we often ignore. But it's still part of the gospel. By canceling the record of debt. That stood against us. With its legal demands. This.

He set aside. Nailing it to the cross. He disarmed. The rulers. And authorities. And put them to open shame. By triumphing. Triumphing. Over them.

In him. In Christ. In the cross. The third aspect. Of our salvation. The war. Against evil forces. Which enslaved us.

[10 : 07] Paul said. On the cross. He disarmed. The rulers. And authorities. Who enslaved. And shamed us. This is what is meant. When Peter says.

He descended. Into the spirit's prison. And proclaimed. A victory lap. He claimed. Victory. Because they. Were not able. To stop him.

Now they thought. They had won. They begun. The celebration. With him on the cross. The seed. That was promised. In the garden. When Adam and Eve failed. That seed war.

Begun. Which we're going to start talking about. They thought. There's the Messiah. That's going to put us under judgment. We put him on a cross. He's dead. We won. And Jesus says. Oh they don't understand.

For when I went on the cross. My victory began. Because when I rose from the grave. I brought with it. The keys. This is part. Of our gospel.

[11 : 00] It's interesting. When it says. That he disarmed. The rulers. That word there. Means to put off. Or to strip off. It's word.

It's often used. Of the put off passages. Put off the old man. Take off the old man. The idea of it is. That he stripped them. Of their robes. He stripped them. Of their rank.

He basically exposed them. For their weakness. They are wearing uniforms. That they do not. Have the power behind. And so we no longer fear death.

Nor their power. Because they can no longer. Hold it over us. Because Christ has stripped it. But that does not mean. That they're no longer a threat. So this is the complicated part.

Of our Bibles. In Romans chapter 8. If you want to turn there. We know this passage well. There's a reason why Paul. Has to remind the believer. Of what Christ has done.

[11 : 55] In his victory. Because the presence of evil. And the war remains. For those who are not in Christ. They still have this threat. They are still under. Their enslavement.

They still live in fear. This is Romans 8. In verse 37. It says. No in all these things. We are more than conquerors. Through him who loved us. For I'm sure that neither death.

Nor life. Now then he goes into the spiritual realms. Nor angels. Nor rulers. Nor things present. Nor things to come. Nor powers. Nor height or debt. Nor anything else. In all creation.

Will be able to separate us. From the love of God. In Christ Jesus. Now why would he have to remind them of that? Because they were feeling. The temptation of it. They were feeling. The power. And the presence. Of living in Rome.

If you're still in Hebrews. You can look at chapter 2. In verse 8. It's something very interesting. That the writer of Hebrews makes. Kind of like we talked about last week.

[12 : 55] An already not yet reality. Here's the already not yet part. This is Hebrews chapter 2. Verse 8. It says. Putting everything in subjection.

Under his feet. This is quoting the prophecy of the Psalms. That when Jesus raises from the grave. Everything goes underneath him. Continuing on. It says.

Now in putting everything in subjection. To him. He left nothing outside his control. At present. We do not yet see everything. In subject to him.

A little last trick there. Just as a reminder. He's over everything. But you don't see it that way yet. Interesting. Why is it that we don't see it this way yet?

Because the war is not over. The rescue plan is not finished. The moment he brings everything under his feet. That means judgment is here. And therefore no one else can be saved.

[13 : 55] So he leaves it as it is for judgment day. And sends us in to rescue the lost. The writers of the New Testament.

Keep pointing us to this freedom that we now have. From the spiritual forces. Is because. They are still active. Because they are still working.

Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 2. We're going to look at a couple of sections here in Ephesians. Chapters 2, 4, and 6. These are all related to what Peter is writing. Kind of like a back story.

Or kind of a setup for what we're going to be looking at. I want you to notice again. Just how Paul uses this idea that we're no longer slaves.

But yet what enslaved us is still active in the world. This is Ephesians chapter 2. And it says. Verse 1. And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked.

[14 : 56] Following the course of this world. Following the prince of the power of the air. The spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. So present tense. We're not in that.

But those around us are still. Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh. So there's the evidence of it. Carrying out the desires of the body and the mind. And we're by nature the children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

So there's still a present tense. To the evil that is in our world. These powers are not gone since Jesus rose from the grave. They're gone for us. But they're not gone from the world yet.

This is why chapter 6. Paul warns us about the fight that we face. We who have been set free. He says don't go back.

