

Sunday: The Resurrection of Our Lord
Date: April 4, 2021
Text: Isaiah 53
Title: The Cross, A Victory in Seeming Defeat

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

The Cross, A Victory in Seeming Defeat.

I. Suggestions of Defeat.

It cannot be denied that the cross suggests the defeat of our Lord Jesus Christ. But it is only a suggestion of defeat. And yet, while this is true, we do well to take note of such suggestions, for these things serve to establish our confidence in the victory of the cross. They do that because they are the fulfilment of the Savior's mission and are essential conditions to His victory. They are the fulfilment of the prophecies and promises of God.

The first suggestion of defeat we find is in Christ's loss of a following. This was foreseen and predicted in the words of the prophet Isaiah when he said: "Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (53:1). The words of Jesus and the promise he made were sufficient reasons for the disciples to have visions of an earthly kingdom. They undoubtedly had visions of multitudes acclaiming Jesus King and flocking to His standard. Just as they had seen as Jesus entered into Jerusalem, but, alas, John, the beloved disciple, testifies to the sorry state of affairs. "He came to his own and his own people did not receive him." (John 1:11). Jesus had no attraction for His own people, even as the prophet declared: "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Even the few who had been faithful to Him in better days must bear witness against themselves and acknowledge: "We have turned every one to his own way" (53:6). When Jesus died, He died forsaken by all. Treason had made an entrance into the ranks of the disciples and found in Judas one

faithless enough to betray Him. And that infection spread to Simon Peter, causing him to deny his Lord. Yes, all of the disciples proved unfaithful, as Jesus had foretold in the upper room. “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. (Matthew 26:31). In his awful agony and suffering there was none to whom He could turn. He was forsaken by God, and in His loneliness cries out from the cross: “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

Why this defection from Christ, why was He forsaken and deserted? Let Isaiah tell us:

“He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.” (v 2). No one had a good or kind word for Him. He was despised, his reputation smeared by slanderous lies. He was truly a man of sorrows, intimately acquainted with grief. All the shame and disgrace of the world was heaped upon Him. His character besmirched, painted in colors as black as Satan himself. During all His persecution and suffering what hand was raised in His defense, what lips uttered a single protest? His miracles of mercy were used as fiery darts against Him by his enemies. He saved others, but Himself he cannot save. If He is truly the Christ, let Him come down from the cross. He was ridiculed as a fanatic, despised as a malefactor, and numbered with the transgressors. The picture painted is one of Jesus as a miserable Savior. Could defeat be any more complete? Friendless, helpless, bruised, mangled, bleeding, and deserted by all, He was suspended between two thieves and murderers as the world’s most notorious criminal.

It appears to be a most glorious triumph for His enemies. In their eyes Jesus was exposed as an impostor, justifying their actions. He will no longer deceive or mislead the credulous, no longer will he slander and defame the pious and zealous children of Abraham. His death as a criminal is the vindication of their conduct. Now He is silenced, He is laid low in death. Satan’s work is finished.

If He was the Son of God, why did He not assert His power? Why did He submit to reviling, blasphemy, scourging and crucifixion? Certainly, His enemies had reason to congratulate themselves. Jesus’ defeat was thorough and overwhelming. In their minds, they had delivered their nation from heresy and destruction. His death refuted His claim: “I am the resurrection and the

life.” (John 11:25). Satan had triumphed over Him who had posited that He had come to destroy the works of the devil. There is joy in the camp of the followers of the power of darkness. The cross spells the defeat of Him they so intensely hated.

II. Proofs of Victory.

But was it a defeat? Was the infinite love of the Father, the endless compassion of the Son in vain? Did His life bear no fruit, and His death only establish more firmly the power and dominion of sin? Were it so, my friends, it would have been better to have left man to pursue the even tenor of his ways, and not have added to his iniquity. No, the cross is only a seeming defeat. It is really a complete victory over sins, death, and hell.

But we have many proofs of the actual victory of Jesus on the cross. Hear again what the prophet Isaiah said:

⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. ... ⁶ the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4-6).

