

Rejoice! Why? Because Christmas is only about a week and a half away? The kids might. It can't get here soon enough for them. The adults on the other hand, probably are thinking, "Oh no, it's almost here, and now I have even less time to get ready!"

Rejoice! Why? Because the vaccine is on the horizon and will also soon be here? That does give us cause to rejoice. The long year of 2020 may soon be behind us. COVID 19, named after the year it was discovered, should be named COVID 20 for the year it ruined. But the vaccine will soon be available, and this long nightmare looks like it will be over.

Rejoice! Why? Because Jesus has promised to appear again? Absolutely! We call it coming or returning, but He's been coming to us. He hasn't stopped coming, ever since He ascended. He comes in His Word. And He comes in the bread and the wine as He gives us His flesh and blood. He gives us a feast not just for our ears, but for our eyes, and especially for our mouths. We rejoice that He comes as He does.

But our rejoicing is for even more than that! Jesus has promised that He is going to show Himself again. We will see Him when He makes Himself visible. And yet, it will be even more than that. We will see Him, and that's wonderful in itself, but He's going to restore creation completely, and things will be back to—if not even better, if that is possible—than they were in the Garden of Eden.

Rejoice, that when Jesus was here, when He was visible for all to see the first time, He had done all He did. It's not just His death and resurrection, not just His pouring out His blood for us. With His entire healing ministry, He was demonstrating what His death and resurrection would accomplish—and that is defeating our spiritual enemies and giving us the victory.

It answers the question we might wonder, "Why did Jesus do His miracles?" Was it His compassion? Yes, but that's not all of it. We know His compassion. A couple weeks ago, we called it His bleeding heart.

But it was more.

Did He do it to attract followers? No. That would be the wrong kind of followers. If the people didn't want what He had come to give, He didn't want them following.

Did He do it to show He is God? Yes, and more than that. He showed what was to come. He would one day be victorious and He would redeem all of His creation. One day He would stand on the winner's block, raise His arms and announce His victory. For this we rejoice, because the victory is also ours.

But coming back to earth, this is what is behind John's question. Are you the coming one, the one who will be victorious in the end, or shall we look for another?

It was a good question. John was in prison. Don't forget this. John did what he was supposed to do. He was a pastor. And when he saw the king put his soul in spiritual jeopardy by committing a public sin and not repenting for it, John had no choice but to say something. John heard his own voice say to the king "Repent," and the next thing John heard was the prison door slam shut.

While John was there in prison, people had to be thinking about what Isaiah said about the Messiah in Is 61. They had to be thinking of what Jesus Himself had said when He preached in Nazareth since He used that very passage to say this was talking about Him, that these were His own words. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives."

And they had to be thinking...Hmmm. The messiah is to proclaim liberty to the captives. Now, look at John. John looks like he's a captive. If Jesus really is the Messiah, he should set John free.

They also had to be thinking of John's fiery rhetoric when he was a free man. He talked about how the evil were going to get what was coming to them, and the Messiah was going to do it. "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Matt 3:12

So the question sounds logical: Are you the one or should we look for another? Jesus said to John's emissaries, What do you see? What do you hear? Look for yourselves. Compare this with the O.T.'s description of the Messiah.

You know who He is, what He is to like; what He is to do. This is the one that everyone has been waiting for ever since Adam and Eve. Generation after generation after generation looked for Him. One generation would tell the next to watch for Him. And they watched for Him with good reason. When He came, He would set creation free.

We weren't too far along in history when Noah's dad, Lamech said it about him in Gen 5, "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands."

Jesus could have said to John's disciples. "Yes, I'm the one. I'm the Messiah." But instead, He said, "Let my work speak for me. Look at what has happened since I've come. The blind see. Isaiah 29:18 says, "the eyes of the blind shall see." The lame walk. Is 35:6 says, "then shall the lame man leap like a deer." The deaf hear. Is 29:18 "In that day, the deaf shall hear." The dead are raised up. Is 26:19 "Your dead shall live; their bodies shall rise." The poor have good news preached to them. Is 61:1 "The Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."

John's disciples left Jesus, deeply comforted. Maybe they even danced as they made their way back to John, to say to Him. "He's the one. He's the one. We are sure of it. You've heard what He has done. Now compare it to what the prophets said the messiah would do. He gave us a check list so you can see for yourself."

My dear friends, saints, and fellow baptized, it's more than just a check list. It's describing the age of the Messiah. Once He is here, the age of the Messiah is here. Once He comes and He has done what He came to do, creation will be set free and Jesus will be the victor.

That's what's was happening in front of everyone's eyes. That's why we rejoice, like it is Easter. He's done it. Isaiah was describing what will happen once the messiah, the Anointed One comes.

