

"Hosanna!" (Mark 11:1-10)

For Your Life in Christ the First Sunday in Advent

November 30th, 2014

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. One of the most successful sci-fi movies ever made was Schwarzenegger's "Terminator 2: Judgment Day." The entire movie is based on a coming, future war between man and machine. In one scene the Terminator and the young man he is protecting observe two young boys playing with toy guns fighting and "shooting" each other. The young man recently awakened to the violent nature of man says to the Terminator, "We aren't going to make it are we?" To which the Terminator replies, "It is in your nature to destroy yourselves."

This is a sobering scene as it seems hard to argue with. We are always fighting. Some of the greatest books ever written are full of confrontation and battles like The Lord of the Rings and The Chronicles of Narnia; I saw a man wearing a T-shirt advertising our back-to-back victories as a nation using the "back-to-back" language typically reserved for sports teams winning championships, but in this case it was referring to our victories in the first two World Wars (a glamorization that seems inappropriate for the brutality that was revealed among civilized 20th century men). All of this has bled over into what we consider to be entertainment: did you know that one of the most popular entertainment spectacles in the U.S. is professional wrestling? But now the Ultimate Fighting Championship has become a rage. This is a fascinating progression that has occurred in our country, because UFC is decidedly more violent than WWE. It feels as though we have developed cravings that are not dissimilar to the days of the Roman coliseum. But even these images are surpassed by what one can put into X-Box. We can't stop fighting...whether people speak of "battling" disease, family infighting, or even conflict within churches we are poised for this most common theme. We wonder if we're going to make it and whether the Terminator's diagnosis is true: is it in our nature to destroy ourselves?

The archetype of all of these, however, is found in the original rebellion against God as seen here from Revelation 12:

⁷ Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but he was defeated and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. ¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death."

The Holy Scriptures themselves give the account of most important fight. Michael and the angels, however, can do nothing apart from the Lord. They will fight only if the King commands it and in this case the King of Kings Himself, our Lord Jesus entered into the fight.

Don't let this get by you though; we are talking about the most relevant thing in your life: you're in a fight. We may not want to be, but we are. One summer while playing ball in the street, I got into a scuffle with another kid. That fall, his big brother got a group of his buddies to surround me after football practice. I couldn't avoid the fight...the fight came to me and after that I lived in tension with those boys who first jumped me...as I got bigger and taller, they – admittedly – didn't feel as confident as they once did. But the conflict never really went away and sometimes the rest of the story was played out on a football field. The point is that the conflicts just don't fade away.

What are your conflicts? What are your wars? What do you fight? Fighting is second nature to us poor sinners. We fight what is popularly called “our demons,” but the culture has unwittingly used a description that is quite real. The devil with his demons comes against you Christian to destroy you. This is his goal. Ultimately, this destruction is designed to rip your faith out of your heart. But the evil one begins subtly: he will use good times and bad times. He will use good times to make you believe you don't need God. He will use bad times to make you believe that God has deserted you. Either way, his goal is to destroy you. This is a fight designed to kill the soul.

Consider the progression:

- #1 Sin is in your heart.
- #2 As a result, you resist God.
- #3 The evil one seeks to capitalize on this and he tempts you.
- #4 His goal is to make the thought of rebellion materialize.
- #5 If it does, it leads to many harmful consequences.
- #6 And if this happens, your conscience is overcome so that you begin to believe the lies of the evil one (e.g. that you are not a Christian).
- #7 And if this happens, you give up your faith.
- #8 With this, you follow what will not last and what leads to hopelessness and death.
- #9 And if this happens, life spins out of control.
- #10 And if this happens, then life itself can be lost.

What I speak of now is real life. This is not about some detached idea about “religion,” but this is about what matters most: whether you will live and never stop living; or whether you will die and lose fellowship with the Author of Life.

So it should interest us to know what God did about all of this. Answer: Jesus rode into Jerusalem to enter the war. Jesus came to win our war. “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.” (1st John 3:8b) Jesus came into the world to enter our fight.

