

Christ's Victory Over Satan.

by Edward Payson

Christ's victory over Satan involves his coming upon Satan unawares, taking from him all his armor, and dividing his spoils, transforming the soul into a temple for God.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Isaiah 5:20, Luke 11:21, John 8:44, Acts 26:18, 2 Corinthians 4:4, Ephesians 2:1, Ephesians 6:10, James 4:7, 1 John 3:8

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Redemption Through Christ"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the spiritual warfare between Christ and Satan, illustrating how Jesus, as the stronger man, overcomes the strong man armed by stripping him of his armor and setting free the souls enslaved by darkness. He emphasizes the necessity of Christ's deliverance and redemption to transform the human soul, originally designed as God's dwelling place, from a palace of Satan to a temple of God. Payson urges Christians to remember their past bondage to sin, to pity and pray for those still enslaved, and to be diligent in serving God. He also calls out to the unconverted sinners, warning them of the false peace and security in serving Satan, and encourages them to seek deliverance through Christ's power and grace.

Transcript

"When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace. But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, he taketh from him all his armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils"

Luke 11: 21, 22

this purpose, says St. John, was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. In conformity with this gracious design, we find that he no sooner made his appearance on earth, than he began to cast out Satan, from his strong holds in the bodies of men, by healing those who were possessed, oppressed and vexed with devils; thus exhibiting a glorious and convincing proof of his power and willingness to save those, whose souls were enslaved by these powers of darkness.

The Scribes and Pharisees, however, unable to deny the reality of these miracles, and unwilling to allow his divine authority, blasphemously pretended that he cast out devils by a power derived from Beelzebub; the prince of the devils. In answer to this, our blessed Saviour replies, that every kingdom divided against itself is quickly brought to desolation; and that, therefore, if Satan be divided against himself; if he thus cast out himself as they pretended, his kingdom could not stand, but must soon fall and have an end.

Having thus answered these groundless and impious pretences, he proceeds in our text to spiritualize the subject, by employing it to illustrate the necessity, nature, and design of that deliverance and redemption, which it was the great object of his mission to accomplish. In this passage he gives us to understand, that the soul of every unconverted sinner is a palace, of which Satan, as a strong man armed, keeps an entire and peaceable possession; and that when sinners are convinced and converted, Christ, who alone is stronger than this strong man, strips him of his armor, casts him out and divides his spoils.

To illustrate these particulars, and notice the instruction which they afford, is the design of the following discourse. In the prosecution of this design we would observe, That the human soul may be justly compared to a palace; for it is a most beautiful, noble and magnificent edifice; an edifice formed of imperishable materials; an edifice fearfully, admirably, wonderfully made. It is a house not made with hands, a building of God, the master-piece of the all-wise and all-powerful Architect, who formed and adorned it for his own use.

It is sufficiently capacious to contain not only the whole creation, but even the Creator himself; for it was especially designed to be the earthly residence of that high and holy One, who fills immensity and inhabits eternity. Even now, debased, disfigured and polluted as it is by sin, it bears the evident marks of original grandeur and beauty; and, as the poet observes of Beelzebub, is majestic though in ruins. Of this magnificent and stately structure, thus originally built and adorned for the habitation of God, Satan now, as a strong man armed, keeps possession.

This proposition contains three particulars which deserve our attention: First, we may observe, that of every unrenewed soul, Satan keeps perfect and entire possession. Secondly, he keeps possession as a strong man. Thirdly, he keeps possession as a strong man armed. I. Of every unconverted soul, Satan keeps perfect and entire possession. This is a truth which, however mortifying it may be to our pride, is too plainly taught in the word of God, to be denied by any who acknowledge the divine authority of this sacred volume.

We are there told, that all who live according to the common course of this world, live according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now worketh in the children of disobedience. Hence it appears, that, as God by his Spirit works in Christians both to will and to do, according to his own good pleasure, so Satan, the father of lies, works powerfully and effectually in the hearts of impenitent sinners; causing them to listen to his suggestions, comply with his temptations, and fulfil his designs.

