

Redefining Victory – Various Passages

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis

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How would you define victory? If you pictured in your mind right now what it would be like to defeat your enemies by the Lord's power, what would that look like? When we learn in the book of Joshua that the Lord fights for his people and gives victory to those who seek him and follow him in humble obedience, how do you translate that to today in your life? What kinds of things would you expect to see happening if the Lord was truly giving you the victory? If you've been paying attention in our study of Joshua so far, you've noticed this often repeated theme coming back again and again: *The Lord fights for his people and gives victory to those who seek him and follow him in humble obedience.* And we'll see it again in our next message on Joshua. Next week it goes something like this: *Following God's battle plan and fighting in his strength, defeats fear and makes God's people strong, courageous and victorious in battle.* The question is: what does victory look like for you and I today?

Clearly God is not calling all Christians today to find a new Promised Land here on earth and take it by force, serving as his instrument of judgment on the people living there, and setting up an earthly kingdom with a new temple. What God was doing in Joshua was a one-time work of God focused on carrying out his judgment against the terrible sin in the land of Canaan and setting up an earthly kingdom and temple where he could display his glory and salvation to the world through an undeserving people who were willing to follow him in humility and learn to walk in his ways.

But today, God's doing something much different. He hasn't changed, but what he's doing has. God's kingdom entered into through Jesus Christ is a kingdom not of this world. It's a spiritual kingdom where its members are in this world, but not of it...strangers in a foreign land...travelers journeying to their true home...ambassadors representing a heavenly kingdom...peacemakers begging people to be reconciled to God. And yet there is warfare...intense warfare. But this warfare is a spiritual battle not against people, but against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the invisible realm...against the ruler of this world who's intent on destroying God and anyone who follows him and keeping others from accepting

his message of salvation through Christ. This is not a battle for land, buildings, wealth, power and other false gods of this world. It's a battle for human hearts, for eternal salvation, for growth and transformation by the Lord's power, for God's glory to be displayed to all people.

Where am I going with all this today? What's the point, you might ask? Well, I'm concerned that as American Christians many of us may have a distorted concept of what victory looks like in the Christian life. I'm concerned that as we study Joshua and hear over and over again how the Lord fights for his people and gives them the victory, we may be wondering things like: *What's taking so long in my life? Why isn't God giving me the victory? What am I doing wrong?* And perhaps the reason we ask ourselves questions like these is because we've unconsciously adopted a false concept of what Christian victory looks like.

I want to briefly share with you two very different testimonies of real people from a book by Randy Alcorn. And I want you to decide which one has experienced the greater victory in his Christian walk. Here we go with the first one from a businessman in America:

Before I knew Christ, I had nothing. My business was in bankruptcy, my health was ruined, I'd lost the respect of the community, and I'd almost lost my family. Then I accepted Christ. He took me out of bankruptcy and now my business has tripled its profits. My blood pressure has dropped to normal and I feel better than I've felt for years. Best of all, my wife and children have come back, and we're a family again. God is good – praise the Lord!

That's a great testimony, isn't it? Sounds like he's experiencing great victory in the Lord! God has saved his marriage, his health is improving and his finances are better than ever...all things God can and often does do!

But listen to this second testimony and see if it also sounds like God's victory to you and if you today would be feeling like God's giving you the victory if this was your story. Here we go. This is a testimony from a former university professor in China:

Before I met Christ, I had everything. I made a large salary, lived in a nice house, enjoyed good health, was highly respected for my credentials and profession, and had a good marriage and a beautiful son. Then I accepted Christ as my Savior and Lord. As a result, I lost my post at the university, lost my beautiful house and car, and spent five years in prison. Now I work for a subsistence wage at a factory. I live with pain in my neck, which was broken in prison. My wife rejected me because of my conversion. She took my son away and I haven't seen him for ten years. But God is good and I praise him for his faithfulness.

Would you say this is a man who's experiencing great victory in the Lord? If this was your story today, would you feel like God is giving you the victory?...that the Lord is fighting your battles with you and giving you everything you need? Or would you be saying: *What's wrong with me? What are you doing God? What's taking so long? This Christian thing isn't working?* I think we all may need some adjustments in our American concept of Christian victory. Because this man is experiencing profound victory by the power of God, and if that idea is outside the box of what we would consider God's victory, then something desperately needs to change in our thinking.

I want to challenge each of us to spend some time in the coming week thinking and praying about our own personal concept of victory and how it may need to change. Will you accept the challenge? It could be that the father of lies has distorted our concept of victory so that it's limited to things of this earth like: the healing of all our health problems, the solving of our financial issues, the advancement of our careers, a great marriage, wonderful kids, getting the respect of others, being successful in business, and on and on and on. We would do well to remember how Paul described his Christian life and the victory he was experiencing. Listen to what he said in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verses 8 to 11:

...8 we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Then Paul goes in verses 16 through 18 to say this:

16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

In these words of Paul, did you notice the constant trouble and challenges and persecutions and health issues Paul was facing? His outer man was decaying. Clearly God's victory in Paul's life didn't mean the removal of all his health problems and the receiving of earthly blessing after earthly blessing. No, God's victory in Paul's life looked like a real, struggle-filled life of tough problems, in the middle of which, God showed up in a very big way; providing hope, wisdom, endurance, strength, inner renewal of spirit, joy and the ability to stay focused on God's purposes and the incredible glory and future awaiting him in heaven.

And as God gave Paul the victory, enabling him to endure and even thrive in the middle of life's difficulties, what happened? The life that only Jesus can bring was revealed to the people around him...the message of the gospel was shown to be true and powerful and life-giving through the way Paul responded to the persecutions and troubles he faced. People saw the very power of God at work within Paul and it led them to believe the good news of Jesus Christ was true. That is Christian victory, my friends!

