

Christ and Caesar

by James Blaine Chapman

Jesus' kingdom, founded on truth, love, and service, ultimately prevailed over the world's forces of evil, demonstrating the power of His message and the character of His followers.

Scripture: Matthew 5:44, Matthew 7:24, Mark 10:45, John 14:6, John 16:32, John 18:36, 1 Corinthians 13:13, 2 Corinthians 4:18, Revelation 21:1

Topics: "Kingdom Of God", "Christian Victory"

Description

James Blaine Chapman preaches about the victory of Jesus over the world, contrasting the kingdoms of Caesar and Christ. Despite the odds stacked against Him, Jesus declared triumph in the face of imminent defeat, emphasizing that His kingdom was founded on truth, love, service, and eternity. Chapman encourages believers to follow Jesus' example and build their lives on these foundational principles to secure victory in the battles of life.

Transcript

CHRIST AND CAESAR

Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:32, 33).

When these words were spoken by our Lord Jesus Christ, they must have sounded to those who heard them like contradictory words. It must have seemed to the apostles themselves that the Master was extravagant and wanting in caution. To talk of victory when there were so many evidences of defeat must have seemed unwarranted.

There had been no darker day in the life of Jesus than the day when He so unqualifiedly asserted, "I have overcome the world." Not only were His enemies becoming more insistent in their demands for His arrest, but He himself admitted that He was to be arrested and crucified. Such an admission might have been expected to elicit an expression of discouragement. He might have been expected to say, "We are overcome. Our cause is lost. Our plans have failed. The world has won the contest."

But there in the very shadow of Gethsemane, Pilate's judgment hall and Calvary's cross, Jesus said, "Be of good cheer. I have won." The disciples might have thought it their duty to console the Master. They may have felt impelled to ask Him not to be entirely disconsolate. But it was Christ himself who asked those in less jeopardy than Himself not to worry, but to rest in peace because the victory is won.

There were two persons in those days who were striving for world dominion. One was Caesar, Emperor of all the Romans, and Christ, the Prophet from Galilee. These two persons were diametrically opposed to each other, so that only one of them could actually win. For if one won, the other had to lose. This was true because the ideals of life and of conquest held by each were such as to erase the ideals of the other. We do not hear the words of Caesar in the Bible. But history approves the statement that he claimed to be the victor. He claimed it with emphasis. He would tolerate no competitor. He taught his followers to say, "There is no king but Caesar." He claimed not only to be the greatest man, but he claimed to be a god. He asked not only for political allegiance; he called on men to worship him. Caesar said, "I am the conqueror." Jesus said, "I have overcome." Who really was the winner? Let us consider:

1. The odds as between these two persons:

a) Caesar was rich. He lived in what was known as The Golden Palace; he was waited upon by myriads of servants; his table groaned under a load of fine wines and tasty foods. His furniture was rich and costly. His robes were of silk and fine-twined linen. His slightest wish was law, and nothing he desired was ever denied him.

Jesus was poor. He was the world's poorest Man. He was born in a stable; cradled in a manger; was often hungry, once He sought His breakfast from a barren fig tree; He was more homeless than the foxes and less provided for than the birds; He was dependent on friends for a place to spend each successive night, and may have spent some nights in the open for want of an invitation; He found it necessary to perform miracles to pay His taxes, and to feed His friends; and when He died He was buried in a borrowed tomb.

b) Caesar had his legions equipped with the most approved implements of war. These hardened men were under oath to carry out the will of Caesar, and wherever they went the people trembled and surrendered. No armies on earth could stand before the soldiers of Caesar.

Jesus had only a staff with which to assist Himself when walking. His followers were unarmed fishermen and tax-gatherers. In the whole company there were never more than two swords; and even these were used only for symbols, not for either offensive or defensive combat.

c) Caesar was of a proud, influential race, and himself held the highest office among the mighty. Those who were not born Roman citizens must obtain that standing "with a great price." The immunities of a Roman were many, and his privileges valuable indeed.