Into the very thing you've been set free from. As a matter of fact you're supposed to go now into the battlefield. You're supposed to be part of the other side of the war. Don't go back to what you were before.

[15 : 58] Giving back into the sinful desires of the heart and the mind. This is why he says if you want to turn to chapter 6. And verse 12. Very famous passage. Mentioned it multiple times.

But I think it's healthy. It's all connected. He says in Ephesians 6.12. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood. But against rulers and against authorities. And against the cosmic powers over this present darkness.

Against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places. Now notice the difference between chapter 2. He says you were once those people's slaves. Those forces. Forces.

Man that's my medication kicking in right there. I am not looking forward to listening to this recording later. Preaching on medication is dangerous by the way.

It's interesting how he says you go from being the victim and enslaved. To now wrestling. How can you do that? How can you have the strength. To fight the very thing.

[16 : 59] That enslaved you. Well that's because of verse 10. Ephesians 6.10. Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you might be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

What is the armor of God? It's Christ. Christ is our armor. The gospel is about the forgiveness of sins. The gaining of Christ's righteousness.

And the freedom from evil forces that enslaved us. This is good news. Because these evil forces still want to enslave you even though you have been set free from them.

They still want to entangle you. This is why Peter and Paul warn us. They say things like he's a roaring lion. He seeks to devour us. To be watchful.

To be sober minded. Peter and Paul are pointing back to what happened here in Genesis 6. The seed war. These promises of what's happening was diluted in Genesis 6.

[18 : 07] They keep pointing back to it. And we're going to learn why here in a few weeks. But Peter is using it as a comfort to those who are suffering. So they're living in a city that has dedicated itself to the worship of the gods.

It's evil. It's demonic. It's horrendous. And he's saying, remember, the very forces that are attacking you, Jesus is the one who holds the authority over them.

I know you're feeling their presence. But they're not in control. Keep trusting the gospel. Now, I want to share something with you that I got pretty geeked out about this week.

And some of you might say, John, this is just a medication. You probably should really think twice about this. No, I think this is good. Turn with me to Ephesians 4. All of you that have gone through a membership class or been here with me for a while have heard me preach through Ephesians 4.

And I really emphasize the nature of the supernatural power of the gospel in the congregation. And so just for the refreshing of our minds, I'm just going to read to us verses 11 and 12.

[19 : 19] Just so we understand the context again. And it says, And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ. This is great. The Holy Spirit comes through the ministry of the word and he strengthens the congregation.

Right? So Paul is promising the power of the Spirit upon the local church. This is great. This is wonderful. But do you know what Paul uses to set this up? What story he reminds them of, of why this is significant?

To my own shame, I always start in verse 11, but I need to stop doing that. Because verse 11 is built upon verses 7 through 10. And so this is why we can trust that the Spirit's power is going to work.

Look at verse 7. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measures of Christ's gifts. Therefore, it says, When he ascended on high, he led a host of captives and gave gifts to men.

This is the psalm he's quoting. In saying he ascended, what does it mean? That he had also descended into the lower regions of the earth. He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens that he might fulfill or fill all things.

[20 : 39] So Christ's dissension and victory lap amongst the spirits was a prophecy given. And Paul is using that as a setup saying, Hey church, get excited about the power that's coming your way in the Spirit.

Because of the fulfillment of what Christ did conquering these evil spirits. Now these are, I've already read like four weird passages. Right?

There's a list I found. It was like 37 passages. All the ones that everybody reads. It goes, that's weird. And keep reading. These were in there. Genesis 6 was in there.

There's quite a few of them that are in there. And then the last one was like all of Revelation. So. These are strange verses to us if we don't know what Paul is speaking of.

Why did Jesus descend into the lower regions of the earth? What a weird statement. Paul tells us as a means of comfort and preparation for the work of the church.

[21 : 48] He tells us an Old Testament prophecy and story to get your heart to trust what he has to say. I mean how many of you are like oh yeah that's awesome Paul let's go.

He went into the lower regions of the earth. Woo! None of you. You're like dude that's weird. It's only weird because we don't understand Old Testament stories and prophecy.

Peter tells us why. Because he went there to prove they failed at an attempt at a coup to stop the Messiah from coming. That's why he went there to claim victory.

