
DAILY DEVOTIONAL



JESUS WINS!

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JANUARY



ACCEPTING HIS LOVE

HIS VICTORY

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

—John 16:33

I had heard the story before and I knew the ending, but it still gripped me every time my dad told it in a sermon. The story was about a boy who loved and admired the main hero in a book series. He had just bought the latest volume and realized that this book was very different! Unlike the previous books, this time his hero was being beaten and seemed to be losing! Not very far into the book, the boy couldn't take it anymore and, holding his breath, went straight to the last chapter. With trembling hands, he turned to the last page and read the last paragraph. And there, in the last sentences of the story, he discovered that, despite the many seeming defeats, his hero was the victor after all, and the villain was destroyed. Now that he knew the ending, he was at peace and went back to the place where he had left off and continued reading the book. This time, having new information, whenever the villain seemed to be winning, the boy would say aloud, "If he knew what I know—if he just knew what I know!"

Jesus has told us the end of the story: He has overcome! Furthermore, He highlighted the contrast of two realities: Himself and the world. *In Him* we may have peace, yet *in the world* we will have tribulation (verse 33). After informing the disciples of their impending personal failure (verse 32), Jesus proclaims that "in Him" they may have peace. Every day we face the choice of which reality to empower: the world and its troubles, which are sure to come, or the love and inward peace that we may find *in Jesus*, focusing on His already-attained victory on the cross. As in the case of the introductory story, it makes a world of difference to know how the story ends. When we face sickness, death, loss, and various troubles, let's remember that evil is a conquered enemy. When I posted a photo of my dad's hand in mine, to announce his passing, I added the phrase that is now the title of this devotional book: *Jesus Wins!* Jesus' victorious love is the basis of our faith!

My Response: _____

HIS LOVE

*“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him shall not perish,
but have eternal life.”*

—John 3:16

I had barely opened the door of my second-floor condo when I was shocked by the sight of a big snake! I instinctively jumped back and ran out. Later I called my neighbors and the department of animal control, and someone came and got the reptile out of my place. But it took me many months to get over the trauma.

This experience reminds me how Jesus used a snake to teach us about salvation and love. Snakes have a way of getting our attention, but that's not the reason why Jesus reminded Nicodemus of an ancient experience with these animals as a visualization of Himself and how God loved the world so much that He sent His Son to die. In this first extended dialogue in John's Gospel, Jesus is explaining God's love and salvation to a teacher of the law. Nicodemus, judging by the signs Christ was doing, starts with an impressive assertion about Jesus having come from God (John 3:2). But Jesus does not engage in reciprocal flattery; instead, He tells Nicodemus that he must be born again (verses 5, 7). When Nicodemus misinterprets Jesus' words, the Savior resorts to the history of Israel. He alludes to an event recorded in Numbers 21:4–9, when venomous serpents started biting the Israelites after God had withdrawn His protection due to their unbelief. God instructed Moses to make a bronze snake and place it on a pole. Whoever looked at it would be saved. And Jesus, explaining the gospel to Nicodemus, says: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world” (John 3:14–16). Yes, God's unfailing love is so amazing that He provided the Antidote for His sinful children. Jesus is heaven's greatest Gift! As much as we enjoy healthy love in this world, it is still stained by our sin and shortcomings. Yet God's love for us is perfect and unfailing, and we can always count on it! For God so loved you . . . that He gave His Son!

My Response: _____

HIS DESCRIPTION

*To Him who loves us and released us from our sins
by His blood . . . to Him be the glory and the dominion
forever and ever. Amen.*

—Revelation 1:5, 6

I was overwhelmed, standing at the end of the main street of the ancient city of Ephesus, with its amazingly well-preserved ruins and its magnificent amphitheater. I envisioned travelers crowding through the city in the time when John wrote the book of Revelation. I also visited the island of Patmos, where John received the *unveiling* of Jesus. I tried to imagine how John must have felt on this island, about fifty miles southwest of Ephesus, being shown the final chapter of the world's history and the indisputable announcement: Jesus Wins!

