

**Trinity Baptist Church**  
**Sermon, Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July, by Andy Banks.**

**9. Jesus' Victory Over The World**

**John 16:32-33; Matt 27:62 – 28:4; Matt 28:11-15; Acts 5:27-40; Eph 1:19-21; Eph 6:12**

Good morning. We're nearing the end of our series exploring the benefits of Jesus' resurrection for us today. Again, we'll be moving around the Bible a bit this morning, as we look at Jesus victory over the world. But let's begin with prayer. **[Pray]**

On the last night before his death, Jesus warned his disciples of the imminent trouble they would face that night from the religious and secular world powers that would cause them to scatter and leave him alone. But then he added (John 16:33): *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* Jesus didn't mean the physical world, here – the good space that God created for us to enjoy. Rather, he's referring to what he's just been talking about – the powers-that-be that will oppose *him* to his death and bring trouble for his *followers* from now on.

Really, this is a companion to last week's sermon on Jesus' victory over Satan, inasmuch as the powers of the world can often work in tandem with Satan and his demons – wittingly or unwittingly. Hence Paul said (Eph 6:12): *12our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* Those evil forces often influence the human seats of power, even sometimes among God's people, as with the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day. Yet, all powers, spiritual and human, are subordinate to Christ, and answerable to him. For God has *"raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion"* (Eph 1:20-21).

That is why I have never understood people who say that Christianity should not be political. As a minister, I try not to be *party* political. But we have to be political if we are to hold leaders to account for ungodly policies – as well as to acknowledge when things are done right. Actually, if leaders are answerable to God, then we are doing them a *favour* if we point out when they are promoting ungodliness and oppressing the needy, because we are giving them an opportunity to repent – as well as answering Jesus' call to stand up for the poor and the needy.

So, we have every right to add our voices loud and clear to the calls for true racial equality, for instance. And to keep holding the powers-that-be to account long after the media has moved on to the next sensational story. We have every right to campaign for real and meaningful action on climate change, on modern slavery, on increasing child poverty, on the legalised murder of unborn children that is abortion, on the plight of the persecuted Church, and so on. We abdicate our duty to God in this area of life if we leave it all to the sports stars. And furthermore, if we abdicate our duty in this regard, we abdicate our right to influence both the way in which the battles are fought and the design of any solutions. The additional, less than godly, priorities of the Black Lives Matter Global Network show us the risks of such an abdication of duty. The *Christian* voice needs to be heard in the political arena.

But that is no licence for rebellion. Paul wrote in Rom 13 (almost certainly in the time of the tyrannical Emperor Nero), *"1Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established ... 2Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves."*

Government is a *good*, God-instituted thing. And the basic principle is that we are to submit to the rules they make, as part of our worship of God. Paul goes on to give the example of paying taxes. There may be legal and righteous ways to reduce a tax bill, such as charitable giving, but basically, if we owe taxes, we should pay taxes, because they benefit society, but more because the government instituted by God has the right to charge taxes. Likewise, we should obey the rules around Covid-19, however inconvenient they might be, because those rules are designed to protect our neighbours, but more because the government instituted by God has the right to decide how and when organisations can safely open in this crisis. So, we will not be opening our church building until we are confident that we can do so safely within the rules the government sets, and that it is worth doing so within those rules.

The only exception to this base line obedience is when a government institutes rules that actively *oppose* God's rule, when they *misuse* their power for evil, to seek to silence the gospel of Jesus Christ or to oppress the needy. In such instances, we are called to speak out against those rules, and if necessary, to disobey them. That is the position that the persecuted Church finds itself in frequently. Yet, as hard as such a situation is, there is comfort in knowing that we then stand on the victory side, for Christ *has overcome* the world, through his death and resurrection. Ultimately, if the authorities choose to oppose Christ, they will find themselves fighting against the irresistible force of God.

We see a somewhat amusing example of this in the resurrection narrative in Matthew's gospel. First the religious leaders colluded with the state powers to try to prevent the disciples from claiming a resurrection for Jesus (Matt 27:62-66):

*62The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 63"Sir," they said, "we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise again.' 64So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first."*

*65"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." 66So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.*

But those guards were useless against the power of God that had determined to raise Jesus from the dead (Matt 28:2-4):

*2There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. 4The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.*

All the authorities succeed in doing was strengthening the evidence for the resurrection they tried to silence – the *disciples* could not have overpowered the guards, but God's angel did so easily. Faced with this overwhelming evidence for Jesus' resurrection, would the authorities admit they were wrong and bow down in worship of God who had sent his Messiah to save them? No. Rather, they attempted a ridiculous cover-up (Matt 28:11-15):

*11Some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. 12When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, 13telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' 14If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." 15So the*

*soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.*

But their plan failed because Jesus' disciples kept boldly preaching his resurrection to everyone – and God confirmed their words by performing miraculous healings through them. So, then, the authorities tried to silence them by arresting them and putting them in prison. And God released them, and they kept on spreading his gospel. The true balance of power is shown in Acts 5:27-32:

*27The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. 28“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”*

*29Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings! 30The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead – whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. 31God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. 32We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”*

And God used one of their own number, the wise and respected Gamaliel, to convince them not to stone the apostles to death. Gamaliel reminded them of some other people who had claimed to be saviours of the Jewish people, whose followers simply faded into nothing, when they were put to death. So he concluded (vv.38-39):

*“38Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. 39But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”*

Whether or not Gamaliel ever became a follower of Jesus, he put his finger on the impotence of those who seek to silence the gospel – they simply find themselves fighting against God, who has won the victory over the world through Jesus' death and resurrection. And throughout history, whenever authorities have tried to silence the Christian Gospel, the blood of the martyrs has merely proved to be the seed of Church growth. For example, Operation World report that evangelical Christianity (true Bible-believing Christianity) is growing fastest today in *Iran* and *Afghanistan*, states which actively persecute Christians. Why? Because Christ has overcome the world.

Or take the American Civil Rights movement. People thought if they killed Martin Luther King, they could kill the movement; instead all they succeeded in doing was giving it even more credence – credence that is still referenced today in the current campaign for justice. Why? Because Christ has overcome the world.

So, will we fight for the things Christ fights for? For, when we do, we fight on the victory side – but only if we fight in *Christ's* way. Since the battle is first of all against the *spiritual* forces of evil, our first priority is to pray. Then, respecting the God-given authority of the powers-that-be, we are called to peacefully, but persistently, campaign and work for godly change. But a word of warning: just as Christ's victory came through *sacrifice*, and *then* resurrection, so also any fight for godly change will involve sacrifice. In this country, we are unlikely to face martyrdom, but we may face ridicule, loss of opportunity – even loss of work – or loss of friendships. A time may even come when, to stand for certain Christian truths, might carry a prison sentence. Yet, through these sacrifices, God *will* bring victory for the gospel and for justice. Because Christ has overcome the world. Jesus' resurrection proves that beyond doubt. Amen?