He took a victory lap. That's how Peter words it. To fulfill the prophecy. And that victory lap somehow happened in the lower regions of the earth. Peter and Paul are both making references to Old Testament stories and prophecies.

That are connected to the gospel. The part of the gospel that matters to us right now. You see this portion of the gospel will not matter to us in glory because the war is over.

[22 : 52] There will be no more forces of evil in the new heavens and the new earth. This is why it matters to us now. Because we every time we stand up to proclaim Christ. Live for him.

Peter is warning you. The entire letter has been warning you. You're going to suffer for your faith. Let me tell you why you have the strength to stand against these forces.

This is good news to the believer. This is why the gospel is not for the unbeliever only. But for us who are being saved. So turn with me back to 1 Peter chapter 3.

I don't believe this is something we can ignore as a church. But we must look into this with some great anticipation and comfort.

Even though it might be strange to the world. It is important for the congregation. Because it is what Peter is using to comfort those who are persecuted.

[23 : 54] So over the next few weeks we are going to unpack the story Peter merely makes reference to. So that we no longer have to wonder what he means. But we know what he means.

And therefore find comfort from his story. 1 Peter 3.19 let's read it again. What did these spirits do that caused God to place them in a prison?

And what happened during the days of Noah that Peter is wanting us to remember. Which is connected to the gospel and our encouragement. Well we will speak on that next week.

This is my enticement for you to come back. We do not have time to unpack this. But he is referencing the story of Genesis 6. So if you want to prepare for next week read Genesis 6. And yes it is filled with all kinds of interesting stories.

And you are going to have lots of questions. And I am excited for you to have them. How does Genesis 6 connect to 1 Peter 3? But before we conclude this morning.

[25 : 12] It is a baptism Sunday. And a special one. They are all special. For me. But today it is special because it very much connects with our sermon.

And so we get to not only the joy of watching baptism. But also preaching on it. And Callie is very special to me. Go back to verse 18 in 1 Peter chapter 3.

It says, For Christ also suffered once for sins. The righteous for the unrighteous. That he might bring to us God. Being put to death in the flesh. But made alive in the spirit.

In which he went and proclaimed to the spirits. In prison. Because they formerly did not obey. When God's patience waited in the days of Noah. So now as I am reading this. I want you to think about the story.

Because it is going to help you with this idea of baptism. While the ark was being prepared. In which a few. That is eight persons. Were brought safely through water. Baptism which corresponds to this.

[26 : 14] Now saves you. Not as a removal of dirt from the body. But as an appeal to God for a good conscience. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Who has gone into heaven.

And is at the right hand of God. With angels, authorities, powers. Having been subjected to him. He means both those who are in allegiance to the king. And those who are evil.

All of them. After his resurrection. Are under his authority. Now I want you to notice how Peter. Connects. Baptism.

To the story of Genesis 6. And the power of being. Overthrowing these evil spirits. This is. It's not you remembering. What you've done.

It's not just remembering Jesus' death. It is remembering. The victory that Christ has. Over. Evil. For us this morning.

[27 : 14] I will give us just a little bit of an insight. Of what Peter is giving to his readers. The ark was used. To save Noah and his family.

From the judgment waters. The wickedness that was upon the earth. We'll get into what that is. God brought judgment to clean it out. And what preserved Adam and Eve. Sorry Adam and Eve.

What preserved medication in my body. What preserved Noah and his family. Was this ark. And Peter now says. Baptism corresponds to that event.

It's a picture of what's happening. What carries us through the waters of judgment into safety. It's Jesus. Our ark. It's Jesus. The one who rescues us. He proclaims victory over death.

Christ dies in our place. Raises from the grave. And that becomes our vehicle. That becomes our source of our salvation. And not only are we saved. I love this.

[28 : 10] Not only are we saved from. The penalty of our death. He says. You are no longer. Going to live with a guilty conscience.

That's what it means to have righteousness. He says. You are raised with a good conscience. Now we all know. This morning when we felt it. That moment of silence.

I didn't even have to tell you. What sins you needed to confess. You already knew. Your conscience. Barked at you. And said. You were wrong. What allows you.

To cleanse your conscience. Is it your dedication. To try harder this week. Is it your. I'm not going to do that again. Or is it your God saying.

Your Christ carries you through. And your conscience can be cleansed. Because what he has done. Not what you will do. This is what we remember our baptism for.