He's come. He has done it. Creation is set free. With His obedient death, sin and death were conquered. Our spiritual enemies are done. Can't you see it? Can you dig it? That's the age we live in. The age where the messiah has come, and the creation has been set free. The curse of sin is no more.

That's a hard sell, isn't it? The curse of sin is no more? Doesn't look like it. Doesn't feel like it.

No, I'm not crazy! I'm not lying. I'm not even talking in a special way. All those miracles were showing what He was doing. He was ushering in a new age, the age of the Messiah. Once He died, He had conquered sin, death and the devil. Your spiritual enemies have been beaten. Death is dead. Sin is defeated. The devil is a lifeless snake. They are powerless against you, each of you, and against me, because you and I have died in our baptisms and our life is now in Christ. Do you see how this almost sounds like Easter?

Let's trot out a couple passages from Paul that make this clear. In Rom 6:4 we are told, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death." Going on a little further, now to v. 11 "Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." Col 3:3 makes the same point even more clear. "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God." Your life is hidden with Christ by your baptism." Your baptism gives you the victory. And in faith, it remains yours. In Christ, you are victorious. In Christ, you are safe. In Christ, you are protected from the real damage your spiritual enemies, sin, death and the devil, could do to you.

I know. It doesn't look anything like it. Part of the reason we like celebrating Christmas is because it diverts us from all of the ugly things of this world. We can talk about peace and love and family. But long before the decorations have been put away, and even while they are still out, the ugliness of the world crowds back in to remind us it's still there.

Even now, as we are getting ready for it, we see how ugly things have gotten to be.

Everything seems to have become politicized. Even our response to a pandemic has become in many ways, a political statement. And no matter what side we fall on, we see how life has been impacted by our concern to limit the spread of COVID. We've also seen death and a lot of people gripped with a terrible fear of it.

Our latest election has drawn the lines of division even more starkly. It's scary talk out there. How's a Christian to act in the face of this political unrest? What lies ahead with such deep division?

All of this seems to be a reflection of the cultural revolution we have experienced. We have become strangers in our own land. We don't recognize where we live anymore because what is considered normal is so far from the normal the Creator would have for His creation.

And the strain of life has had its personal toll. The Lord knows about those strains and has warned us against approaching them in unhealthy ways, even as we heard last week when He said, "Watch yourself so that you don't become weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness." We've been hearing the stats. I heard one lately that said that a 1/3 of adults in the US have binged drank in the last month. That's seven or more drinks in a sitting. That's a serious problem, plus the rise in opioid use. It's getting to be too much for too many.

Despite all we see with our eyes, all we experience in our lives, all we feel in our hearts, we have already been promised the victory. All of this has been conquered for us. We are more than conquerors, Paul reminds us in Rom 8.

Think of it like a race. The race is over. The tape has been broken. The line has been crossed. Now it's just a matter of taking the stand on the winner's box. That hasn't happened yet. It seems like a long time getting from the finish line to the winner's box, and it has by our standards, but it doesn't change the fact the race is over. Jesus has already won. He said it is finished, and there isn't anything more for Him to do to win.

Or think of it like a boxing match. Jesus has KO'ed sin, death and the devil. They're lying there lifeless on the mat, but the official hasn't gotten over to lift Jesus' arm and declare Him the winner. It's not like it's in question. It's just that the official pronouncement, when everyone else will see it, hasn't been made yet.

That's coming. In the meantime, He has the victory and when we are in Him, the victory is ours. I'll say that again. When we are in Him, the victory is ours. We are in Him by faith. We were first placed in Him with our baptism, and by faith remain in Him. So, when we are in Him, the victory is ours.

This is why we rejoice when we see the miracles He had done. They showed that He was going to win when it was all over. And then He did. It's Easter in December.

But it's hard to believe. He knew it was. Many stumble because it doesn't look like victory. They can see all the suffering. They see it all over the world. They see it all around them. They see it in their own lives.

How is this victory? Because He said it was. And He is God. We saw the victory at the cross. We taste the victory when He gives us His body and blood. He couldn't do that if He lost. These are the tokens of that victory.

We may be joined with all the angels and all the saints who have gone before us in this victory meal, but it still doesn't feel like victory. And it didn't feel like victory for John the way we would think victory. It didn't feel like victory for John's disciples, nor did it feel like victory the way we think of victory for the apostles. It hasn't felt like victory, the way we think of victory, for any Christian who has ever lived, because they still lived in this world, and they lived in between the time of His victory and the final announcement of it.

That's where we are. It doesn't look like victory, it doesn't feel like it, it's not our experience, but it is our reality. And for this we rejoice. Rejoice! The victory is yours. Rejoice, because you can see what the victory means in the miracles. Rejoice! Because one day He is going to take the winner's stand, and then we'll see what we've been given. Until then, rejoice, because He has told you that in Him you are victorious. Therefore, when you are in Him, you are.

