

Message in a Bottle, pt. 4: (Christ Victorious)

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

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## **Reprise**

Thus far, our four part series has considered Jesus' work in its order. First, we looked at Christ with us, the life of Jesus during His incarnation. Then, Christ for us, Jesus' sacrifice for us at the cross. Last time, Christ in us, the coming of the Holy Spirit after Jesus' ascension and of His work of salvation internal to us. Each message has addressed one aspect of Christ's role in the plan for our salvation.

Today, the last of four parts exploring the gospel, God's unspeakably precious "message in a bottle" sent to us across the centuries. This morning, a brief look at Jesus' work for us in the heavenly sanctuary, and the close of the Great Controversy War.

## **Not Finished At the Cross**

Jesus' work for us and through us was not finished at the cross. Consider a shocking text in support of this shocking thought. Romans 16:20:

And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly (KJV).

The ESV translates the Greek even more literally:

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.

Romans 16:20 encourages the Christians in Rome. Rome was the very seat of occupying power, center of the blasphemy of emperor worship, a violent and seemingly ineradicable world power. To the Romans it must have seemed that the world had reached a new moment, that their empire would stand for the remainder of time, that the world had come to "the end of history." Considering appearances, it would have been difficult for the Jews to disagree. Their nation was

in subjugation. Still, Paul reassures the believers that Rome—as one of Satan’s “all the kingdoms of the world” (Luke 4:5)—nonetheless would fall.

Paul is in this verse clearly alluding to Genesis 3:15 and God’s promise that

I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel.

The seed of the woman was humanity descending from Eve. The Seed, singular, would be Jesus the Messiah. Mortally injured at the cross, yet He would crush Satan there.

Only, the crushing would not be complete—not even at the cross. For, if, as we think, Romans was written about AD 57, then more than a quarter century after Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary, Paul places the crushing of Satan *future*. Yes, Jesus would be the primary agent, the One who crushes; yes, Satan would be fatally and finally wounded. But Jesus would accomplish this under the feet of believers—believers *future* in time to the writing of Paul’s letter to the Romans.

Local context gives further insight. Paul’s statement appears near the very end of Romans. Already, after completing the main portion of his letter, he has spent the space of 15 verses sending greetings (Romans 16:1-15). But notice, after offering this friendly list, he especially points out those in their midst who have caused divisions within the congregation. He calls for these to be avoided as persons who do not have the service of Christ first place in their heart.

These may be in the church but they are serving themselves, they have their own motivations for being there. They speak skillfully, but are deceivers. It is after this warning—this addressing of the problems of congregational disunity—after this that Paul affirms that they will be victorious over Satan.

It is in the face of deep challenges which Paul has been made aware of from a far distance that he writes of the believer's role in the crushing of Satan. Who was more aware than Paul that Satan was making war with the church of God? But somehow, Christians today lack this perspective. All is over; everything is done; all was completed at the cross.

But the grand finale is just ahead.

### **The Camp Must Be Cleansed**

Which brings us to Christ's ministry as our great High Priest (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15; 5:10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 10:21). This is not a question. Jesus is this. While on earth He was not this. He could *not* serve as our high priest while on earth (Hebrews 8:4; 7:14). But He is this now.

Some quibble over details and perceived difficulties, like the rendering of *NITSDAQ* in Daniel 8:14, or the reference to evenings-mornings rather than days, or the validity of the day for a year principle, or the literality of a heavenly sanctuary. But just stop. If we look to the Bible for our understanding, it refers unambiguously to Jesus as our great high priest. It refers to Him functioning in this role only upon His return to heaven. It makes clear that His Second Coming immediately follows the conclusion of His high priestly ministry. What else are we supposed to believe, if the Bible is our guide, except that Jesus is today serving in heaven as our great high priest!

And what was the role, in Israel's history, of the high priest? His special purpose in the Day of Atonement was to cleanse the camp from all sin so that God could be with them (Exodus 25:8). Is what Seventh-day Adventists understand Jesus to be doing right now then odd or fanciful? And in the Day of Atonement, did not the high priest do this very thing, while all Israel stood in their tent doors afflicting their own souls? (Leviticus 16:30, 31).

