

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker, Pastor Emeritus
Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
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Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26 “Are You a Victim or a Victor?”

Intro. The title of my message ought to grab your attention. “Are You a Victim or a Victor?” It is clear from the letters to the seven churches that Jesus expects His people to become victorious as Christians and as a church. Yet some believers faced unjust persecution. The goal of the enemy was to turn them away from their faith. Many faced the attempts of Satan and unbelievers to cause them to fall into sin. Yet Jesus ended each letter with the promise of what would be granted to those who overcome. So instead of becoming victims of Satan and the world, Christ encouraged them to be victors.

Today there is a significant emphasis on telling individuals and groups of people that they are victims of oppressors or abusers. Indeed, we live in a society that promotes “victim thinking.” Victimization *is* a problem in our world. Indeed, as long as Satan is at work in this world and as long as sin reigns in human hearts, there will be victims of injustice and mistreatment. Cain murdered his brother Abel. The sons of Jacob became envious of their brother Joseph and sold him into slavery. As a slave in Egypt, he was falsely accused and imprisoned. Many years later the children of Israel were oppressed and enslaved by the Egyptians.¹ David was mistreated by King Saul, who even tried to kill him on several occasions. The Bible has many other examples of when God’s people were oppressed and victimized.

Now fast-forward to today. Those in power tend to abuse their power. Sexual abuse is a major problem. People are still victims of racism, human trafficking, economic oppression,² and a host of other problems. Drug pushers and pimps create more victims every day. There will be times when we feel cheated, neglected, or taken advantage of.

The problem is real but what is the solution? Government has a role in punishing those who harm others, as Paul affirmed in Romans 13. Yet this solution is only as good as our police force, prosecutors and our judicial system. Do they promote effective and equal justice under the law? Today, too many are literally getting away with murder. There are those who offer political solutions. Since the early part of the last century those embracing Marxism have told certain groups of people that they are oppressed and victimized and they call upon the many who are oppressed to work to grant *them* political power, typically through revolution, with the promise that they will turn the tables on their oppressors and they promise economic and social justice for the oppressed. This thinking is becoming more acceptable in our country, especially with the younger generation. Yet how well has that worked out?

Listen to what Jesus Himself said in Luke 22:25, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’” The people who exercise political power want you to believe that they are *your* benefactors! Indeed, they dole out benefits using other people’s money. Yet they typically exercise power to enrich themselves and they enjoy the exercise of power. Indeed, as Jesus says, once they seize power, they exercise lordship over their subjects. Every Marxist or communist revolution ends up with different dictators. The population becomes oppressed except for those in the inner circles of

¹ Acts 7:6 says, “But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and oppress [them] four hundred years.” See also vv. 19, 24, 34.

² James 2:6 says, “...Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts?”

political power and those who support them. It has been estimated that by 1997 some 94 million people have been killed by communist governments,³ and many have become political prisoners. Marxists create more conflict and more victims of abuse of power.

So in today's political landscape where both Marxism and lawlessness are on the rise, we hear a lot about victims. The newspapers are full of references to victims. Yet when I did a search of the New Testament, I did not find a single occurrence of the word "victim" or "victims." Does that surprise you? That word is found only 4 times in the Old Testament, mainly in reference to the victims of murder. When I checked synonyms for the word, I found only a few references.⁴ Instead, the emphasis is far more about how to be victorious over injustice, persecution, and other forms of suffering that we may experience in this evil world. Jesus said in John 16:33, "In the world you will have tribulation;⁵ but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

So this morning, I want to share with you how you can be victorious over those who would persecute you, or oppress you, or victimize you. I will give you hope that you can be victorious over the bad circumstances of life. I have surveyed all 29 references of the Greek word for "victory" in the New Testament. The noun form of the word, *nike*, is found only once. All other occurrences are based on the verb meaning "to overcome" or "gain the victory." The only One who can give us victory over evil in this world both now and forever is Jesus Christ! So how can we move from being a victim to being a victor in Jesus Christ? And how can we overcome evil redemptively?

First of all, I think it is important that you:

I. JESUS CARES FOR VICTIMS OF EVIL

Since the Bible declares that Jesus is the One who enables us to have victory over evil, we need to learn what He did to make victory possible for us.

A. He Suffered Abuse and Injustice for Us - If you have suffered this evil world know that Jesus came to suffer with you and for you. No one was a greater victim of injustice and abuse than Jesus. He predicted in Mt. 16:21 "that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed...." Prior to that, the prophet Isaiah predicted the following about the coming Messiah in Isa. 53:5, 7, 8b, "But He [was] wounded for our transgressions, [He was] bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace [was] upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.... He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth.... For the transgressions of My people He was stricken." Indeed, from Gethsemane to the cross Jesus was betrayed, forsaken, wounded, bruised, and chastised with the whip. He stood silent as He was falsely accused and condemned to die. He then suffered crucifixion, a most cruel form of execution. He suffered abuse and execution from those who abused their power to prevent what they perceived as a threat to their political power.

³ *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁴ I searched for the following synonyms for victim in the New Testament: one who is injured, caused to suffer, wounded, abused, injustice (cf. mistreat), oppression, persecution, enslavement. Few examples were uncovered except for persecution.

⁵ See also 1 Thess. 3:4.

Since He personally knows what it is to suffer abuse and injustice, we can also say that:

B. He Came to Deliver Us – In Luke 4:18 Jesus quoted a prophecy from Isaiah concerning His mission, “The Spirit of the LORD [is] upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to [the] poor⁶; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to [the] captives and recovery of sight to [the] blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed.” If you have experienced poverty, a broken heart, unjust imprisonment, or oppression, Jesus came to deliver you. He promises to provide for your needs (Mt. 6:33), heal your broken heart, and at least liberate your *spirit* from captivity and oppression. Jesus also came to set us free from the bondage and condemnation of sin. There are thousands of persecuted Christians in prison today because of their faith. Someday, Jesus is going to come again and set free those who have been unjustly imprisoned!

So to those who are victims of evil, you need to know that Jesus cares for you and your true hope of deliverance is in Jesus! And since Jesus came to deliver us, I call upon you to:

II. PUT YOUR FAITH IN JESUS

1 John 5:4-5 says, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” The first step in experiencing victory is to be born again by faith in Jesus, which enables us to share in His victory. We do not overcome the world by fighting but by faith!

On the other hand, if you live by sight, you will be a victim of the world. The persecutors can show believers the jails that they would go to if they confess Christ. They can show the so-called pleasures and rewards of going along with the world. But those who live by faith, not sight, shall be an overcomer! You will never make it in the Christian life without a strong faith in the unseen realities of God.

So I want to encourage you to have:

A. Faith in His Person as Victor - Jesus was victorious over every temptation of Satan (Mt. 4:1-11). This world tried to overcome Jesus by conspiring against Him and they crucified Him, committing judicial murder. The cannon of death exploded upon the Lord Jesus Christ, but when the dust and smoke cleared there was an empty tomb and Christ had gained the victory over death! Jesus said in Revelation 1:18: “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” Thus, Jesus said in John 16:33, “...be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” In the last days the proud leaders of this world will conspire against the Lord yet again. His ultimate victory is spoken of in Revelation 17:14, “These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those [who are] with Him [are] called, chosen, and faithful.” So the armies of heaven shall share His victory as well (see Rev. 19:11-21). Since Jesus was and is victorious, those who put their faith in Him will share in His victory.

Years ago there was a man by the name Fredrick Douglas, a black man, who had worked for the freedom of the slaves. He had suffered persecution and death threats, but he loved the Lord Jesus. One day he came to Atlanta, GA to speak to a group of people who needed to hear an

⁶ The word translated “poor” (*ptochos*) refers to the very poor, those who are destitute of the comforts and necessities of this life, and even have to beg for food.

encouraging word. But when he stood up to speak, all of the pressures just caved in on him. He lost his composure and put his head on his hands and began to weep. An old black woman, sitting in the audience, took out a ★white handkerchief and waved it to get his attention. After a while he looked up and saw her, and she said to him, “Mr. Douglas, I want to ask you a question today.” “Yes ma’am, what is it?” She said, “Mr. Douglas, is God dead?” Mr. Douglas hesitated. So she asked again, “Is God dead?” He lifted his head high and said, “No ma’am, the Lord Jesus Christ is very much alive.” That little woman stood to her feet, waving that white handkerchief and said, “Then Mr. Douglas, if Jesus Christ is still alive, no Christian should ever hang his head in defeat.” [Illus.#C-353].

So because of our faith in Jesus, our Victor, we can have victory over the world and its evil. 2 Cor. 2:14 says, “Now thanks [be] to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.” This is a picture of a 1st century parade celebrating a military victory, which was the highest honor given to a victorious Roman general. The spectators would shower the General and other victors with flowers. Thus, the air was filled with the odor of incense and flowers, the smell of victory! Again, it is clear from that verse that our victory is only made possible by Jesus Christ.

You can also be encouraged to claim victory as you exercise:

B. Faith in His Promises of Victory - Let me just give you five examples.

1. We Are Promised Victory over the World - The Bible teaches that the world is the enemy of the Christian life. Yet 1 John 5:4 says, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world.” We are promised victory over the world’s peer pressure, temptations, and threats of persecution. We will especially have victory over the world when Jesus comes again to establish His kingdom. Jesus promised in Rev. 2:26, “The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations” (ESV).⁷

2. We Are Promised Victory over Trials and Suffering – Rom. 8:28 says, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to [his] purpose.” Even when you are mistreated God can turn that into some good in your life. For example, such will cause you to grow closer to God in prayer and build patient endurance. Then Paul says in v.31, “What then shall we say to these things? If God [is] for us, who [can be] against us?” Be assured that God is *for* you. That is why all things work together for good for the child of God. Then Rom. 8:35-37 says, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? [Shall] tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: ‘For Your sake we ... are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” Paul uses the strongest language in the Bible for a victor. He says we are super conquerors! (*hupernikao*). And notice that Paul says that even when we are victimized by tribulation, persecution, or even the sword we are more than conquerors! That seems like a contradiction from a worldly point of view, but God is able to completely reverse such mistreatment.

Armed with such faith Paul said in 2 Cor. 4:8-10 says, “[We are] hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; [we are] perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed... that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” His life within gives us strength for victory.

⁷ Likewise, Rev. 3:21 says, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”

3. We Are Promised Victory over Satan – Acts 10:38 says that Jesus went about “healing all who were oppressed by the devil.” Jesus exercised power over Satan and He continues to do so today. Thus, 1 John 4:4 says, “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” As a result, James 4:7 says, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” That’s a promise of victory of Satan. 1 John 2:13 says, “I write to you, young men, Because you have overcome the wicked one.” Rev. 12:10-11 says, “for the accuser of our brethren is cast down... 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.” If you are a true believer in Jesus Christ Satan can accuse you and try to load you down with guilt but your sins are covered by the blood of Jesus! We also overcome Satan when we boldly testify of our faith in Jesus. Finally, we look forward to our final victory over Satan! Rom. 16:20 says, “And the God of peace will crush⁸ Satan under your feet shortly....” Aren’t you looking forward to that day!

4. The Church Is Promised Victory - God’s church will have trials, difficulties and challenges but our ultimate victory is assured. Jesus said in Mt. 16:18, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail [*katischuo*] against it.” The gates of a city or village was the traditional place of governmental authority (Genesis 19:1; Ruth 4:1). So the “gates of hades” can refer to the powers and authorities of Hades, where Satan and his fallen angels take counsel against the church. On the other hand, Hades is the realm of the dead, and the gates perhaps symbolize the entrance to that realm. In that case, the Lord was declaring that even death will not triumph over His church. Or to say it in another way, the church will not die, but endures to the end of the age. Individual members will die, but this community of faith will last *forever*. When you trust in Christ as Savior and join His church you are on a winning team! And why is the Church indestructible? It is because Jesus is indestructible! The church is called the body of Christ, and He is the head. The only way the church can be destroyed is for our Head to be destroyed. Even death could not conquer Jesus, the Son of God. The future of Swift Creek Baptist Church is assured because this is God’s church (Acts 20:28b).

5. We Are Promised Victory over Death – 1 Cor. 15:54-57 says, “So when ... this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where [is] your sting? O Hades, where [is] your victory?’ ... thanks [be] to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” For the child of God death is not the end of life but the doorway to a far better life in heaven. Hope of a brighter future impacts the present with comfort and strength.⁹

This is why even deadly persecution cannot defeat or intimidate us. Jesus said in Luke 12:4-5, “And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But ... fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!”¹⁰ The powerful victimize and oppress people through fear. Did you notice how the fear of Covid gave political leaders much more power over our lives? Early in the pandemic they suppressed treatment options and elevated Covid deaths by also counting people who died *with* Covid instead of limiting the count to those who died *from* Covid.

⁸ The same word is used in Rev. 2:27, “He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels....”

⁹ We not only have victory over physical death but also over eternal death. Rev. 2:11 says that the one who overcomes, “shall not be hurt by the second death.”

¹⁰ Jesus also said in Rev. 2:10, “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer....”

Toward the end of the first century Christians were faced with a decision. Were they going to bow the knee to Caesar and confess *him* as Lord or were they going to profess faith in Christ as Lord? Most of John's readers had made their choice and had overcome the world. Everyone else was a victim of the power and intimidation of Satan and the world system.

So don't let Satan and his minions defeat and control you through fear. Truly fear God and you will not fear others and you will be victorious. By the way, look at the Scripture on the front of our bulletin today (Ps. 27:1).

So to have the victory over this evil world, we need to have faith in Jesus as Victor, faith in His promises, and furthermore:

C. Faith in His Power to Handle Your Enemy – 1 Peter 2:23 says of Jesus, “who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed [Himself] to Him who judges righteously.” As Jesus suffered abuse, He trusted His Father to overcome such injustice. What example He set for us! Then 1 Peter 4:19 says, “Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls [to Him] in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.” The Greek term translated “commit” (*paratithemi*) is a banking term that speaks of a deposit for safekeeping. We are to entrust our lives and well-being to God. Why? First of all, He is described as “Creator,” which clearly suggests power and authority. He can handle the problems we face. Secondly, He is also “faithful.” God can be trusted to do what is best for our eternal future. God may allow your enemy to prevail temporarily but He will surely deal with your enemy on the Day of Judgment or before.

We see this principle illustrated in the life of Joseph. Though sold as a slave by his own brothers, and though falsely accused and put into prison for some two years, God so worked in his life that he was promoted from the prison to the palace and became an exalted leader in Egypt. He used *his* political power to save both Egypt and his own people from a severe famine.

So armed with faith in Christ and His promises, we can replace a victim mentality with a mentality of victory!

III. FORGIVENESS GIVES US VICTORY OVER THE PAST

I want to show you two statements: Which reflects your thinking:
“I am a victim.”
“I was a victim.”

Do you see the difference? Apart from forgiveness, the hurts of the past are going to continue to make you a victim. You will continue to say, “I *am* a victim.” Apart from forgiveness, we are going to be afflicted with bitterness (Heb. 12:14-15), malice, a desire for vengeance, and other sinful behaviors. Holding on to that bitterness and a desire for vengeance is like drinking a cup of poison hoping it will kill the other guy! It will not. However, by means of forgiveness, you can say, “I *was* a victim, but now I am a victor over that pain. I am a victor over the sin of paying evil for evil (Rom. 12:17; 1 Th. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9). I am a victor over the sins of bitterness, malice, and personal retribution.” Instead, we turn vengeance over to God (Romans 12:19).