AMEN

Rejoice, the Victory is Yours

Rejoice! Why? Because Christmas is only about a week and a half away? The kids might, and it can't get here soon enough for them. The adults on the other hand, probably are not thinking, "Oh Good! Instead, "It's almost here, and now I have even less time to get ready!"

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But our rejoicing is for even more than that! Jesus has promised that He is going to show Himself again. And it will be even more than that. We will see Him, and that's wonderful in itself, but He's going to restore creation completely, and things will be back to—if not even better, if that is possible—than they were in the Garden of Eden.

Rejoice!

Wait! There's more?

Actually, there is so much more, but you still might have been thinking to yourself, Pastor, I thought you were getting into the sermon. When you start talking about Jesus restoring the Garden of Eden, and talking paradise, that has to be the entry point. It is.

Rejoice, that when Jesus was here, when He was visible for all to see the first time, He had done all He did. It's not just His death and resurrection, not just His pouring out His blood for us. With His entire healing ministry, He was demonstrating what His death and resurrection would accomplish.

It answers the question we might wonder, "Why did Jesus do His miracles?" Was it His compassion? Yes, but that's not all of it. We know His compassion. A couple weeks ago, we called it His bleeding heart. *It has no limits. That's why He had come in the first place. He saw our condition of being separated from Him, our Creator. He saw that this was only death. Death while we were alive and eternal death when we died. He had said, "The day you eat of that fruit, you will surely die." And death came immediately.*

He came because of compassion, what did we call it a couple weeks ago, a bleeding heart. This is why He came. Love and compassion, His bleeding heart, is what led Him to make the promise that He would come in the first place. And while He was here, compassion or His bleeding heart led Him to heal those who suffering. So He healed them. But it was more.

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they would fall an they would have been following Him under false Was He doing it to attract followers? No. He didn't want people to follow Him because He did miracles. That happened after He fed the 5,000 and they came back wanting more of the same. They weren't interested in what He really had. They just wanted to fill their tummies. And if they could have Him around for more things they wanted, all the better. They thought they had found the goose the laid the golden eggs.

What's wrong with letting them think that? That might even sound like good business. In fact, you might have been tempted to look at it like it was a business. Well, it couldn't hurt if He attracted followers this way. They would be interested in what He was doing but then He could set them straight and put them in the right direction.

Yeah...no, it doesn't happen that way. People don't want to be bait and switched. You draw them in with one thing and then switch them over to the real thing you are offering. It doesn't work in the long run.

It doesn't work for church. If people don't come and aren't compelled to stay for the truths that are here and the gifts that are given, then they would be here on false pretenses. Jesus didn't operate on false pretenses. What you saw with Jesus is what you got.

And that is why He was doing all these miracles. They showed He was God. What they had with them was God Himself, the Creator. These miracles made that clear.

Did He do it to show He is God? Yes, and more than that. He showed what was to come. He would one day be victorious and He would redeem all of His creation. One day He would stand on the winner's block, raise His arms and announce His victory. For this we rejoice, because the victory is also ours.

But coming back to earth, this is what is behind John's question. Are you the coming one, the one who will be victorious in the end, or shall we look for another?

It was a good question. John was in prison. Don't forget this. John did what he was supposed to do. He was a pastor And when he saw the king *put He told King Herod he should not divorce his first wife and then take his brother's wife to be his own. Herod claimed to be a devout believer. He made it seem he was willing to be held to the same expectations as other Jews. He*

thought because he was the king, though, he was untouchable. No one would tell him this was wrong.

But John was his pastor. When Herod put his soul in spiritual jeopardy by committing a public sin but showing no repentance for it, John had no choice but to say something. John told him to repent and the next thing John heard was the prison door slam shut. Herod's wife also had no choice. She didn't care what this prophet said, she would not tolerate him meddling in her life. She wasn't going to play Herod's game of acting like a believer. So she had her husband throw John in jail. And that's where John was, in prison.

While was there in prison, people had to be thinking about what Isaiah said about the Messiah in Is 61. They had to be thinking of what Jesus Himself had said when He preached in Nazareth since He used that very passage to say this was talking about Him, that these were His own words. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives."

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But it’s more than just a check list, my friends and fellow saints. It’s describing the era of the Messiah. Once He comes, the era of the Messiah is here. Once He comes and He has done what He came to do, creation will be set free and Jesus will be the victor.