Jesus was of a despised and provincial race, and among these He never held an office of any kind. He was born "King of the Jews," but He never assumed any kingly functions or invested Himself with any kingly garments. He was a humble representative of a humble race.

d) Caesar spoke the classical Latin language. This was the language of Cicero, of Cato and of the men of polite literature. It was the language of the imperialists. Ability to speak it made one a patrician among the people of the nations.

Jesus spoke the Galilean dialect of the humble Yiddish, for the most part, although He was also master of the Greek tongue. His was the speech of the prophets and the saints. People of high standing in the state did not bother to learn the language which was his mother tongue.

Surely the odds were against the claims of Jesus, and a court of worldly contemporaries would certainly have given the award to His competitor. They would have said, "Caesar wins. But let us now make the bold assertion:

2. That in spite of appearances to the contrary, Jesus won. His claim, "I have overcome the world," was fully justified. He was the true Conqueror. And think of the extent of His claim. He did not stop at saying, "I have overcome the Jews." But "I have overcome the world." His claim was that He had overcome all that organized opposition to God that is represented by the spirit and temper of the present world. Jesus had defeated that world and had transferred the conception of good to an altogether different realm.

The evidences of Jesus' victory did not immediately appear. But time, "the leveler of all things," has vindicated His testimony. Let us think of it on just the same grounds as we covered in making the study of comparisons and contrasts at the beginning:

a) Caesar's money has melted and vanished away. His golden palace is now an unimportant ruin on the hill above modern Rome. His crown has become a shapeless mass, and its whereabouts is unknown. His kingly garments have been eaten by the moths. And there is nothing left to remind one of the splendor which was and has now passed away.

But Jesus, the once homeless, now has a place at millions of firesides. His crown of thorns has become a crown of glory. Millions of earth's poor, and a considerable number of its rich, pour out their gold and silver as offerings to Christ every week. At His tables millions of the poor and needy of the earth eat every day, and still there is room. Yes, Jesus won in the matter of riches on earth. But this is the least part of the story. In the Father's house of many mansions, Jesus lives and reigns today. Yes, Jesus won. He won by a margin so wide that even the dumbest can see it.

b) Caesar's legions have long ago been disbanded, and no one who can by any show of right claim to be his successor has any troops to take their place. The equipment that Caesar's men counted efficient is now discounted everywhere, and his engineers have ceased to plan and develop other implements to take their place.

But Jesus has three hundred million "soldiers of the cross" among the nations of the earth, and these soldiers are keen and ready to go anywhere their great Commander bids them go. Others have held their slaves by force and fear. Jesus holds His friends by love. The bands that others have forged have been broken by contrary wills. But the love of Christ constraineth men everywhere to do His bidding.

c) Caesar's proud Roman race has become absorbed among other peoples, and the name Roman is no longer a badge of honor. But the new race of Jesus, called Christians, involves within its scope the very finest, purest and most honored people everywhere. And within the possession or stewardship of the friends of Jesus are the principal glories of earth.

d) The language that Caesar spoke is now listed as "a dead language," and is spoken by no nation in the world. Only those who have time for the antiquities are likely to hear even the name of Caesar, and when the name is used, it is usually given as a cognomen to a favorite dog or horse. And only those who have

time for the niceties of education can pronounce the words of the language which was Caesar's.

But all the languages of men are the languages of Jesus. His name is substantially the same in every tongue. Little children learn to lisp this name before they can call their mother's name. Strong people delight to say this word in their prayers. Old tottering saints are heard to pronounce the name of Jesus even as their feet touch the dewy grass along the banks of the Jordan of death. The words of Jesus have been translated into more than a thousand of earth's languages and dialects, and the Bible has to be ruled out always when "best seller" books are being discussed, for twenty million copies and more are printed and distributed every year. The number grows, rather than diminishes, as time passes along.

Yes, Jesus won. And the fact that He won assures us that we who follow Him may win also.

