

# God Is Greater

by Tom Macartney

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*God is greater than our enemies, and His power and love can transform us through the cross, enabling us to experience spiritual power and transformation.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 53:4, John 4:24, John 12:24, Romans 8:16, Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:19, Hebrews 4:12, 1 John 4:4

**Topics:** "Gods Power", "Spiritual Victory"

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## Description

Tom Macartney preaches about the overwhelming superiority of God over our enemies - the world, the flesh, and the devil. He emphasizes the need for Christians to rely on God's power to overcome the challenges of deception, moral pollution, and pressures of life. Macartney highlights the importance of abiding in Christ for protection and victory over sin and the devil, and the necessity of experiencing God's power and sufficiency in a weakening society. He also discusses the significance of God's grace in overcoming our circumstances, heredity, and the effects of sin, pointing to the healing power of Christ in every aspect of human need.

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## Transcript

God is greater than our enemies: the world, the flesh and the devil

One of the most encouraging verses in the Bible is 1 John 4:4, "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world". This is a verse we need today. It tells of God's overwhelming superiority over all His foes and ours. John is speaking here of the spirit of antichrist, the spirit of error abroad in the world to deceive us, but we may take the verse to include every aspect of enemy activity. The forces ranged against Christ are not only determined to lead us astray in some way, but also to wear us out by the weight of their antagonism. As the devil tightens his grip on this world, is it not becoming more and more difficult to spot the difference between the real and the counterfeit in spiritual things, not to get contaminated by the moral pollution around us, and to stand up to the pressures of life? To prove the Lord's sufficiency as we live in a disintegrating civilisation is a real challenge. What a word of encouragement then is this: The Lord Jesus says, "I am greater and I am in you." It is encouraging to know that God is almighty. It is even more encouraging to know that the almighty God lives in you. This is a fact, both joyful and sobering, for a real Christian.

We Christians have only three real enemies: this present evil world, sin in our hearts, and the devil. We live in enemy territory, in a spiritually hostile and polluted atmosphere and environment, and need God as

our protecting shield. Only as we abide in Christ, our true environment, shall we be safe and also know His power to be greater than that of indwelling sin. He can break the grip of sin and arrest the traitor in our hearts. And as we resist the devil, whose power we shall be wise not to underrate, we shall find that he is a defeated foe.

The question of spiritual power, that is effectiveness, fruitfulness and the strength and ability to serve the Lord, is an urgent one today. We know that these are God's will for us, and yet the church at large is so weak it has to keep going by using countless substitutes for the reality. Much Christian activity is really a confession of spiritual impotence. And there is also much counterfeit power in circulation. Yet the reality should be ours.

Paul also repeatedly underlines what John says about the power of Christ. In Ephesians 1 he tells of his prayers for these Christians that they may know God, understand the wonder of their destiny in Christ and His inheritance in them, and experience the exceeding greatness of His power as demonstrated in the resurrection. The power of God exceeds, excels, surpasses all the power of the enemy. The word means 'to throw beyond or further'. The devil did his worst at the cross, but God overthrew him there. There the prince of this world was cast out. There the power of sinful flesh was broken. And now this same power can deliver, sustain and protect us, and be our inner resource and energy. Of course we must not imagine that we shall enter fully into all this overnight. Paul tells us that the flesh remains an active force in us. While subject to Christ's victory, like Satan, it can and will assert itself whenever possible. Nor must we imagine that we shall always be conscious of His power. In fact Paul tells us we shall usually be more conscious of our weakness and inability to cope. He says the power of Christ rested upon his own weakness. True spiritual power only flows from the cross; it is the power of His resurrection. We must learn to live by faith and not by our feelings. God is greater and Christ is in us whatever we feel like. And the victory of the cross was final and complete.

There is one area of the conflict in which we shall continually need to see that God is greater. We are all sometimes oppressed by a sense of failure and sinfulness. Those inclined to introspection may often feel like this. We must learn to rest in the exceeding riches of His grace. Satan, the great accuser, loves to point the finger at our sin. Our answer should be, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. If our backs are toward sin and our faces toward God, then grace is greater than all our sin.

God is greater than our enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil, but are we proving it?

God is greater than our circumstances and heredity

God is also greater than the very stuff of human life, its problems and heart-breaks, all stemming from the fall which has written frustration over everything.