In light of the revelations he received, how would John introduce Jesus to the audience? There are two verbs in John's opening description of Jesus that we will focus on, because they give us assurance from the very beginning of this book. "Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who *loves us* and *released us* from our sins by His blood" (Revelation 1:4, 5). Let's start with the phrase: "who *loves us*" (verse 5). This *present* tense verb reminds us of the ongoing love of Jesus Christ for us, right now and forever. The original meaning is continuous: He loves us and keeps loving and loving and loving us. Then comes the second phrase: "And *released us* from our sins by His blood" (verse 5). In the original Greek, the past tense of the verb "to release" is what is called an aorist participle, which means a completed action in the past. Therefore, here we find two verbs that describe the relationship of Jesus with us: He loves us, continuously and unceasingly, and He has purchased our freedom on the cross. These two verbs form the core of the everlasting gospel. Many have not experienced real, unconditional love in this world, yet God's message changes that. The last chapter of the world's history starts with the reminder that Jesus *loves us*, and that He has *freed* us. These two realities will sustain us every day until we see Him face to face!

My Response: _____

HIS CONQUEST

*"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand;
repent and believe in the gospel."*

—Mark 1:15

As the Olympics, the World Cup of soccer is a much-awaited worldwide event involving many countries, represented by their national teams. In 1978, Argentina hosted the Cup, and the national team won the trophy. I will never forget this victory. I was in high school, and the country ground to an absolute stop for three days in order to celebrate this momentous event. Even though the victory had been won by the able athletes, all of us had won; their triumph was ours, the victory belonged to the whole country! They were our representatives!

Mark opens his book by stating, "The beginning of the gospel [good news] of Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1). The Greek noun *euangelion* is translated into English as "good news" or "gospel"—a term that comes from the Old English *godspell*, which means "good news." This term was used when messengers came from the battlefield, announcing that the king had fought on behalf of his subjects and had won; the messengers who brought the good news were called *evangelists*. The Greek term was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX) to announce God's ultimate deliverance of His people:

How lovely on the mountains
Are the feet of him who brings *good news*,
Who announces peace
And brings *good news* of happiness,
Who announces salvation,
And says to Zion, "Your God reigns!"
(Isaiah 52:7).

When Jesus proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the *gospel*" (Mark 1:15), He was announcing that the good news of God's victory through Jesus was about to be revealed. It is highly significant that Mark chose this term to introduce his book about Jesus. Jesus has won the battle on our behalf! Don't ever let fear of the future, or anything else, take away the joy of your salvation. Jesus, our Representative and Substitute, has conquered in our place! Rejoice!

My Response: _____

HIS KINGSHIP

"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?"

—Matthew 2:2

Whether in the tombs and treasures of Egypt or Buckingham Palace in the United Kingdom; whether in ancient kingdoms or modern monarchies, one common thread runs throughout history: the splendor and grandeur that surrounds kings and queens. I have visited many such majestic buildings, and I have always marveled at the beauty and riches in honor of mortal men and women. And I wonder about the contrast between earthly royalties and Jesus, the King of kings, who walked on this earth two thousand years ago. Who would pay Him homage?

Matthew shocks his audience by narrating the visit of the Magi. The story starts by placing Jesus in the territory and tribe of the Davidic kings, hence the clarification that this is Bethlehem of Judea, where David was born: "Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea" (Matthew 2:1). At that time, Herod was the king (verses 1, 3), and these wise men went straight to his palace in Jerusalem, perhaps expecting the new King to be born in the royal family. But they were in for a surprise! They spoke to King Herod about another *King of the Jews*, thus introducing tension between the two kings from the very beginning of the story. Herod clearly understood that their inquiry was related to the Messiah (see verse 4). It is a notable fact that the Magi used the title "King of the Jews" instead of "our King," which indicates that they were Gentiles. Evidently, Matthew included this story to highlight the inclusivity of Jesus' mission (see Jesus' command to make disciples of *all nations*, Matthew 28:19). Yet what I find most fascinating about the title "King of the Jews" is that the only other use of it in Matthew is found in the story of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27:11, 29, 37), and once again, it is spoken by Gentiles. It was the legal charge placed on the cross by Pilate: "This is Jesus the King of the Jews" (verse 37). The One who loved us to the point of death has revealed to us how the story ends: *Jesus Wins!* He will return, as the King of kings, to take us home. Until then, let's honor Him and invite Him to be the King of our lives, reigning in our hearts!

My Response: _____