That’s what’s was happening in front of everyone’s eyes. That’s why we rejoice. He’s done it. Isaiah was describing what will happen once the messiah, the Anointed One comes. He’s come. He has done it. Creation is set free. With His death, sin and death were conquered. Can’t you see it? Can you dig it? That’s the age we live in. The age where the messiah has come, and the creation has been set free. The curse of sin is no more.

That’s a hard sell, isn’t it? The curse of sin is no more?

No, I’m not crazy! I’m not lying. I’m not even talking in a special way. All those miracles were showing what He was doing. He was ushering in a new age. Once He died, He had conquered sin and death. They are dead. Death is dead. Sin is defeated. They are powerless against you, each of you, and against me, because you and I have died and our life is now in Christ.

I know. It doesn’t look anything like it. Part of the reason we like celebrating Christmas is because it diverts us from all of the ugly things of this world. We can talk about peace and love and family. But long before the decorations have been put away, the ugliness of the world has crowded back in to remind us it’s still there.

Even now, as we are getting ready for it, we see how ugly things have gotten to be.

Everything seems to have become politicized. Even our response to a pandemic has become in many ways, a political statement. And no matter what side we fall on, we see how life has been impacted by our concern to limit the spread of COVID. Whether all of us are that concerned or not, we’ve been forced to change a lot of things in our lives and we’ve seen a lot of damage. We’ve also seen death and a people gripped with a terrible fear of it.

Our latest election has drawn the lines of division even more. The presidential election is far from being settled, and now the president-elect at this time appears before long he will be coming under fire for allegations related to his son. Although some media people and elected

officials had been referring to these allegations about his son for months, now everyone seems to be getting into the act, threatening the would-be president before he can even be installed.

Furthermore, we've seen a major cultural revolution, and we have become strangers in our own land. We don't recognize where we live anymore because what is considered normal is so far from the normal the Creator would have for His creation.

And the strain of life has had its personal toll. The Lord knows about those strains and has warned us against it, even as we heard last week when He said, "Watch yourself so that you don't become weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness. We've been hearing the stats.

Despite all we see with our eyes, all we experience in our lives, all we feel in our hearts, we have already been promised the victory. All of this has been conquered for us. Think of it like a race. The race is over. The tape has been broken. The line has been crossed. Now it's just a matter of taking the stand on the winner's box. That hasn't happened yet. It seems like a long time getting from the finish line to the winner's box, and it has by our standards, but it doesn't change the fact the race is over. Jesus has already won. He said it is finished, and there isn't anything more for Him to do to win.

Or think of it like a boxing match. Jesus has KO'ed sin, death and the devil. They are lying there lifeless on the mat, but the official hasn't gotten over to lift Jesus' arm and declare Him the winner. It's not like it's in question. It's just that the official pronouncement, when everyone else will see it, hasn't been made yet.

That's coming. In the meantime, He has the victory and when we are in Him, the victory is ours. I'll say that again. When we are in Him, the victory is ours. We are in Him by faith. We were first placed in Him with our baptism, and by faith remain in Him. So, when we are in Him, the victory is ours.

This is why we rejoice when we see the miracles He had done. They showed that He was going to win when it was all over. And then He did.

But it's hard to believe. He knew it was. Many stumble because it doesn't look like victory. They can see all the suffering. They see it all over the world. They see it all around them. They see it in their own lives.

How is this victory? Because He said it was. And He is God. And it's not just because He makes the rules. We saw the victory at the cross. We taste the victory when He gives us His body and blood. He couldn't do that if He lost. These are the tokens of that victory.

We may be joined with all the angels and all the saints who have gone before us in this victory meal, but it still doesn't feel like victory. And it didn't feel like victory for John the way we would think victory. It didn't feel like victory for John's disciples, nor did it feel like victory the

way we think of victory for the apostles. It hasn't felt like victory, the way we think of victory, for any Christian who has ever lived, because they still lived in this world, and they lived in between the time of His victory and the final announcement of it.

That's where we are. It doesn't look like victory, it doesn't feel like it, it's not our experience, but it is our reality. And for this we rejoice. Rejoice! The victory is yours. Rejoice, because you can see what the victory means in the miracles. Rejoice! Because one day He is going to take the winner's stand, and then we'll see what we've been given. Until then, rejoice, because He has told you that in Him you are victorious. Therefore, when you are in Him, you are.
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The curse is broken

Offended by Jesus?

End of OT prophecy

Questions from the Sermon

1. What is the main point of the Bible, and why we don't expect prophecies about our country?
2. Since we are in the last days, how long have we been in them?
3. What happened to Jerusalem and the Temple about 40 years after Jesus ascended?

4. How will most people react when they see the signs in the heavens?
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Answers to questions from the Sermon

1. God's plan of salvation in Jesus
2. Ever since Jesus was here the first time (In Acts 2:17 Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32)
3. The Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans. (70AD)

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