
Jesus, the Crucified Conqueror

*“And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again”
(Mark 8:31).*

In both the Old and the New Testaments, Jesus is pictured as a suffering Savior, but we must also see Him as One who was victorious. Our crucified conqueror brought victory through humiliation. Through the prevision of prophecy, Isaiah described Him as a Redeemer whose “appearance was marred more than any man” (Isaiah 52:14b). He would be “despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isaiah 53:3a). Amazingly, God would choose to “crush” Him (Isaiah 53:10a). In what has been called the “Crucifixion Psalm,” David wrote a pictorial prophecy of Jesus. He portrayed Him as saying, “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within me” (Psalm 22:14).

In the New Testament, Paul declared that he had resolved to focus on “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). He affirmed that Jesus “gave Himself for our sins,” becoming “a curse for us” (Galatians 1:4a; 3:13b) and accepting the lowest form of poverty so that we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). Peter named himself as a witness to “the sufferings of Christ” (1 Peter 5:1). He wrote, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (1 Peter 3:18).

The meaning of the trials and the crucifixion of Christ was difficult for Jews to grasp. They had looked for a conquering Christ, not a suffering Savior. The crucified Christ was a rock of offense to the Jews and a testimony of foolish-

ness to the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23). The Jews wanted the Messiah to come in conquest, to be a mighty prince who would restore the kingdom to Israel. The Gentiles demanded a demonstration of philosophic wisdom to make them believe. Instead, God chose the cross, a despised and shameful death, to be the revelation of His power, love, and wisdom. He turned the worst imaginable death into a throne from which Christ would reign as Lord. He chose “the foolish things of the world to shame the wise” and ordained “the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong” (1 Corinthians 1:27). To sinners who will receive Him, this Jesus who suffered and died on the cross is God’s wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). Jesus used His sufferings to bring salvation.

His victory over suffering provides an example for us. It shows us how to handle our pain. Peter wrote, “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you *an example* for you to follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:21; emphasis mine). Christ is our model for every aspect of living, but Peter’s statement highlights Jesus’ example of how righteous people handle pain. How did Jesus respond to His time of trial? He did not sin or deceive anyone as He suffered rejection and persecution. He did not retaliate for the evil that was done to Him: “While being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats” (1 Peter 2:23a). He took all the pain, humiliation, and sorrow that were heaped upon Him and entrusted them to God,

the One who judges all things righteously and properly (1 Peter 2:23b).

The Christian will not always find his road smooth and easy to travel. He may experience hardship, ridicule, or even physical pain. He, like his Lord, may be hated by the world and face mental and social trials. When the sky turns black with the clouds of opposition and persecution, how should the Christian respond? He must look to his Lord and emulate the way He reacted to His dark hours. Jesus stands beside the suffering Christian and reminds him with His nailed-pierced hands and His spear-pierced side to commit his suffering to God.

His victory through suffering manifests the love of God. What prompted the great God of heaven to bleed, agonize, and die for us? Paul said, "For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die" (Romans 5:7). Jesus was not compelled to die for us because we were righteous or in any way deserving of His death. In truth and humility, we must admit that Christ died for us "while we were still helpless"—that is, while we were sinful, rebellious, and without honor or hope because of our disobedience (Romans 5:6). We were dead in sin, dominated by the devil, disobedient to God's will, driven by the lusts of the flesh, behaving as children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). Even though we were in this despicable condition, God, being rich in mercy and motivated by His great love for us, "raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:4, 6). When we look at what Jesus has done, we can only cry, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us" (1 John 3:1a). "Greater love has no one than this, that One lay down His life for His friends" (John 15:13; capitalization mine).

His victory came through suffering in order to placate the justice of God. The redemption that God provided for man required a kind of suffering on Jesus' part that no human mind can comprehend. Jesus came to be the propitiation for our sins. To "propitiate" means to appease God's wrath. The righteousness of God demanded that sin be dealt with in harmony with all the holiness, purity, and righteousness of His character. God could not just overlook sin. His justice demanded punishment and appeasement

for man's sin, while His grace sought salvation and forgiveness for man.

These attributes seem to be in conflict with one another, but God's nature has no incongruities. His attributes are perfect and are perfectly harmonized. Justice demanded punishment, but His grace stayed its hand; grace demanded salvation, but His justice blocked it. Jesus was the answer to the demands of God's holy nature. As the embodiment of grace, He bore the punishment of sin. Whatever God's divine righteousness required to expiate man's sin, Jesus suffered because God loved us and wanted to save us. We ask, "How can a good God send a sinful man to hell?" The New Testament asks, "How can a righteous God bring a sinful man to heaven?" God answered the question with one word: "Jesus." Paul summed up this profound truth in Romans 3:25, 26:

Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Jesus, the crucified conqueror, came not as a mighty warrior swinging a sword for revolution and reform, but as the Suffering Servant. He bore our griefs and sorrows and was pierced for our transgressions, even though at the time of His sufferings, He was esteemed as stricken, smitten, and afflicted of God (Isaiah 53:4). "He was crushed for our iniquities," "the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him," and "by His scourging we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). A lamb slain before the foundation of the world—not a king upon a throne—has conquered sin and death and provided our salvation.

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As we face suffering in this life, we must focus on the One who suffered for us yet emerged triumphant. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Romans 8:35–37; KJV).