

Triumph or Defeat

by Keith Hartsell

As we walk with Jesus through his passion, we can experience defeat in our pride, sin nature, and false self, and ultimately triumph with Christ as he rises from the dead.

Duration: 17:47

Scripture: Philippians 2:5

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the theme of triumph over defeat. He shares personal examples of triumph and defeat in his own life, as well as the importance of experiencing victory in various aspects of life. The sermon focuses on the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem and the contrast between triumph and defeat displayed in this event. The preacher encourages the congregation to apply forgiveness to past sins and to walk with Jesus towards the cross, experiencing triumph over sin and evil.

Transcript

So as we begin this time of studying God's Word, let's begin with a word of prayer. Father in heaven, we thank you for the great gift that is Jesus who came entering into the city of Jerusalem on this day that we celebrate in victory. And we pray, Lord, that you would show us how to walk with him this week, that we may also see victory in our own lives over sin, over death, and over hell.

And we pray, Lord, that you would help us to walk with him. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

So this sermon is about triumph or defeat because this day mixes triumph and defeat in such an incredible way together. I imagine everyone here has experienced victory in some way and defeat in some way in your life, from sports competitions to music competitions, science fairs, and different rankings in school academically. I was the valedictorian in my high school class of 520 students in 1995.

My wife, Dawn, was the youngest student in her college organic chemistry and finished with the highest grade in her class. Yes, we're both smarty pants. I took first place at a judo competition in the second grade, defeating my arch nemesis, my identical twin brother, who took second place in that judo competition, which essentially means that I pushed him down more than he pushed me down.

Triumph or defeat. They're at the heart of every good story, every great myth, every movie that we enjoy watching, and every legend. We particularly love the stories.

I think most people are drawn to the stories that appear as if the good guys and gals might be defeated, but at the last minute something marvelous happens and the tables are turned and they, in the end, surprisingly triumph over evil, which is what we're all hoping for, waiting for, anxiously on the edge of our seats. And today, with these readings and with what we celebrate, is a day of contrast displayed by the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, being celebrated as a king, as the victor with palm branches, and then in the reading that Aliana, my daughter, just did, the passion reading that we do every Palm Sunday, that describes the arrest of Jesus just a few days later and his humiliation, the mockery that he faces publicly by the soldiers, and then finally a gruesome and humiliating death by crucifixion. It's a confusing day liturgically.

We rejoice and we wave our palms, we dance with children who are playing their instruments in joy, and then we get to the passion reading where we're sobered by the details that follow in the services that we will celebrate later this week on Monday, Thursday, and Good Friday. And we turn from triumph with Jesus on this day, and we turn to the cross, walking with Jesus who knows he's heading to the cross and his passion. In a few moments we'll symbolize that by turning the purple into the liturgical color of red, the color of Jesus's passion.

And so even in the change of colors in the service, we mix together these feelings of triumph or defeat. Why do we walk through these motions in this service? Well, in Holy Week, we essentially join with the apostles as followers of Jesus. We sort of step into them and participate in the events through the eyes of the apostles.

We watch the events and we experience it with the apostles, seeing the events as they see the events, experiencing hopefully these events every year in a more profound way, going deeper and deeper as we're able to enter more fully in to the experience that the apostles shared. And that these services then become more profound each year for us. The closer we come to Jesus during these events, the more united we are with him.

And the more we come to grieve our own sins, the more freedom and joy we experience at the resurrection. So the deeper you go towards the death of Christ, the greater the jubilation at the declaration that Jesus was risen from the dead. So look in your bulletins with me at Philippians.

Out of all of these rich passages, I actually chose this one to focus in on for a moment. Philippians chapter 2 verses 5 through 11. This is the passage known as the kenosis passage, which is the word in Greek that's used in verse 7, kenosis.

It means to empty out oneself. It's the word and indeed the theology of God, the son, who before Abraham was, he said, I am. It's the theology of God, the son emptying himself.

And humbling himself so that he could become human. The defeat and triumph of Jesus are here contrasted in verse 8 and 9. He humbles himself by becoming obedient to death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

Even in his triumphal entry, he enters the city, as Kyle read for us, as humbly as he can, emptying himself. He doesn't ride in on a great white war horse like the victors of any kind of athletic challenge, battle, or

race. He enters not on a war horse, but on a colt, on a donkey, a symbol of peace.

And on Monday, Thursday, the next service that we share together, we imitate his actions of taking off his shirt and kneeling at each disciple's feet to wash them like a servant. His humility, his humility is astonishing. So how are we supposed to experience defeat this week? Should we be experiencing and feeling defeat or triumph? How do we enter into Holy Week and these events, observing these stories, these narratives through the eyes of the apostles and what they experience? As we walk with Christ through his passion, we want to experience, one, a defeat in our pride, in our arrogance, because we want to emulate the man that we're watching and how he's emptied himself and how he doesn't fight back even though he has all of the strength and the power of God Almighty at his disposal.

So we want, one, to experience defeat in our pride and arrogance. Two, this is what I pray every Lent and every Holy Week, I want to experience greater defeat in my own sin nature and in the strength of my temptations. And three, I want to experience defeat in my false self.

That's the person that isn't true. It isn't my true identity. I don't want to pretend any longer to be better or stronger or happier than I really am.