Our blessed Saviour also told the Jews, that they were of their father, the devil, and that the lusts of their father they would do; and to this he adds, that he who committeth sin, is the servant or slave of sin. When Christ called Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles, he gave him a commission to turn them from the power of Satan to God; which evidently proves that in their natural state, they were subject to the power of this arch deceiver and apostate; and that from this power they must be delivered, before they could receive an inheritance among them that are sanctified.

St. Paul himself informs us, that all who oppose the truth are entangled in the snares of Satan, and are led captive by him at his will; and that it is he who blinds the minds of all who believe not, lest the glorious light of the gospel should shine in upon them. From other passages we learn, that it was he who put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ, and tempted Ananias and Sapphira to commit the crime which cost them their lives. In short, so absolute and universal is his control over sinful men, that he is often, both by our Saviour and his apostles, styled the prince, the ruler, and the god of this world.

And, my friends, even if the word of God had been silent on this subject, would not reason and experience have led us to adopt this conclusion? Is it not evident that a large proportion of mankind, conduct as if they were the willing subjects of the father of lies? Are not his laws, which enjoin it upon us to hate our enemies, to revenge insults, to envy rivals, to love the world, to please ourselves, to slander others, to fulfil the desires of the flesh and the mind, to forget our Maker, neglect his word, transgress his commands and reject his Son; incomparably more regarded, more obeyed, than the law of God, which commands us to love our Creator, to do to others as we wish them to do to us, to love him supremely, to forgive and pray for our enemies, to deny ourselves, to renounce the world, take up the cross and follow Christ?

Should this foe of God and man publish a revelation of his own mind and will, issue his orders, and promulgate his decrees to mankind, would he not urge them to live just as they now do? Would he not tell the young to put off the thought of death, to neglect religion, to conform to the world, to give themselves up without restraint to the pursuit of frivolous pleasures and amusements, serving divers lusts and vanities? Would he not charge the middle aged to seek first the good things of this life, instead of the kingdom of God and his righteousness; to lay up treasures on earth and not in heaven; to rise early, sit up late, and eat the bread of carefulness; and put off religion to old age?

Would he not command all ages and ranks in society to spend the Sabbath in idleness; in reading foolish, frivolous or pernicious books; in transacting, or at least thinking of their worldly business; in unprofitable visits or useless conversation; instead of employing it in attending to the great things which concern their everlasting peace? Would he not charge them when in the house of God, to let their thoughts wander after vanities, to neglect or forget the truth which is proclaimed, or to apply it to their neighbors instead of themselves?

Would he not enjoin it upon them to neglect the word of God, and to trust in their own righteousness; or assure them, as he did our first parents, that though they transgress and eat forbidden fruit, yet they shall not surely die? Would he not especially charge those who begin to think seriously of religion, to dismiss all such melancholy and superstitious fancies, and either to give themselves no concern respecting eternity, or at least defer it to a more convenient season?

In a word, would he not direct mankind to love themselves supremely, to do their own pleasure, obey their own inclinations, seek their own exaltation profit and honor, and, without regarding what God has said, to cast off his fear and restrain prayer before him, walking in the way of their own hearts, and according to the sight of their own eyes? Yes, my friends, these are the secret wishes of Satan, these would be his commands, should he publish a code of laws; and hence it is but too evident that mankind obey him, that he is the god of this world, and keeps entire possession of every unconverted soul.

But, II. Of such souls he keeps possession as a strong man. This will appear evident if we consider that he can neither be restrained, subdued, or driven out by any created power. 1st. By created power he cannot be restrained or subdued. In the story of the man among the tombs, who was possessed by an evil spirit, we are told that he was often bound with chains and fetters, yet he easily broke all these bonds, so that no man could tame or subdue him. So it is with those of whose souls Satan keeps possession; they can be bound or restrained by no laws or regulations, human or divine.