And so, there is a sense in which Jesus' defeat of Satan at the cross was not final. Only when we, Christ's followers, so live that Christ lives in us and is through us victorious, will Satan's head be crushed. It was not fully crushed at the cross. Look at 16:20. Paul writes long after the cross. And we are still here! Jesus still has not returned in His Second Coming. This confirms the shocking truth that the final victory of Jesus remained then and today remains—future.

The cross was crucial, central, necessary even in the plan of salvation (Hebrews 2:14). But it was not the end. Heaven's purposes were not then accomplished—not in full.

We are building a case for an atonement in which Jesus takes a humanity that can die, Jesus lives in that humanity and overcomes sin in it, Jesus dies for us on the cross and His righteous life makes atonement for our rebellious one. But the atonement is not completed until the camp is clean, until sin is no more. We say that as soon as there was sin, there was a Savior, but we must also say that as long as there is sin, there is war. As long as there is rebellion against God's just rule, the Adversary yet lives.

This is more than a matter of judgment; it is all about healing. Jesus is not our Lord if we just acknowledge His power; He is our Lord if we voluntarily agree to freedom and fullness as He offers it. Do we agree with the practice of a selfless and giving life? How much are we willing to endure for the sake of other hearts?

### **From Divorce to Faithfulness**

The evidence is, not as much as we would like to think. God hates divorce (Malachi 2:14-16). Divorce, says Jesus, was only permitted because of the hardness of hearts (Matthew 19:8). But at the last, He creates a generation which follow Him wherever He goes (Revelation

14:4), who place what God loves and hates above what they love and hate, which endures the hard things brought on by the other for the sake of the other. They have love authentically, the true article, the kind described by Paul as patient, not insisting on its own way, bearing all things, enduring all things (1 Corinthians 13).

Some in the last generation may not have had the emotional stamina earlier in the life to live this out. Not then. Mercifully, time has gone a bit longer. But in the end, they will have this stamina. That is, *we* will. We must not despair at past failures but we must grow in our walk with God so that we are stronger, gentler, more like Jesus. Then Satan will come to us and find no lever, nothing to exploit, because we have invited the Holy Spirit to soften our heart. Which is more free? One who chooses to reject another? Or the one who loves others enough to, in a sense, take their stripes? Who was freer than Jesus? And He took our stripes.

The last generation is seen standing on Mount Zion with Jesus (Revelation 14:1). They have become like Him. They love as He does. They bear with the defects of others; they have no claims to make for themselves. At the end it is never words, but acts. A man is what his acts show him to be.

### **Robes, Blood, Testimony**

Let's look at some Scriptures and make certain that we are tracking with the Bible.

Looking at the last generation, John states that

They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:13, 14 ESV).

Christ is victorious in them. He leads them to hunger and thirst for righteousness, and they wash. They have robes—changed in cooperation with Christ. Their old characters are old

things, passed away; all things are become new. This means a new character imparted by Christ, pure, spotless. They make the robe white, not because of goodness in themselves but because they turn to God and plead for Him to soften their hearts. They have the most powerful agency for the accomplishment of this change: the blood of the Lamb.

What is the blood of the Lamb? It is the life of Jesus, is it not? In the Bible, the blood represents the life (Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 17:11). Jesus' blood is not a vitamin pill or a magic hemoglobin we can swirl in a test tube. It is a pure life lived in damaged flesh, a life in which sin was never expressed, never suppressed. Jesus resisted every temptation and was victorious. He died but is now alive forever more!

The blood of the Lamb is more than Jesus' declaration that His life is counted in place of ours. Actually, it means that He can give us a new heart. He works in us, puts enmity between us and Satan, gives us new thoughts, new impulses, new desires. We no longer live (that is, the "old" version of me no longer exists), but He lives in us (the new me commands the life). God's Holy Spirit is continually welcomed as resident Guest. We make our robes white by washing our life in the life of Christ. We read His Word, we inculcate in ourselves His values, we invite Him to soften our hearts. We seek change, renewal.

