

***Atonement Riches:
Christ The Victor***

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

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Friends - I need to enlist your help to settle a family dispute.

Asked the Thursday morning prayer group for input, but it didn't work.
 They didn't give me the answer I wanted, so I've got to look elsewhere.
 I need someone to agree with me.
 And I'm hoping that you'll be the people to do it.

See, I generally read a few Agatha Christie mysteries during my vacation. It's about all that my mind can absorb at the time.

And I've got this habit when I read.
 It's one that my family resents. Dreadfully.
 Actually - I've yet to find a single supporter.
 Tonight I'm going to take a vote. See if I can solicit some help.
 Someone, anyone, have mercy on my position!!

Here's what I do. Tell me if you think I'm right or not.
 Before getting too far into the book, I flip to the end to see the outcome.
 Got to know how it'll all work out.
 Then I go back and read the rest of the story.
 And, as I do, my mind enjoys watching things come together.
 Especially knowing the outcome.
 Anticipating that, I'm interested to watch how things weave from rather varied corners towards the common conclusion.
 I admire the artistry of the author in pulling that off.

What do you think?

Hands up if that's an OK practice in your mind.....

Hands up if you think that I'm way out to lunch.....

[pause]

Would you at least admit that sometimes, in some situations, it would be helpful to know how things are going to work out even before we're done a particular task?

That, in some way,
 at some times
 it helps to know the end of the story?

I submit that it is so; that there are occasions in life,
(and perhaps reading a mystery novel is not one of them)
 where knowing the outcome helps us push through to the end.

I believe very much that this is true about Easter, and the impact of Christ's death and resurrection.

We spoke about it in some ways this morning.
 Tonight I want to return to that theme, from a slightly different angle,
 considering the impact of Christ's death and resurrection
 on our daily lives - on our present, and on our future.

I want to do that over the next few weeks, considering the theological theme of
ATONEMENT

It is one of those big and beautiful faith words.
 It means exactly what is spelled -

AT
ONE
MENT

how the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour brought us, who were estranged, into fellowship and unity with our God and Father.

As Paul Ryan wrote in a recent issue of *Reformed Worship* (v.90 p.36), "Christ's atonement deals with the schemes of the devil, the consequences of sin, and the salvation of the whole creation.

Brilliant and devout minds have considered this wonder work of Jesus from the earliest days of the Christian faith. And sometimes they have disagreed with each other - sometimes even vehemently. There are many, many theories that have been put forward about what, exactly, went on when Jesus lived, died and rose again.

These theories often revolve around one or more images of the work of Christ that are presented in the Bible. The problem that happens when you latch onto only one or two images is that you eventually run stuck. Which is what eventually happens to virtually every theory of the atonement. If you grasp to it in a singular sort of way, you will eventually come up short.

There is no theory of the atonement that is a sufficient explanation in and of itself. And I don't think that there ever could be.

I prefer to read these various theories, and see them as like facets on a gem stone - each with a different angle, a different view into the interior of that precious stone.

Or - you could think of them as different threads in the brilliant tapestry of Salvation that God is weaving through time in his Son.

Over the next weeks we'll take time to view some of the different theories of the atonement as they are presented through various themes in Scripture.

As we do, I invite you to weave together an image in your mind of the grand and miraculous work, which culminated on Easter morning, and which will be consummated at the return of our Lord on the clouds of glory.

And we will begin.....

....yes....

....at the end.

Because I believe that here is one case where knowing the final outcome

IS

the right thing.

I want to sketch with you a few contours of the atonement theory known as

CHRISTUS VICTOR

or

CHRIST THE VICTOR

Hear with me from the Word of God.....

1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-58, p.177 (New Testament)

I believe that knowing the outcome of the resurrection story gives us hope in a daily reality that is sometimes not very hope-filled.

Knowing the outcome that there WILL be a New Creation (as we considered this morning) gives hope.

Knowing the outcome that the tiring battle against the Devil will NOT last forever gives hope.

We believe that, we take hope in that, because we believe that Christ is the victor.

Death has been swallowed up in victory.....

Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

And because of that victory we proclaim,

Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

The atonement theory of Christ The Victor revolves around the Bible's images of battle between heaven and hell, of conflict between good and evil, of rebellion by Satan and his followers against God and his followers, of warfare between angels and demons.