Their language concerning the Son of God is, We will not have this man to reign over us. Let us break his bands asunder and cast away his cords from us. In vain does God present to their breasts the curse of the law, like a flaming sword; they rush upon its sharp point and are sure to perish. In vain does he place

before them the fire that never shall be quenched; they throw themselves headlong into its devouring flames. In vain does he endeavor to bind them with the bands of gratitude and the cords of love; they break them, as Samson broke the cords of the Philistines, with which he was bound.

In vain does he endeavor to restrain them by the warnings of conscience, and the remonstrances of his Spirit; they regard them no more than the spider's web. If divine restraints are thus insufficient, it cannot be expected that human laws will avail. Though by the aid of prisons, scourges and gibbets, external crimes may be partially prevented, yet where is the lawgiver to be found, who has been able to restrain wandering thoughts, to keep down the secret workings of envy, pride, selfishness and revenge; or even to chain up a false and slanderous tongue?

And as neither divine nor human laws can restrain or subdue the strong man, who reigns in the sinner's breast, so neither can the sinner himself effect this, by any exertions of his own. It is true, indeed, he could do this if he would; but alas he has no will to do it, for his will is entirely on the side of Satan, who has bound it in fetters, too strong to be broken. He is not only a captive, but a willing captive. He is pleased with his slavery, and fancies there is music in the rattling of his chains.

Like the Jews, he is ready to say, I was never in bondage; and, like them, he has no wish to be free; so that he alone who says to the roaring billows, Thus far shall ye come and no farther, is able to restrain the rage and malice of Satan, and lay his hand on the strong corruptions of the human heart. III. If no created power can bind or restrain the strong man who reigns in the sinner's heart, much less can this power prevail to cast him out. This the ministers of Christ too often find by painful experience.

They, call upon sinners in the name of the Lord, to turn from their evil ways and live; but the god of this world, the strong man armed, blinds their eyes, stops their ears, and hardens their hearts, so that they call in vain. Like our Saviour's disciples when he was upon the mount, they charge this dumb and deaf spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, to come out; but he ridicules their authority, and laughs at their efforts. In vain do they employ threatenings and promises, commands and entreaties, arguments and motives, prayers and tears.

The strong man still keeps possession, notwithstanding their most vigorous efforts. Without divine assistance, Paul and Apollos may labor in vain, and spend their strength for naught. Still less can the moralist or the philosopher force him from his palace. They may declaim eloquently and copiously on the beauty and fitness of virtue, and the deformity of vice; but it is like attempting to charm the deaf adder, who will not hear, or regard the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely.

Even the sinner himself cannot cast out this powerful tyrant, who has obtained such complete dominion over him. True indeed, as we observed before, he is so well pleased with his bondage, that he seldom wishes for or seeks deliverance. But at times, conscience alarms him by her reproaches; he finds that the ways of transgressors are hard; he dreads what the end of these things will be; and therefore forms some weak resolutions, and makes some faint efforts, to root out the tyrant of his breast, and recover his liberty.

But if these efforts are made in his own strength, they are always in vain; and, like all ineffectual efforts to throw off the yoke of oppression, they only render it more grievous and difficult to break. Even if the evil spirit appears to be cast out for a time, and an external reformation takes place, he soon returns, bringing with him seven other spirits, still more wicked; so that the latter end of such a man is worse than the first. With the utmost propriety, therefore, may Satan, who thus keeps possession of the sinner's heart, be represented as a strong man.

But, IV. He keeps possession, not only as a strong man, but as a strong man armed. He has his armor, both offensive and defensive; and with this he defends and fortifies his palace in the soul, and attempts to make it strong against the Captain of our salvation. This armor is directly the reverse of that Christian armor which St. Paul describes, in his Epistle to the Ephesians. Instead of being girded with the girdle of truth, he girds the sinner with the girdle of error, falsehood and deceit.

Instead of the breastplate of Christ's righteousness, he furnishes him with a breastplate of his own fancied righteousness, goodness and morality. Instead of the shield of faith, which the Christian possesses, the sinner has the shield of unbelief; and with this he defends himself against the threatenings and curses of the law, and all the arrows of conviction, which are aimed at him by the ministers of Christ. Instead of having on for a helmet the hope of salvation, by faith in the Saviour's blood, Satan furnishes his subjects with a false hope of obtaining salvation at last, let them live as they please; and instead of the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, he teaches them to wield the sword of a tongue set on fire of hell, and furnishes them with a magazine of cavils, sneers, excuses and objections, with which they attack religion and defend themselves.

