

## “The Word of Triumph”

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John 19:28-30, Luke 24:1-8, Romans 8:35-39

Jn 19:28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.”

Jn 19:29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips.

Jn 19:30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, “It is finished.” With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Lk 24:1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.

Lk 24:2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

Lk 24:3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

Lk 24:4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them.

Lk 24:5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead?”

Lk 24:6 He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee:

Lk 24:7 ‘The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’ ”

Lk 24:8 Then they remembered his words.

Ro 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Ro 8:36 As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

Ro 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Ro 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

Ro 8:39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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*“It is finished!”* This word spoken by our Lord as he hung upon the cross might have been the saddest word of all. It might have been just a bloody period to a life ending in miserable failure. *“I’m finished... done for ...So this is how it ends: shame, humiliation, defeat, death! It’s over.”*

*“It is finished!”*

Many, no doubt, said the same: the disciples who sadly went back to their fishing nets; the Roman soldiers who had completed yet another crucifixion; the Jewish authorities who were finally rid of a dangerous radical and heretic; the Devil himself, who thought he had triumphed over his worst enemy.

*“He’s finished!”*

But they couldn't have been more wrong. Jesus' last word from the cross according to John wasn't at all a cry of defeat; it was a cry of victory! It was a shout of triumph. Jesus was saying, *"It is finished! I've done it! It's been completed. I have accomplished what the Father had given me to do."*

Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus was conscious of fulfilling God's plan: *"My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to complete his work."* And what was his work? To seek and save the lost – to rescue those who had wandered away from God. His work was to save people from their sins and restore them to true fellowship with God. He came to reconcile us to God and to one another.

Now in his death upon the cross, God's great plan for salvation has come to completion. The penalty for human sin has been paid. The gap between sinful humanity and a holy God had been bridged by the sinless Son of God who was fully God and fully human. Now, because of what Jesus has finished, we can be completely whole. The power of sin and death over our lives has been broken. The victory has been won. And that victory was made visible and concrete in Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead. Jesus is the risen, conquering Son of God, and he has given you and me a share in the spoils:

*"Thanks be to God," says Paul, "who gives us the victory over sin and death."*

Because of his finished work and his resurrection from the dead, you and I have victory over sin. We need no longer be enslaved to our selfish, sinful passions. We need no longer be defeated by our own worst instincts. We need no longer be dominated by pride and greed and lust and jealousy and all those ugly things in human nature that serves to hurt others and to separate us from God. We are free to love, free to forgive as we have been forgiven, free to live in peace and wholeness with others. Christ is alive and his Spirit now lives in us. Because of Christ's victory over sin and death, we can live as new people. We can live out of a new identity: *"Behold, if anyone is in Christ he or she is a new creation – the old is past, the new has come."*

This is not to say that we will not now ever fall into sin, or give in to temptation, or revert to old ways. We will still struggle with sin and evil, there are skirmishes here and there, but the main battle against evil has been won, and the backbone of the Enemy has been broken, and we no longer have to be dominated and enslaved by that oppressive power. We can live differently! We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

What's more, because of finished work of Christ – because of resurrection from the dead – You and I not only have victory over sin, but victory over all that would defeat us in life – all that would separate us from God.

Ro 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...

Ro 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

He can enable us to turn fear, hardship, trouble and tragedy – those things that would defeat us into victory.

Our choir just sang an anthem from Handel's *Messiah*. Are you aware of Handel's story? All his life George Frederick Handel was dogged by misfortune ; debt followed debt and despair followed despair. A cerebral hemorrhage paralyzed his right side and for four years he could neither walk nor write. Doctors gave him up, but he revived to write several operas, only to be plunged once more into deep debt. Nearing sixty he felt finished. He complained: "*Why did God permit my resurrection only to allow my fellow men to bury me again? Why did he allow a renewal of my life if I may be no longer permitted to create? My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*"

Then when all seemed lost, he was challenged by a poet friend Charles Jennens to write "a sacred oratorio." Reading the Scriptures and finding in the sufferings of the Savior an affinity with his own, he went to work. For 24 days without eating a crumb, he worked like a fiend to produce "*Messiah*"--which many consider the greatest oratorio ever written. His accomplishment lives on and continues to inspire. Our Lord enabled Handel to triumph over certain defeat. He could shout triumphantly, "*I know that my redeemer liveth, and that I shall stand at the latter day.*"

Perhaps you can point to instances in your own life where defeat stared you in the face. Perhaps you were going through a tough time emotionally--perhaps it was sickness, or the loss of a loved one, or unemployment, or a divorce, or financial troubles. You thought all was lost – that you were finished. And yet somehow you managed to survive. Somehow God brought you through and you can look back and can see how something good came even out of those terrible circumstances. The risen Christ has a way of overcoming evil with good, and failure with faith, enabling us to be more than conquerors through him who loves us. And he continues to be worthy of our trust.

Because of his finished work upon the cross and his resurrection from the dead, we have victory not only over sin and over all that would defeat us in this life, but we have victory over death itself and are given life eternal.

Death is the great hush-up in our culture. It is said to have replaced sex as the unmentioned, unmentionable taboo of our society. We just don't want to deal with it. The Frenchman Pascal spoke a truth for our day: "*We spend all our lives trying to take our minds off death.*"

And yet, because of Jesus' victory over death we should not fear it. Christ took the sting out of death, so that it no longer has power to ultimately destroy or separate. Because of Jesus' triumph over the grave we know that death is not extinction but fulfillment. Death is the gateway to a greater life. Someone has said: "*The final heartbeat for the Christian is not the mysterious conclusion to meaningless life. It is, rather, the grand beginning to a life that will never end.*"

Christians believe that Jesus not only passed through death but that he conquered it and gives eternal life as a gift. We can receive it through faith even now.

What then holds terror for the Christian? Paul is sure that nothing in the whole creation can tear us apart from God's love in Christ. "*In spite of all,*" he says, "*the overwhelming victory is ours through him who loved us:*"

Ro 8:38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,  
Ro 8:39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*"O Death, where is thy sting. O Death where is thy victory? But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!"*

*"It is finished!"* said Jesus from the cross. The work of salvation has been completed. But in a sense, the work of salvation continues, for the news of all that God has done for us in Christ, must be carried into all the world, *"until every knee shall bow and tongues confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."* And the Risen Lord will continue to work in us and through us until his kingdom comes in all its fullness.

The early Christians used to greet the sun on Easter morning saying (in Greek) *"Nika! Nika!"* That is, *"Victory!"* (By the way, that's where the sports shoe company gets its name--Nike--victory.) Today we, too, shout *"Nika!"* The victory is Christ's! And the victory is also ours. We too have a share in Christ's triumph. We, too, are winners. The Risen Christ makes us winners in this life and the next. Praise the Lord! We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.