The greatest battle raged on the cross.
 When Christ died, hell celebrated, certain in their dark success.
 But when Christ rose again, hell recoiled.
 When Christ rose again, the head of the serpent was crushed.
 When Christ rose again, death was conquered.

A hymn written in 569AD, and in our hymnal, put it this way:

*sin's bonds severed, we're delivered;
 Christ has crushed the serpent's head.
 Death no longer is the stronger;
 hell itself is captive led.
 Christ has risen from death's prison;
 o'er the tomb he light has shed.*

["Praise The Saviour Now And Ever" PH 400]

Christ the Victor.

Jesus was taken captive by sin and evil and darkness in his death.
 He was fully under their power.
 But his power was greater.
 And he was able to burst free from their bonds.
 He shattered any control they pretended to carry with his great might.
 They are defeated.

And so it is that there are phrases in the bible that bring to mind images of ancient battle parades - where the triumphant general would lead his troops in a parade through the streets, while the crowds looked on. And they would drag behind them the vanquished army, in a display of might for everyone to see.

One of the greatest is Colossians 2:13-15 –

*13.... when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses,
 14 erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross.
 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.*

Or 2 Corinthians 2:14

14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him.

Christ is the victor.

It is described by St.Paul in theological language.

Ephesians 1:

*20 God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,
 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.
 22 And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things....*

And it is celebrated by John in *The Revelation* in the marvellous picture language of ch.5:

*5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep. See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."....
 11Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands,
 12 singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"
 13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in*

them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!"

14 And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

Christ the victor.

What this **ISN'T**, of course, is a license to declare that everything we do in the name of Jesus is right, and ought to triumph.

That can result in unfortunate arrogance.

Or to say that the way of faith and following Jesus is, at all times, a way that triumphs, that prospers, that comes out at the front of the line, that results in riches.

That can result in sinfulness that is no different than the capitalistic greed of some of North America's executive elite with their multi-million dollar retainer bonuses. Only it gets cloaked in holy talk.

Such cheap, self-serving triumphalism completely ignores everything that Jesus says about what happens to those who desire to come out first; or about what our attitude ought to be.

Which is?

I'm hoping that most of your minds are flashing to the great *Kenosis* (or "emptying") passage of Philippians 2.

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,

7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,

8 he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death-- even death on a cross.

9 Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Seeing the atonement through the gem facet of "Christ The Victor" allows us to move forward, humbly yet with courage.

And it gives motivation to our service of Jesus.

For we know that the efforts we put forward towards the cause of the Kingdom of God are NOT dropping into some vast sinkhole, never to be seen again.

Our work is NOT in vain!

It will last.

It will count.

And that can be **SO** important.

Those of you who have battled cancer know that.

If you are told by the doctor that the malignancy has spread all through your body, and that it is terminal, what, then, would be the point of treatment; of enduring the pain and nausea of chemo and radiation?

Wouldn't it be better, then, to simply live as fully as you could in the days you had left?

Don't bother fighting it?

But if you were told that there was hope, would you fight it?

And if you were told that the odds were strongly in your favour, would you fight it then?

And if you were told that the battle would be difficult, and there would be pain, but that if you fought you were **CERTAIN** to win over the tumor what would you then do?

Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

[1 Corinthians 15:58]

When you stand up as a voice for the unborn, your labour is not in vain.

When you seek to combat world hunger, your labour is not in vain.

When you work to settle a new refugee, your labour is not in vain.

When you seek to temper your language in the workplace, your labour is not in vain.

When you live, determined to keep your marriage pure, your labour is not in vain.

When you reach out to a neighbor who is lonely, your labour is not in vain.

When you sacrifice personal time to join in communal worship, your labour is not in vain.

When you volunteer to help mentally challenged believers experience a mission project, your labour is not in vain.

In fact - in ways that we don't fully understand and that have not been revealed to us - how we struggle and fight and serve in the name of the Victorious Christ today will make a reappearance at the final day when that same Victor is fully made known to everyone under heaven. You can read Matthew 25 about that.

All that we do now **DOES** matter!!!!

Christ the Victor sees to that.