He also builds for them many refuges of lies, in which, as in a strong castle, they fondly hope to shelter themselves from the wrath of God. Having thus shown that the unrenewed soul is a palace, of which Satan, as a strong man armed, keeps possession, we proceed to observe, V. That while he thus keeps possession, his goods, or in other words, his subjects, are at peace. Not, however, that impenitent sinners now enjoy, or ever will enjoy true peace of mind; for there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.

No, they are constantly and anxiously seeking rest, and vainly inquiring, who will show us any good? and their repeated disappointments, cares and perplexities, together with their unruly appetites, passions and desires, render their minds like the troubled sea which cannot rest. But the peace which the subjects of Satan enjoy, consists in these two particulars: (1.) They are seldom if ever much alarmed respecting their own salvation. Like madmen, who fancy themselves kings and emperors, the sinner thinks that he is rich and increased in goods, and has need of nothing; and does not in the least suspect that he is poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked.

He has a good opinion of himself, suspects no danger, thinks little of death or eternity; or if he does, fancies that he is already prepared, and that there is no cause of anxiety or alarm. True he may, occasionally, notwithstanding his armor, be slightly wounded by the arrows of conviction, or he may hear the curses and terrors of the law proclaimed by God's ministers, when they lift up their voices as a trumpet, to warn him of his transgressions; but he listens to them as to the noise of distant thunder, which, though it rolls over the heads of others, threatens no danger to himself, and is quickly forgotten amid the hurry and bustle of worldly pursuits. (2.)

The sinner enjoys peace, because there is nothing in his soul to take the part of God against Satan, and thus produce intestine war and commotion. All his powers and faculties are leagued against God, on the side of sin, unless we except his conscience, and this soon becomes seared and stupefied; so that its voice is seldom heard. There is consequently in the sinner's breast none of that inward warfare which the Christian feels, no lusting of the flesh against the spirit, and of the spirit against the flesh.

In this respect all is calm and peaceful within, but, alas, it is the calmness and peace of spiritual death. His understanding, his will, his affections and imagination are all chained up in spiritual bondage, darkness and death. The foe of God and man reigns supreme and uncontrolled on the throne of his heart; all his

mental and corporeal faculties are so many instruments of unrighteousness, to displease and dishonor his Maker; yet he is careless and secure, suspects no danger, and, while hardening himself against God, hopes to prosper.

Such is the deplorable situation of every unawakened, impenitent sinner; and such it ever will be, unless Christ, who is stronger than the strong man armed, by the power of his Spirit and grace, comes upon him, overcomes him, takes from him his armor, and divides his spoils. In the description here given of the great and glorious victory which Christ obtains over the god of this world, when he casts him out from the soul of which he has taken possession, we may notice, in the first place, that he comes upon him unawares.

Never does the sinner begin to seek Christ, unless Christ begins to seek the sinner; for we are assured there are none who ever seek after God. But when our blessed Saviour comes with the godlike design of delivering the captive from the hand of the mighty, he girds on his sword, and rides forth prosperously in his chariot of salvation, arrayed in meekness, truth and righteousness; and in a moment when the sinner perhaps least expects or wishes it, he suddenly feels the arrows of conviction sharp in his heart.

Then his false peace is at an end. Conscience no longer sleeps; he no longer hears as though he heard not; the blind eyes begin to open, the stony heart begins to melt. The weapons of Christ's ministers, which are not carnal but spiritual, then become mighty, through God, to cast down all his high thoughts and imaginations, and he for the first time finds himself a poor, miserable, helpless captive, a wretched, self-condemned sinner; and all within is remorse, anxiety and alarm.