I want to be my true self. And so I want to experience defeat in my false self, the pretender. I read a powerful story this week that caught my attention because I'm an identical twin and I feel like it juxtaposes this narrative of defeat and triumph in a person's life.

It's the story of Eva Moses Carr. I don't know if you've heard of her. She was a survivor of Auschwitz during the Holocaust.

And these are her words that I will share with you in a moment. It caught my attention because I'm an identical twin and she was an identical twin experiencing the Holocaust. And this is what she says in an interview in the 90s.

I was born in 1934, one of a pair of twins. Miriam and I were the third and fourth children in the family. In May 1944, at the age of 10, I arrived with my family in a cattle car at the concentration camp, Auschwitz.

We got down from the cattle car. People were selected to live or to die. People crying, pushing, shoving, dogs barking, trying to make sense of that place.

And I actually turned around trying to figure out what was this place. As I turned around, I realized my father and my two other sisters were gone. I never saw them again.

We were holding on to my mother for dear life, Miriam and I. A Nazi was running in the middle of that selection platform yelling in German, twins, twins. He noticed us and demanded to know if we were twins. And my mother asked if that was good.

And the Nazis said yes. And my mother said yes. At that moment, another Nazi came.

My mother was pulled to the right and we were pulled to the left. We were crying. She was crying.

And all I ever remembered was seeing my mother's arms stretched out in despair as she was pulled away. I never even said goodbye to her, but I didn't understand that this would be the last time that I would see her. And all that took 30 minutes from the time we got down from the cattle car and my whole family was gone.

Only Miriam and I were left holding hands and crying. We were taken to a lab where Mengele, known today as the angel of death, experimented on us for months, injecting us with strange substances every other day. His job was to figure out how to lengthen, multiply, and strengthen the Aryan race.

And so he experimented on many sets of twins in Auschwitz. I was told after getting a high fever and all my limbs swelled up and became painful that I would die in two weeks. But I survived somehow.

We were liberated in 1945 by the Soviet army. Where's the triumph in this story? The triumph wasn't experienced for Eva until many decades later after they were liberated. Because despite their liberation, Eva and Miriam struggled with a great many physical problems, one that eventually led to her sister's death later in life.

In 1993, Eva had the opportunity to meet with a Nazi doctor from Auschwitz as a result of an interview, as the survivors were found and interviewed. And she was given the opportunity to get from this Nazi doctor a letter of authentication stating what had happened to her and her family because of all of those in the culture that deny that the Holocaust actually existed. And so she wanted and needed that letter of authentication about the events of her life.

And the doctor agreed to write it and to sign it. And she thought, what can I give this man in exchange? What do you give a Nazi doctor as a gift? And she thought and she came up with the idea of writing him a letter of forgiveness. He would write a letter, so she would write a letter.

She said how powerful it felt after 50 years to present that Nazi doctor and in her heart to address Mengele himself, the angel of death, with her personal declaration of forgiveness. This is a powerful story following on the heels of our catechist Laura Nichols sermon last week on the healing of memories, because Eva experienced the healing of memories as she was trying to put the words down on the paper. She actually said before she could begin writing, she had to pick up a translating dictionary and find 20 very nasty words to write down first before she could begin the letter.

She applied forgiveness to the Nazi doctors, Mengele especially, to their sins from the past. And her having that moment, they actually went to Auschwitz to exchange the letters. They went to the place where it all happened.

And for that moment to take place for her, I'm not even going to spend any time talking about what happened for the doctor. For me, this is about Eva. She applied forgiveness to those sins that were done, those grievous, horrible sins that were done against her from the past, illustrating the power of triumph over defeat in the long run.

We have been beaten down by sin and evil. Each one of you is beaten down every day in your lives by the forces of evil, by the temptations of sin, by the accusing voices that tell you that you are not good enough. Just as Jesus himself in our passion reading was beaten down, but stepping into his body this week, walking with him toward the cross, laying our sins down to receive forgiveness for ourselves, we will triumph with Christ as he rises from the dead.

That is the end of our tale. The end of our story. We triumph over sin, over death, over evil, over the spiritual forces of darkness that war against us to convince us that we're failures and to discourage us from the calling that God's placed on our lives.

If you came in today with any discouragement, let us join Jesus this week. So the best way to apply the main idea of this sermon is simply clear your calendar and come to the services this week and walk with Jesus, experiencing the events through the eyes of the apostles. Let's ask Jesus to bar the evil one from beating us down, from preventing us from walking with Jesus this week to the cross and to the resurrection.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, you know how we come against all of the obstacles and the spiritual forces that would keep us from following Jesus and experiencing freedom and triumph in our lives. We pray, Lord, would you help us with our schedules this week? Would you help us, Lord, to come present to the events that we celebrate this week that only come once a year, where we can kneel and wash one another's feet as Jesus washed the disciples feet, where we can come to the cross and lay our burdens and our sins down and experience freedom, forgiveness and healing, where we can grieve with the apostles at the death of their dream for total victory over the Romans and the loss of their friend as they lay Jesus in the grave.

And Lord, we pray for new life, new resurrection life, new joy to come in and that the joy of the Lord would be our strength. We pray, Lord, that you would rise us out of those things that hold us down or back. And we pray this in the name of Jesus Christ.

It's in his name that we pray.

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