You're no doubt familiar with this verse, also from 2 Corinthians 4:

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;

These are the words Paul said immediately before describing his Christian life as being afflicted but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing...He said we have this treasure, this new life and power in Jesus Christ, in earthen vessels...fragile, breakable jars...describing our frail human bodies that are subject to the curse, and sin and the troubles of this world.

We have this treasure in frail, human bodies so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves. As we in our weakness and frailty face the real troubles and persecutions and struggles of this life, God's victory looks like his power coming to give us what we need to walk through them and face them and stay strong in the face of what would destroy and despair those without Christ. And his obvious power at work within us in these situations is the most convincing proof to other people that the message of the gospel is true.

Please don't misunderstand me today. God is a Miracle-worker, a Healer, a Giver of good gifts, a Father who loves to give good things to his kids. He often does heal health problems and provide financial blessings, and living the principles of his Word is a healthy and wise way to live that sometimes brings earthly success at our jobs or in business. But we desperately need to root out and completely abandon this idea that God's victory always or even 75% of the time looks like worldly success and material blessing and freedom from health and other types of problems. That's the erroneous theology of the Western World that within the past couple hundred years has experienced unprecedented material prosperity. It's what causes so many believers to get stuck in their Christian walk, asking God: *What's wrong with me? Why don't I have victory? Why isn't God blessing me?* It's what I believe as well is a real barrier to us being able to properly understand and apply the whole book of Joshua, and that's why I'm taking this slight detour today.

In my mind as we've been moving through Joshua, I've wondered if some of you are saying: *Yeah, the Lord fights for his people. The battle belongs to him! He gives victory to his people who seek and follow him. It all sounds great, but it's just not happening for me. I'm praying. I'm reading the Word. I'm coming to church. I'm seeking the Lord. But look at my life. I've got marriage problems. My health isn't good and God's not fixing it. I'm living paycheck to paycheck. I can't stand my job. My house and car aren't nearly as nice other people's...and on and on and on.* But as we think a little deeper about each of those statements, I hope it now becomes apparent that if this our thinking pattern, we've been heavily influenced by the American concept of Christian victory. We've laid out for the Lord exactly what we expect of him if he's going to give us the victory. And our focus falls very heavily on the receiving of earthly blessings and success by worldly standards. This is something we each need to think about.

I want to challenge you for a moment to think about what victory looks like from God's perspective. What is God most concerned about accomplishing in our lives as his children? Does he want us comfortable and unaware of our need for him? Does he want us distracted and absorbed in the things of this world? Does he want us self-sufficient and self-confident in our own abilities and talents? **OR** is God more concerned about teaching us to depend on him in everything? Does he want to teach us to release our hold on the world and find our joy only in him? Does he want to grow our understanding of who he is and how near he is to us in the challenges of life? Does he want to awaken us to the powerful truths of his Word and how they actually work in real life? Does he want to show other people through us how the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ is real and alive? Does he want to use the struggles of life to prepare us for eternity with him? Does he want to display his glory and power through us in the way we respond in a godly way to disappointment and pain and the real problems of life?

I'm confident we each know the answer to every one of those questions, and I hope they lead us to broaden our understanding of what God's victory looks like in our lives today. Let's not limit God's victory to earthly success and blessing and physical healing. His victory sometimes includes those things, but often involves the complete opposite. Are you willing to accept that reality today?

I want to close with that powerful description from the Hall of Faith in Hebrews chapter 11 of the vast variety of victories God brought about in people throughout history who trusted and followed him. May it forever destroy our Americanized concept of Christian victory and prepare us to better understand and apply the message of Joshua:

32 And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, 33 who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection;...

These are the types of victory we're very comfortable with, aren't we? Bring it on, Lord! But what about some different types of victory as we continue on? Would you be able to consider yourself victorious in these situations?

...and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; 36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated 38 (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. 39 And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.
(Hebrews 11:32-40)

How will you respond if the victory God gives you fits into this second category? Will you consider yourself abandoned and deserted by God and lash out in bitterness and despair? Or will you trust him and keep following the principles of his Word and allow him to give you everything you need, thereby displaying his unmistakable power within you to a watching world? That's a victory only God can bring about, my friends, and it will speak volumes to the truth and power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Well, what advice does the writer of Hebrews give us for living victorious like these great heroes of the faith? Listen closely:

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. 3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. (Hebrews 12:1-3)

The difficulties we face in this world by the power of God will one day seem like momentary, light affliction, in the face of the great glory that will one day be revealed in us! Let's live in God's victory wherever we are as we keep our fixed on Christ and accept whatever challenges and battles God determines are necessary for our good and his glory.

SERMON APPLICATION AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18 and Hebrews 11:32-12:3, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you as you read. Look at the surrounding verses, take your time and talk to God as you read and meditate on it. Think through the following, writing notes and thoughts and looking up related Scriptures as needed:

Write down from the passages or from what was shared in the sermon: 1) a truth that stands out to you; 2) anything you believe God is showing you or telling you personally through it; 3) any related Scripture that comes to mind; 4) any questions you have.

In thinking of your life right now, what are some victories that you would really like to see God bring about? Why?

Shifting to God's perspective on your life right now, what are some victories you think he would most like to bring about?

Have you struggled at all in thinking God's victory is about worldly success or earthly blessings? Describe.

Make a list of what you think are the top 5 things God wants to accomplish within you during your life on earth. List any Scriptures you can find that reveal God's priorities for you.

Can you think of any ways he's been accomplishing these things through the experiences of your life?

Write down any other thoughts, notes or applications below: