

Victory in Jesus
Hebrews 2:14-18

Begin by reading the story or use for children's moment: "Jesus and the Bird Cage" aka "The Empty Bird Cage." As told by Paul Harvey.

People need to be rescued; they need a Savior to set them free. We have an adversary. From creation our adversary was not happy. People made by God to be in a special relationship with God irked him something terrible. That was the kind of relationship he used to have with God. Until, that is, he decided that he should have the same kind of recognition as God did. After all, he was the #1 angel in charge of praise and worship. He should be worshipped and receive much more recognition than he was getting. That was his down-fall. He chose to be like God rather than to have a relationship with God. And now Adam and Eve had the most favored status. Well, he'd see about that.

When Adam and Eve gave into the temptation to be like God rather than have a relationship with God, they not only sinned against God, by disobeying the only requirement he had given them, but, in so doing, made the choice, whether they realized it or not, to become like Satan. Not only that but when Adam and Eve sinned they, and all humanity after them, fell into and became citizens of Satan's realm, are now enslaved to evil, and ultimately will succumb to death. We are like caged birds, our lives held at the whim of the one swinging the cage. It is in that sense that John writes, "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Paul reminds us that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood (other caged people), but against the rulers, against the authorities, and against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). We are like the birds in the cage desperately wanting out. We need a hero! We need someone to win the battle, to rescue us from bondage, and to set us free.

It is real easy, especially with John Wayne, Sylvester Stallone, the Avengers, and the like duking it out in movies and on TV in a good versus evil thriller, to imagine God and the Devil in battle, fighting it out with humanity in the middle waiting to see who will come out victorious. We must be careful, however, not to give the devil more power than he is due or than the Bible allows. In Job we find that Satan is answerable to God (Jb.1:6-12). In the Gospels, every time Jesus encounters a person possessed by a demon, the demon not only knows who Jesus is, but cannot resist Jesus' command to leave the person being possessed. James writes, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder" (2:19). Why? God is still God. God is the all powerful Creator of the universe. With a word God called all that is into being and with a word God can call it out. And the demons know it.

If God is able to rid creation of evil with just a single word, then how come he didn't? Why not just say the word and be done with it? If God eliminated sin and evil in this manner then we wouldn't be here. Remember the consequence of sin? Paul reminds us, "The wages (consequence) of sin is death" (Rom. 3:23). No more sin, but no more you or me either.

God created us for relationship, a perfect, holy, awesome, wonderful, everlasting relationship. For that purpose of God to persist, and God's purposes are always hard and true, there needed to be a different way (**Read text here.**)

Did you hear that? Jesus became flesh and blood "for only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the Devil, who had the power of death" (2:14 NLT). Satan knew Jesus was the Son of God in flesh. Oh, he tried over and over again to tempt Jesus to sin and so really be like us; but, Jesus remained faithful in relationship with God and did not sin. So Jesus did not have the consequence of death – he did not have to die. Jesus offered his perfect life in exchange for the lives of all people for all time.

One might ask, did Jesus offer his life as a deal to Satan or to satisfy God's standards? The answer is YES. We will consider God's satisfying standards next week. It is significant to note, however, that Satan accepted Jesus' offer as THE "perfect" deal. To Satan, if Jesus, as both fully human *and* fully God, could die then Satan most assuredly would be even more powerful than before. And if Jesus dies, who says he has to honor the presumed agreement to set the people free? At Jesus' death, Satan and his forces of evil were seemingly victorious. You can almost hear Satan bust out in an evil laugh.

But, the joke is on Satan. Satan's deception only deceives himself because the very opposite took place. Jesus took the consequence of sin upon himself, thus releasing us from that bondage; the cage door was opened wide. "Through death, he (Jesus) destroyed, rendered powerless, him who holds the power of death, that is the devil" (Heb. 2:14). Jesus' death on the cross alone was enough to set us free.

But, the wonder of the cross is enhanced in that Jesus rose again. Had Jesus remained dead, the devil would still have tried to keep us in bondage not through death – those chains had been removed – but through the fear of death. Ever wonder how circus elephants can be restrained by just a rope or chain attached to a stake? When the elephants were young the stake was enough to hold them. When they are full grown, even though they have plenty of strength to walk out of the stake, the slightest resistance holds them back; the memory engrained into them remains strong. So it is with us. The cage door is wide open. The resurrection reminds us that the consequences of sin have been removed and Satan no longer has control over us; we can be free even from the fear of death.

The cross is proof that Jesus is, was, and always will be the Victor over Satan. The victory that Jesus gives you and me the Victory. We are the ones who, though deserving death as

a consequence of sin, have instead been given life and a restored relationship with God. When we, who have accepted the forgiveness and restored relationship God offers and made available by Jesus are set free, we are also able to be victorious in the life we live on this earth. Will it be easy? No. Satan, though ultimately defeated, will still try to coax you back into his cage. He does not want us to be back with God. His temptation will be strong, and we may at times falter. Just remember, there is no temptation that he can throw at you that Jesus didn't already encounter (Hb.2:18). Jesus is the one who makes us victorious; Jesus is able to help us in our temptation. Satan cannot close the cage door on us ever again. There is Victory in Jesus for now and for eternity.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. The cage door is open. Believe it. You can be free. And, you can live in that freedom.

Have you, will you believe and be Free?