3. Why did Jesus win?

a) Jesus won because His kingdom was founded on truth. He proclaimed Himself the way, the truth and the life. He never made use of deception in promoting His work and extending His kingdom. "If it were not so, I would have told you," He said in giving to His disciples intimation of the blessed future which was their heritage. If there had been no home for them in heaven, He would have told His disciples so before they left their earthly homes to follow the homeless Christ. When men came to Him in professed discipleship on the supposition that henceforth He would feed them as He did the multitudes in the desert, He disillusioned them at once, even though the fruit of many days was swept away with one fell blow under His exhortation, "Labour not for the meat that perisheth." The burden of the message in which these words appear was that He would offer no immunities to secure followers.

We must build upon truth also, if we would build a kingdom that will stand. Character is of more importance than reputation; being is more fundamental than doing; thinking is of higher order than speaking; dependability is a more valuable virtue than appearance.

I went one day to assist a father whose boy had become enmeshed by the law. When first arrested some months before, the boy, who was really a juvenile, testified that he was eighteen years old. This made him "eligible" for the penitentiary from which he might be released at the end of a year or eighteen months. But if he said he was fifteen he might be sent to the "school" for a period covering six years or until he was twenty-one. He had listened to the advice of criminals in giving the false testimony. Now that his father had come to his rescue, there was a chance that the judge of the juvenile court might give him over to the custody of his father. The main hindrance was the fact of this deliberate falsehood. The thought of this irked the judge, who turned upon the youth every few minutes during the hearing to ask him to recite this saying: "The greatest lesson that anyone can learn is to tell the truth."

We must build on truth in word if our kingdom is to stand. Even in the affairs of this life there is no asset like the reputation for veracity. In the business world one's fortune is about made when those who have had dealings with him arise to say, "His word is as good as his bond." The banker accounts veracity and honesty better security than bonds and real estate. How much more does God honor those who speak the truth in their hearts?

But truth is more than words. It is action. It is thought. It is purpose. It is reality. It is in this deeper sense that the disciple may, like his Master, become the truth. Whatever is not of truth will perish. Falsehood is sand. Truth is rock. Let us build on the rock.

b) Jesus won because the motive of His kingdom was love. Caesar's kingdom was founded upon force. The motive of his subjects was fear. They obeyed to avoid punishment or to obtain the reward of a servant, but Jesus won His followers by love. They followed Him as disciples or learners, and He called them friends. There were no threats to enforce obedience. If there were warnings, they were always mentioned in gentle tones. It was love that moved the mighty God to give His Son for our redemption. It was love that moved the blessed Saviour to give Himself for our sins and for our salvation.

There are those who say love will not suffice in a world of force. But where is the kingdom of Caesar or of Alexander or of Napoleon today? They founded their empires on force, but their kingdoms have perished from the earth. Jesus founded His kingdom upon love and it stands yet today -- in a world given to the worship of force.

If we want our kingdom to stand, let us follow Jesus, not Caesar. Let us build on that supreme love for God which is the love of worship. To "love nothing but God," means to love God so much that every other love is as hate compared with it. This supreme love is sometimes called fear, for there is a full measure of reverence in it. And it is notable that one who fears God in this sense of supreme love does not fear anything or anybody else. The good are the brave, and the gentle are the great.

If our kingdom is to stand we must build upon love for our fellow men. This love is not to be a pretense. It is to be the implanting of God in our hearts. We must build on the special love that God's children have for one another -- the love of fellowship; and we must build upon the love that good people have for the unsaved -- the love of pity.

Looking over the record of King Herod, sometimes called "Herod the great," one remarked that it were better to be Herod's pig than to be his son. But the words of the Master and the record of Christians prove that one is fortunate, if he must be an enemy, that he shall be enemy to the followers of Christ, for the Master gave special commandment to His followers to love and treat kindly their enemies.