Jesus was stricken for the transgressions of the people. (v 10). It was the will of the Lord to make His soul an offering for sin. (v 10). Out of the anguish of his soul [God] shall see and be satisfied, by His knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. (v 11). And He was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many and makes intercession for the transgressors. (v. 12).

Let us turn again to the cross and note the literal fulfillment of those words of the Prophet.

“It is finished”—that is not the lamentation of the vanquished. It is not the plaintive cry of the defeated, but the triumphant shout of the Victor in the strife. Those words were not uttered as a tribute to the baseness of men, to assert that they could no longer persecute Him. But they were a happy farewell to a race of sinners lost and ruined in sin, assuring them of their redemption from sin, death, and hell. “It is finished.” What did He mean?

What but the work for which He came to do? Now all things were fulfilled that were written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man, and He could truthfully say: I have finished the work the Father gave Him to do. He had fulfilled all the law and the prophets. He was reviled, spitefully questioned, scourged, and crucified. Now he was atoning for the sins and the guilt of the world, even the sins of his revilers, interrogators, abusers and murderers.

The measure of iniquity was now full. The reproaches of sinners were heaped upon Him, death and hell had done their worst, has slain the Son of God; yet they were but unconsciously and unwittingly fulfilling the eternal purpose of God: for “He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.” Christ “was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification.” Though the cross was raised as a triumph of fiendish hatred, yet it stands as a monument to the victory of boundless divine love.

His death was not a matter of compulsion, it was a voluntary sacrifice of the Just for the unjust, of the Innocent for the guilty; a sacrifice prompted by love. For out of love for us Christ suffered death for us, that through death He might destroy him that had the power over death, the devil. By his stripes we are healed, redeemed from sin, purchased and won from death and from the power of the devil and reconciled with a holy and offended God.; for “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

In fact, He was acclaimed Victor even as His enemies were seemingly triumphing over Him. The honors shown Him at His crucifixion, though it was an homage unconsciously rendered, attest to his victory. There is the superscription on the cross written by Pilate, “Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews. Let the Jews rave and plead as they will, it must stand. “What I have written, I have written”, thus the governor testifies to the Lord’s victory. The criminal to His right adds his testimony to that victory; for his plea for mercy is an acknowledgement that in Christ we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sin.

Even a heathen soldier, hardened to such scenes of cruelty as this, is moved to acknowledge His sovereignty, saying, “Surely this was a righteous man and the Son of God.” “And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death.” How literally that prophecy was fulfilled! What a refutation of the vaunted victory of the Jews! They had put Him to death as a criminal and

had intended that He should be buried like one as well. But God had decreed otherwise. Joseph and Nicodemus, intimidated by fear of the Jews from owning Him in public as their Lord while in His humiliation, are made bold to give Him honorable burial as befitted His greatness.

Who shall declare His generation? Laments the prophet. And in the same breath he answers: “When His soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. ... Therefore, I will divide him a portion with the many and He shall divide the spoil with the strong.” (v 10, 12).

Pilate is long since dead, the victim of his own cowardly hand. Herod is no more, having died in exile. The proud Scribes and Pharisees have returned to the dust from where they came, their people a nation hated by men. But what of Jesus? Though He died forsaken of all, He lives; “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God.” (Romans 6:9-10).

He lives not only in glory and majesty on high; He shall see His seed; that is, He lives in His disciples in the world. Of Him the Lord said by the mouth of His psalmist and prophet: “I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.: (Psalm 2:8). “Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. (Isaiah 55:5).

Why, then, do “the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain?” (Acts 4:25). Christ cannot be eliminated from the world; for He lives, honored and glorified by countless millions. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church founded on His victorious death and proclaiming His name. The time will come when hell itself with all its minions must openly own His supreme sovereignty, for “God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11).

The cross a defeat? Not hardly. Let not that thought be found among us. But delivered from sin, death and hell by its power, let us shout with joy, “O death, where is your victory? O death where is your sting? ... Thanks be to

God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:55, 56). Amen