Revelation says more. (Revelation 19:7, 8 ESV):

Let us rejoice and exult and give Him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints (Revelation 19:7, 8 ESV).

Here it is again. The bride makes herself ready. But she could never do it alone. “It was granted her” to clothe herself in behavior that is right. As always, salvation is a gift to us, not something we have earned.

Hear Revelation again, at 12:11:

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

How is Satan overcome? Yes, by the blood of the Lamb, just discussed. But also, by the word of their testimony, by the faithful living of the Christian life. As Jesus was obedient unto death (Philippians 2:8), so are these! So, we see an active people. They do not sit by passively while Satan hijacks the plane; they rise and fight the usurper at all costs. They are His and He is theirs, and all the universe will know it.

### **Christ Victorious**

Our great High Priest did not begin the Great Controversy War, but He does bring it to conclusion. He wants to live in us, to be with us today in our journey. The Christian must not become distracted, he must not let his vision drift off onto side issues of limited consequence—not when the vindication of God’s name is at stake. The Great Controversy is how Christ is victorious in the end. He produces a people who deeply, truly, simply, love Him. They are determined to follow Jesus, and will shed any part of themselves that inhibits their passage to eternity at Jesus’ side.

Does this mean that we will all think alike all the time? The Spirit will lead us. He leads us into a oneness of mind, but we need to understand what this oneness is. It is not a uniformity of thinking. We are diverse, each unique. Having the same Spirit does not mean all have the

same tastes, all prefer the same Bible translation, or all understand every detail of how to live as a Christian the same way as other brothers and sisters in Christ.

What it does mean is that one by one we choose; one by one hearts are turned. We submit ourselves to Christ. What happens when the Christian submits himself to Christ? The heart is united with His, the will is merged in His, the mind becomes one with His. The thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; the Christian can be said to live His life. He manifests the garment of Christ's righteousness. To simplify, as impossible as it may seem, the character of the Christian becomes like the character of Jesus. He came and lived with us, died for us, lives in us, and at the last our hearts are knit with His.

If we are willing, we will draw so close together with Jesus that there will be almost a blending of hearts and minds. His purposes will become our purposes, to the place where, when we obey Him, we are just carrying out our own impulses. Then we will know Him as Christ victorious.

### **Conclusion**

Friends, what a hope we have in Christ! Christianity is an adventure. Jesus' sacrifice for us at the cross makes so much possible for us. I hope that somewhere in these four short talks you have seen something with fresh eyes.

Softly and tenderly, our Lord is calling us. Come, says Jesus, Come up to higher ground. And right here is the classic place to make such a call for people to rise from their seats and some to come tearfully forward to signify their purpose to follow Him. But I am not going to ask for that today. Only God can read your heart.

But there is a call for us from heaven. You can show God today that you want to be a new creature in Him. You can talk to Him straight, you can uplink right now. You can give to Him that lingering sinful practice that you have failed at so many times. Give it to Him fresh, here, today, and walk out of this sanctuary clean, ready to grow as a Christian in the way you did in the first days of your experience. I am sharing with you today my own conviction that you can follow Jesus the way you have always dreamt of following Him. That is the ultimate, straightforward, underlying message I have sought to bring you these four sabbaths. So stand with me, won't you? Just stand right where you are. And as we sing this closing hymn today, you talk silently with Jesus. And ask Him to take you to Himself all over again.

May the adventure begin!

**Biographical note:** Larry Kirkpatrick has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church since 1994. He is a pastor of the American West, having led churches in Nevada, Utah, California, and Idaho. His writings include the books *Real Grace for Real People*, and *Cleanse and Close*. Larry and wife Pamela presently serve in the Upper Columbia Conference, ministering to the [Bonners Ferry](#) and Clark Fork churches in the incomparable beauty of Northern Idaho.