The world has tried different methods of ridding itself of enemies, but if one hates his enemy, this hate will poison his own blood and affect his bodily health; it will poison his mind and make him unhappy; it will poison his disposition and make him disagreeable and unsatisfactory even to his friends. If one mistreats his enemy, he must always guard against his enemy's spirit of retribution, and live in fear lest his enemy "get even," for getting even in a quarrel always means to leave the account in favor of the last one who attempted to square the score. If one kills his enemy, the ghost of the murdered will haunt the murderer in his dreams, and the laws of men and the law of God will unite in bringing justice and punishment. The Christian way to rid oneself of his enemy is to love his enemy, and despite what men say, this plan works. By means of it the enemy is made harmless, and he may even be changed into a friend.

c) Jesus won because He built His kingdom by the method of service. Caesar and "the princes of the Gentiles" built their kingdom by the method of exaction. The greatness of Caesar's kingdom was computed upon the basis of the number of people who could be made to serve and to bow down. The strength of Christ's kingdom is described in terms of the number who will receive what He has to give. Caesar's symbol was a yoke of iron. Christ's symbol was a yoke lined with love. Caesar demanded that men minister to him in abjection. Jesus girded Himself with a towel and washed His followers' feet. Peter was still confused when Jesus approached him, and thought to show his great regard for his Master by refusing to be served by Him, but Jesus corrected Simon and said, "If I do not serve you, you have no part in me." Then the enlightened disciple said, "Not my feet only, but also my hands and my head."

If we are to win we must build our kingdom on service. We still have Caesar's example, and there are still those who would be served, but the truly rich are not those who can hire others to do their bidding. The truly rich are those who have no need of that which others can do for them. Those who complain that opportunities are scarce mark themselves as subjects of Caesar; for opportunities to serve are everywhere.

Men, worldly men, have been marked by covetousness, and they have counted success in terms of what they have accumulated. But Jesus set forth a new method. He remarked that the giver is more blessed and happy than the receiver. Black is the color of Caesar, for it represents receiving and holding. White is the color of Christ, for it represents giving away all one has.

The watershed of the Lebanon Mountains gathers supplies for the Jordan River. The stream starts as a mere rivulet, but gains strength as it moves along. It passes through that small lake which in the days of Joshua was called "the waters of Merom," and enters the north end of the Sea of Galilee. This little sea is thankful for the gift, for it is its principal source of supply; but it does not attempt to hold any of what it gets; it passes its supplies on to the low lands beyond. The lake has been called "Blue Galilee," both because of its depth and plentitude and because of its beauty. About this little lake the principal cities of Old and New Testament times gathered. The water is well stocked with fish, and everywhere there is the air of fruitfulness and blessing.

The Jordan River is not content to flow in a straight line, but by constant bendings, as though reluctant to hand over its supplies to the lake below, makes two hundred miles out of what would be sixty-six on a straight line. At the last the Jordan pours its full favor into the upper neck of the Dead Sea. This sea, in contrast to Galilee, gives away nothing, and its very grasping becomes its curse, for about this sea no cities are built, no fields of grain wave, no marks of happiness appear. The waters themselves sustain no life. It is truly "the Dead Sea." Miserliness killed it.

The Dead Sea is the symbol of Caesar's way of life. The Sea of Galilee is the symbol of Christ's way of life. Looking at these symbols, we scarcely need to be told again that we must build upon service, if we are to build a kingdom that will stand.

d) Jesus won because He included so much of the future in His plans. The reach of Christ's compass was so great that He could accept a passing defeat as just one of the incidents on the way to final and permanent victory. Caesar required his good today, but Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world." In the midst of the fiercest conflict Jesus quit praying for the passing of the immediate bitter cup, and asked for the enduring victory. He could pass over the tears and blood of the garden for the prospect of the glory He was to have with the Father later. He could endure the judgment hall of Pilate and the cross upon which His body was stretched by thinking of the house of many mansions into which He was later to enter. He could leave off contending for a tent, seeing He was heir to a house of enduring foundations.