Our circumstances present us all with problems and trials such as sorrow, sickness and pain, fears about the future, concern for loved ones and frustration of cherished hopes. We are part of a fallen creation and experience the consequences every day. But God is greater and able to turn even these to good account in our lives as we trust Him. This is the meaning of Romans 8:28, which does not say that all things automatically work together for good, but that God works with us to make this true. Such is His superior grace and power. This will give us that positive attitude to life's trials which we see in Paul when he says, "We glory in our tribulations."

Then God is greater than our fallen heredity, an even greater miracle! We are not only spiritually and morally sin-sick, but also abnormal! We have each inherited traits of character, inhibitions, constitutional and temperamental weaknesses, which are the results of sin in the bloodstream of the race. As human beings we have been damaged by sin and need God's healing power. We not only need salvation from the guilt and power of sin, but also from its effects. We need justification through the blood of Christ, major surgery for the cancer of sin, and also skilful nursing to restore us to full health. This is an aspect of salvation little understood. Consequently, surgery may be urged when nursing is needed and vice versa. Isaiah 53:4-6 shows us that the cross touches the whole range of human need. We read that Christ bore our sicknesses (R.V. margin), carried our sorrows, was wounded for our transgressions and was bruised for our iniquities. In Matthew 8:16, 17, verse 4 of Isaiah 53 is applied to bodily healing. It certainly also applies to the healing of the soul. Paul tells us in Romans 5:6, 8, 10 that Christ died for us not only while we were sinners and enemies, but also while we were weak (the word weak often means sick). Certain it is that salvation covers every aspect of human need. Contrary to popular ideas the cancer of sin does require surgery, but its harmful effects need medical care. We need Christ both as surgeon and physician. In the gospels we not only see Him dealing with evil, but also curing its effects. There are things that must be cut out of our lives, but there are areas that need His healing touch. For example, the works of the flesh call for surgery, but a weak conscience, a timid disposition, or some limiting human frailty, or inhibition need healing. Praise God, He is greater than our heredity and able not only to operate where necessary, but also to restore us to full health! Our heavenly heredity is greater than our earthly! "Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world!"

Bible references: John 12:31; Rom. 5:1-11, 20; 1 Cor. 8:7-13; 2 Cor. 4:7; 12:9, 10; Gal. 1:4; Eph. 1:15-23; 2:7; 3:20, 21; Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:27; 2 Tim. 1:7; Jas. 4:7; 1 John 5:19; Rev. 12:10; Psalm 77:10 (R.V.); Dan. 7:25

God is greater than our wills, our emotions and our minds

What is God's greatest problem? It is not Satan but us! To save us from the results of the fall requires a momentous and many-sided miracle of grace. We are guilty before God and need forgiveness; we need deliverance from our sinful human nature; we are spiritually dead and need life, and so on. Praise God, in Christ He has solved every aspect of the problem we present! Now our present concern is with the effects of sin on our wills emotions and minds. It has been well said that the root of all evil in human nature is the corruption of the will, and perhaps nowhere in the Bible is this problem of the human will, under sin, illustrated more clearly than in the case of Jacob. We are, of course, only thinking now of God's handling of our waywardness. Jacob was a typical believer in whom we can see an important aspect of sanctification. Here is a man pursuing his own ends until he is cornered at Jabbok. His first encounter with God at Bethel was only a beginning. Not till Jabbok did he find that God was greater than his fallen selfhood; there his will was subdued and set free again, under God. If we know ourselves at all we know that we too are rebels. Self-will so often reigns where God's should. Salvation involves the subduing of our wills, a life-long process beginning at conversion. If God were not greater than our wills, if He just gave in to us instead of wrestling with us like Jacob, we should be undone. Praise God, He is greater than Jacob (John 4:12). He is the God of Jacob. He is able to subdue us and change us from rebels into His willing, happy subjects.

And He is the God of Isaac too. Unlike Jacob, Isaac seems to have been a rather weak character. So if we are somewhat spineless by nature, God is able to put backbone into us. He is ever working in us Christians to secure the active cooperation of our wills with His.