If anyone was a victim of injustice, slander and abuse it was Jesus. Yet after the Roman soldiers crucified Him, He prayed in Luke 23:34, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” I find it interesting what Claude King said about this verse, “Even if the person

doesn't believe he is wrong, forgive."¹¹ Indeed, most of the Jewish leaders who stood by to watch Him being crucified, did not believe they were in the wrong. The Roman soldiers were just following orders. I'm sure they didn't believe they were doing something morally wrong. They convinced themselves they were just executing an enemy of Caesar. Yet in His own heart Jesus forgave them! He would not allow *their* sin to bring about resentment, hatred and unforgiveness in His *own* heart. In that moment Jesus was victorious over sin and was able to die for *our* sins.

Argumentation:

So we need to heed the words of Jesus in Mark 11:25, "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." Evidently, unforgiveness will interfere with your prayers. Likewise, Colossians 3:13 says, "forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*." The word translated "complaint" (*momphe*) is based on the verb meaning, "to blame, find fault." If you withhold forgiveness, you probably feel that you have a legitimate complaint against that other person. Yet, you are to forgive, and Paul tells us why. The basis of forgiving others is found in the last of v.13, "even as Christ forgave you...." We are to forgive others because God forgave us, and in the degree that He forgave. How can we withhold forgiveness when we have been so freely forgiven? The Lord's generosity to you must be the model of your own generosity. Also, the word translated "forgive" (*charizomai*) is based on the root word for grace.¹² We are to forgive graciously. We are not to withhold forgiveness until they earn it or deserve it. If you fail to forgive, you are just hurting yourself with the additional stress that unforgiveness causes. So forgiveness is the way to keep from being victimized by your past.

Yesterday, at our Church Memories Workshop, Pastor Robert asked us to write down on five blue Post-it notes five painful memories from the past. Beyond something like the death of a loved one or friend, it could include where you felt someone had hurt you or the church. Later, he asked us to take those memories and put them on the cross, to symbolize that Jesus has borne griefs and sorrows and we will leave them at the cross. Follow His own example given at the cross.

Finally, we are victors instead of victims when we:

[Note: The following was not included in the audio/video sermon due to sermon length]

IV. OVERCOME EVIL WITH LOVING GOODNESS

Rom. 12:14 & 21 says, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." When you do evil in response to evil, then evil has just been multiplied by two and perpetuated. If hatred is met with hatred the result is only more hatred. Don't let evil have the victory in your life. When you respond with animosity, unforgiveness, and vengeance, you end up poisoning your own soul.

Yet it is not enough to simply reject the wrong ways to respond to those who hurt us. Instead, we should also act in positive love toward our enemies as well. What Paul said was based on what Jesus said in Mt. 5:44, "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and

¹¹ Claude King, *Come to the Lord's Table* (Brentwood, TN: Lifeway Press, 2006), p.72.

¹² The same word is used in Eph. 4:32, "forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you."

persecute you.” Again, in Rom. 5:21 Paul said, “overcome evil with good.” In the previous verse he have two examples of good we can do: “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink....” The best way to get rid of an enemy is to turn him into a friend¹³ with love and kindness and so “overcome evil with good.”

Conclusion: So when you are victimized in this evil world will you choose to remain a victim, or will you become a victor in Jesus Christ? As we learn of what Jesus did to give us victory, as we trust in Him as our Victor and trust in His promises of victory, as we forgive those who have done us wrong and even love and do good to our enemies, we are indeed victorious over the past, over sins that would defeat us, and we are victorious over our enemies.

As I said, the first step in becoming a victor over the evil in this world is to be born again by faith in Jesus. Who will step forward to do that today? Who will come to the prayer altar and lay that burden at the foot of Jesus and leave it there? Who will join this church and become part of this body of believers that will surely prevail?

Source: Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

Someone has said, “every test in our life makes us better or better, every problem comes to break us or make us. The choice is ours whether we become VICTIM or VICTOR.

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¹³ Abraham Lincoln said something similar.