And what shall we say of ourselves? Shall we lengthen the compass of our faith and hopes until it embraces death and judgment and eternity, as well as the life that now is? We are the true ancients when we stand upon the shoulders of those who have gone before us. We shall become true children of eternity when we lengthen our plans until they embrace the home of God.

Caesar and those who adhere to his kingdom of time are subject to disappointment here, because they have no plans for using anything that is not given to them now, but it is different with those who built as Christ did. Some people can say sincerely, when the good of the present is denied them, "God is eternal, I

am immortal, therefore I can wait." If good is denied the good man here it will be given to him later when he needs it more and can keep it longer.

Life to the follower of Christ is not a battle only -- it is a war. When the Christian seems to lose a battle, he does not greatly grieve, for he is interested in the war. This is the lesson of the Book of Revelation. This is, as I think, a difficult book, but from the high hills of the early chapters one may see the higher hill of the concluding chapters. When one starts to make his journey from the first to the last, he encounters many dark days and darker nights, but if he keeps in mind the end from the beginning, he knows all the time that when he comes out he shall see the "city foursquare," and the new heaven and the new earth. He knows that the end is victory for God and righteousness and for all those who put their trust in Him, and if there is victory in the end, there is victory all along, for "all is well that ends well."

There is a day beyond for the child of God. I am as sure of it as I can be sure of anything. It is like the boy who could not see his kite for haze and for distance, but who told the inquirer, "I know it is up there. I can feel its pull." I can feel the pull of heaven. I know it is up there, even though my mortal eyes cannot behold its towers. In my program of life, tomorrow is more important in the way of reward than today, and because my plans embrace tomorrow, I shall win. I shall win because Jesus won, and because I am building as He taught me to build.

We have come to a critical hour. It is customary for speakers and writers to remark upon the times, but the times never do solve personal problems. One must choose his own course. Times of political peace and economical prosperity have often been times of peril to men's souls. Times of stress and trouble have served others as they did David by making them realize the need of God. But the times neither save nor damn. Our own choice is what counts.

If we are normal we want to win in this race and battle of life. We want to be overcomers, but we feel instinctively that it would be easy for us to lose. Think of living a whole lifetime on earth and then missing heaven in the end. Think of having all one's kingdom swept away by a calamity of any sort whatsoever.

Patrick Henry appealed to history as his guiding lamp. Let us also appeal to the past for instruction. The condition of the world has never had very much to do with the individual Christian life. When martyrdom was the common price of professing to be a Christian, Christians multiplied so fast that the saying was, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." When the times became more agreeable, Christians lost much of their heroic spirit, so that when a new period of persecution arose, its first days were marked by many recantations. Also, a study of the past reveals that periods of prosperity have spoiled men, as the tropical climate is said to do, so that, paradoxically, good days materially have been bad days morally and spiritually.

At any rate, we cannot choose the kind of times in which we shall live. God has brought us to the kingdom for such times as these. It is ours to make good in the times, and not to make the times. Jesus said to those about Him, "The kingdom cometh not with observation." That is, things are not necessarily what they seem to be, but "the kingdom is within you." It is not when did you live? but how did you live? It is not with what complacency did you fare? but toward what port did you sail?

Just as surely as we have been called to fight, just that surely we have been called to win. On that ground, we are sure we are all called to be Christians, for just as surely as Jesus won, just that surely shall we win if we follow Him.

We are foolish if we insist on proving again that the way of Caesar is the way of defeat. That has been proved too many times to require repetition. Even in the world of science, progress is made only by those who are willing to accept the experience of others and build upon what these others have demonstrated.

Christ won because He built His kingdom upon truth as its foundation; upon love as its motive; upon service as its method; and upon eternity as its scope. We can win too, if we build upon Him, and build as He built.

That rains of God's mysterious providences, the winds of human misunderstandings and persecutions, and the floods of satanic opposition will try all our houses. But if your house is built upon the rock of God, it will stand.

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