The people at that time were familiar with the word for “save” – they cried out “Hosanna!” which meant they were asking God to help them, deliver them, and to give them the victory -- we don’t use this word as much as people did back in Jesus’ day. The Hebrew word for “save, deliver, give victory” is a word that was often used to describe wars. “At various times Israel, oppressed by other nations, had to go to war to win and to maintain its freedom. In these battles the nation turned to God for help. They believed that the outcome of the battle belonged to [The LORD] (1 Sam 17:47). Thus they ventured out in the assurance of a victorious outcome. The focal point of God’s saving deeds in the OT was the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage (Ex 14:30). Thereby they became known as a people saved by [The LORD] (Deut 33:29). Such deeds of salvation became a witness of the lordship of [The LORD] not only to future generations, but also to the surrounding nations (cf. Ps. 106:8; 1 Sam 4:6ff.). Later as the Israelites anticipated entering the promised land, Moses said, ‘the Lord your God is he that goes with you, to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory’ (Deut 20:4).” (TWOT, Volume 1, 415)

So this is why Jesus came. The early church father Irenaeus answered the question, “For what purpose did Christ come down from heaven? Answer: ‘That He might destroy sin, overcome death, and give life to man.’” (Aulen, Gustaf, *Christus Victor*, New York: MacMillan, 1969: 19)

It’s hard for us sometimes however to make connections. Jesus defeated sin on the cross right? So how do I know the Lord’s victory in my life today? “The classic idea of salvation is that the victory which Christ gained once for all is continued in the work of the Holy Spirit, and its fruits reaped...The victory of Christ over the powers of evil is an eternal victory, therefore present as well as past. Therefore Justification and Atonement are really one and the same thing; Justification is simply the Atonement brought into the present, so that here and now the Blessing of God prevails over the Curse...[Christ for us] or [Christ in us]...are not two different things, but two sides of the same thing. Both are equally essential.” (Ibid., 150)

Translation for the every-day Christian: because Christ rode into Jerusalem to answer the prayer to save and to give victory, He entered into your darkness and death so that His light and life would completely conquer these enemies! So remember that progression? Let’s consider it in light of Christ’s victory for you:

#1 Now your sin is now covered by the blood of Christ.

#2 Now repentance that turns from sin and turns to the Lord marks your life. You live in the forgiveness Christ has won for you!

#3 Now the evil one loses his basis for accusation against you. As Luther wrote in his great hymn, A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, “One little word can fell him!” [Rev. Chad Bird wrote: “What’s that word? In at least one of his writings, Martin Luther refers to his own hymn and reveals that the word he had in mind was ‘liar.’ Speaking of one of the books his opponent had written against him, Luther says, ‘For all such books, even if there

were many as thousands of them written every day and every hour..., are very easily refuted with the single word, 'Devil, you lie,' just as that haughty beggar Dr. Luther sings so proudly and boldly in those words of his hymn, 'One little word shall fell him.'" (Against Hanswurst, AE 41:185-186)]

#4 Now your faith equips you to hold up "the shield of faith" (Eph. 6), that is you hold up what faith holds to: Christ Jesus the Victor and all the flaming arrows of the evil one are extinguished upon Christ.

#5 This leads to protection and safety in Christ. "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures..." (Psalm 23)

#6 And with this your conscience is lifted up (you know that by God's amazing grace, you are a child of God).

#7 Now your faith becomes more important than anything else!

#8 Now you follow the Lord (consider Proverbs 3:5-6 or Matthew 6:33).

#9 Now in Christ, your life is in His hands (John 10:28).

#10 Now eternal life in Christ is yours.

One last note: sometimes people get the impression that if someone is gentle and kind that perhaps they are also weak. This can be of course a terrible assumption. Moses was meek, but powerful. More importantly, Christ was completely gentle, but no one was ever as mighty as He. He rode into Jerusalem on the colt of a donkey. Such a picture makes Him absolutely gentle and approachable. We are emboldened to come to Him and we realize that no one has ever been more gentle towards us. Jesus loves you! But as you know His embrace, you realize something else: as He holds you in all gentleness, you also see that He is stronger than anyone or anything else! His victory is yours. You're saved!