[29 : 06] Christ is the one who cleanses us. And carries us through judgment. And he is the one who. Gained victory over the power of darkness. That wants to enslave us. That is the picture.

Of baptism. That Peter is giving the church. It's far. Far more. Than just. A symbol. To remember. The entirety of creation.

Both those who are loyal. To the king. And the evil forces. That are still in rebellion. Are symbolized in this baptism. In that when. We watch Callie get baptized.

Out here in a minute. The symbol should remind us. That she. Her sins have been forgiven. She's been clothed with righteousness. And evil no longer has control over her. That.

That. Is an amazing thought. That she no longer. Will have to give in. To the forces. That so wants to destroy her. So our baptism.

[30 : 06] Is a remembrance. Of what we face. Every single day. Not only the forgiveness of our sins. And the righteousness that we have gained. And our conscience is being cleansed. But the forces that we fight.

Are no longer. Have power over us. Dear saint. This is not a battle. You can win. With your flesh. This is why. There's so many warnings.

Where Paul says. I have the desire in my flesh. To do what is right. But not the capacities. To carry it out. The good news of the gospel. Is that Jesus Christ. Not only. Conquered. The evil.

But he comes and lives with inside us. Those who are dead in spirit. Cannot make themselves alive.

This is the part of the gospel. That's offensive to people. Because they want to figure out. Not only how can I prove myself to God. That I'm worthy to be his child. But even after they become his child.

[31 : 03] They want to prove that they are worthy. To then fix themselves. Or continue to fix themselves. And these are all the lies. That we face. And this is why Peter is encouraging them. That as you face these lies.

You have been set free from your flesh. And you've been set free from the evil forces. That want to pull you back into this. And you walk by faith. This is why he says. You walk by the spirit. And then you won't fulfill the lust of the flesh.

It's not that you walk by the flesh. So that you can fulfill the spirit. So to those of us who believe this morning. I want to leave you with this.

As long as we ignore the evil forces in our world. That Peter and Paul and the New Testament writers. Are warning us about. They will continue to distract us.

And even destroy our faith. And we'll keep falling prey to their traps. This is a warning. This is why Paul says. Put Christ on.

[32 : 02] So that you can withstand. This is why Peter calls us. To be sober minded. To protect our minds. We hold the power over death.

And yet we close our mouths. And our hearts. And our minds. And our lives to it. When we allow sin. To control us instead. We don't live the Christian life for fun.

That's to come. We live it for war. That's the language that's being used. I preach this way. Because I believe. We as a church. Are under a spiritual attack.

Every single day of our lives. I'm a real enemy. That hates what we preach. Which is the gospel. The number one reason. People get upset at me.

And the elders. Is because. And this is no joke. We emphasize grace too much. That tells me. We are doing something right.

[32 : 59] Grace is the power. That saves sinners. And fights back against evil. And if we stop. Preaching grace. What am I offering you? Fleshly powers.

That do nothing but enslave you. And so if I'm going to be accurate. To what Peter is saying. And Paul is saying. We have to emphasize the gospel. In every area of our life.

And we will need to be reminded. Of these evil forces. That want to take our eyes. Off of grace. And off of the gospel. And put it on anything else. Even if it's our self. And our good righteousness.

And so. I believe. Far too many of us. Have been playing with these evil forces. And not even knowing it. Not even realizing. How they've infiltrated our heart. And our mind.

To where we will dabble in sin. We will engage in sin. Or. We will try and live the Christian life. In our own strength. And we're going to use the gospel.

[34 : 00] To free us from those. Traps. So happy Mother's Day. The best gift I could give you today.

Is the gospel. Let's pray. Our Father we. Are weak. I'm weak. I'm weak. Not only in my body. But in my spirit.

Lord. As scary. As the Bible might seem. In a world. That wants to be filled. With scientific answers. There is. No answer. That can explain.

The gospel. It's a supernatural power. It's your power. Lord. Lord. Lord. As a. Little congregation. As we are. Continue to protect us.

And guide us. With your strength. Lord. Give us the means. By which we can. Hear your word. And now. Fellowship around it. And be renewed.

[34 : 58] By it. Lord. As scary as it might seem. This world. Is filled with. A curse. And death. And destruction. You have come. To your congregations.

And you have given us hope. Far beyond. Our flesh. And may we look. To the gospel today. As our hope. In Christ's name. Amen. Thanks for listening.

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