Then there is the problem of our twofold craving for emotional and intellectual satisfaction. In 1 Cor. 1:22-24 we read, "Jews demand signs. and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified ... the power of God and the wisdom of God". Here we have this problem and God's answer. Broadly speaking we can distinguish two kinds of make-up, the emotional and the intellectual. Of course we are all a mixture and the mixture does vary. Because man is a fallen being, out of touch with God in his spirit, he craves for signs, for tangible evidence of God's presence and working, or for wisdom for intellectual satisfaction. But God is neither mind nor emotion. He is greater. He embraces both. He is spirit.

Now this twofold longing is a major hindrance in the Christian life. We must understand that the Bible makes a distinction between the human soul and spirit, though this can be carried too far. The spirit is the sphere of god-consciousness in man, while the soul is the sphere of self-consciousness, of willing and feeling and thinking. As Christians, God dwells in our spirits, the inner sanctuary of our beings.

Matthew 12:38-45 will help us here. The Jews came to Christ asking for a miraculous proof of His Messiahship. There was, of course, abundant evidence to faith and obedience in His words and works. The Lord refused them any sign but the sign of Jonah. To prove Himself to men who had no intention of yielding to Him would only have hardened them in their sin (verses 43-45). Yet the sign of death and resurrection would be given. This is why the Ninevites repented. Jonah was a man back from the dead. The death and resurrection of Christ would be the greatest possible sign, but the Jews would not hear of it. Human nature does not want to hear about 'Christ crucified', it only wants signs and manifestations, not to die. It craves for Christ without His cross, but God knows better. Christ crucified and risen, One greater than Jonah, is the only answer. Signs never touch the root of the problem, human nature. The meaning of the cross must be applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Here is something of great importance. We must not seek signs of God's presence in our emotions. He wants to meet us in the quiet of our spirits. To insist on living in our feelings is to court trouble; we are simply asking for signs, which, incidentally, Satan can imitate. And if God does give us an unusual experience for some reason, then we must on no account depend upon or consider it as normal or necessary to our Christian life.

Our emotions are, of course, an important part of us, though now affected by sin; it is only wrong to be governed by them, to depend on them, to live on them and to insist that God meets you there. God's home is in our spirits. The effect of His presence there upon our souls will be an overflow of 'joy unspeakable and full of glory', leading to spontaneous praise. But few seem to realise that our emotions can easily be activated by other influences too. It is one thing to be stirred by God, another by our temperament, surroundings or others.

Let us live by faith in our living Lord and we shall experience the greatest of all signs, the power of His resurrection, carrying us through all the problems and pressures of life and transforming us into His likeness.

Further, God is greater than our minds. "Behold, One greater than Solomon is here." Solomon was the embodiment of wisdom; he knew the answers. Now 'Christ crucified' is the answer to our thirst for religious knowledge. This can express itself in a desire to master and systematise divine truth and it has led to the diverse and contradictory schools of interpretation contended for by equally learned, devout and sincere Christians. The human mind, wonderful tool of our spirits though it is, can never compass the whole truth. Christ is too big for our pigeon holes. Let us seek to be Biblical in our thinking, without sterile dogmatism in

those areas of truth where true Christians differ, above all saturating our minds with scripture itself. Yet something more is needed. God's truth goes beyond our minds. The Queen of Sheba came with her questions and was overwhelmed not so much by Solomon's answers as by his magnificence. This is God's way. He wants us first to see His majestic glory. Then as we are bowed in wonder, love and praise, our questions will find their answers. Only when our hearts are bowed can our minds be safely instructed. Our minds need deliverance and renewal. Let us remember how the Lord Jesus reacted to the inquisitive Greeks in John 12 by talking about the cross. The cross must touch our minds as well as our wills and emotions. The Spirit of truth has come to lead us far beyond the range of our minds. Without Him we search the scriptures in vain. Our chief desire must be, like Moses, to behold the glory of God.

Christ crucified and risen is God's answer to our wayward wills, our unstable emotions and our restless minds. He is greater than Jacob, Jonah and Solomon. In Him alone we see the true man, living in perfect communion in His spirit with His Father, His will, mind and emotions in perfect harmony and balance. Our destiny is to be like Him!

Bible references: Luke 16:31; John 4:24; 5:40; 13:37, 38; Rom. 1:9; 8:16; 12:2; Eph. 2:1-10; Phil. 2:12, 13; 3:10; Col. 1:21; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:8; Gen. 27-33; Exod. 33:18; 2 Chron. 9:1-12

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