Again: In farther carrying on this glorious work, the Captain of our salvation takes from the strong man armed all the armor in which he trusted. He strips the sinner of the breastplate of self-righteousness, causes the shield of unbelief to fall from his hand, takes away the false hopes of salvation which composed his helmet, quenches the fiery sword of an inflamed tongue, scatters all his magazines of cavils, excuses and objections, and beats down the refuges of lies in which he trusted.

Once more: Satan being thus baffled and disarmed, the triumphant conqueror proceeds to divide his spoils. The soul, which was once his palace, is transformed into the habitation of Christ, and a meet temple for the Holy Spirit of God. All his mental and corporeal faculties are now transformed into instruments of righteousness, to serve and glorify God. His time, his talents, his property, himself and all that he has, are consecrated to the work of obedience and praise. This is the work, and these the spoils of the conqueror.

My friends, what a glorious change is here! That soul, which was once the palace, the castle and strong hold of Satan, the den of every unclean and hateful lust, is now the temple of God, and filled with the graces of his Spirit. The wretched slaves of sin, chained up in spiritual darkness and death, ignorant of their danger, pleased with their situation, and not even wishing to be delivered, are now brought into the glorious light and liberty, and adopted as the children of God.

The distracted sinner, who, like the man possessed among the tombs, once madly endeavored to wound and eternally destroy his own soul, by his vices, now sits as a humble disciple at the feet of Jesus, clothed with his righteousness, adorned with his graces, and in his right mind. Surely none but God alone can produce a change as happy and glorious as this. Surely there may well be joy in heaven to behold it. Permit me now, by way of improvement, to remind you, my Christian friends, who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, of the time when Satan, as a strong man armed, kept possession of your hearts, and led you captive at his will, while you were at peace and feared no danger.

Remember how you were then pleased and satisfied with your bondage; how you loved darkness; how long you resisted and grieved the Spirit of God; how you were wont to say to him who came to accomplish your deliverance, What have we to do with thee? Remember these things and then consider what you owe to Him who has done such great things for you. Remember these things, and then consider how you ought to pity and pray for those miserable captives who are yet in that deplorable bondage, exposed to endless perdition, and yet are at peace and satisfied with their condition.

Remember these things, and let the remembrance increase your humility, inflame your love, and animate your soul, and cause you to be as active, cheerful, diligent, and persevering in the service of God, as you formerly were in the service of Satan. From those who have been brought out of darkness and slavery. into the glorious liberty of the children of God, we would next turn to those who are still in the gall of bitterness and bonds of iniquity. You are perhaps ready, my friends, to pity, if not despise the Christian, on account of the restraints and obligations under which he is laid by his belief; but in reality, he has infinitely more reason to pity and weep over you.

The service of the Christian is perfect liberty; for Christ's commandments are not grievous, but his yoke is easy and his burden light. His service also is honorable, and will receive a rich reward; for he serves the King of kings and Lord of lords; who will give him a crown of glory and eternal life. But you, who boast of your liberty, are enslaved in worse than Egyptian bondage. You serve and obey the father of lies; you live just as he would have you, and he doubtless exults, with diabolical joy and triumph, to see his miserable victims, whom he leads captive at his will, proud and pleased with their chains, and running thoughtless and secure the broad road to ruin.

But his service, which you thus love is not only base and dishonorable, but ruinous and destructive; for the wages he bestows is eternal death. Yet by his diabolical art he has so blinded your minds, that you believe not. You think there is no danger; the gospel is hid from you, as it is from those who are lost; and unless the blessed Redeemer, who is stronger than the strong man armed, should see fit in infinite mercy, to come and open your eyes, and turn you from the power of Satan to God, you will continue careless and secure, conformed to the world, and pursuing its pleasures, riches and honors, till you open your eyes too late in eternity.

From this state, my friends, we cannot deliver you. We cannot even convince you that you are in such a state, and probably many of you have heard the present discourse, without the smallest suspicion that it is a description of your own character and situation. But this false peace and security, instead of proving that you are safe, only proves more clearly your danger. It proves that the strong man armed is not disturbed in his possession, but that he keeps you in peace. Another thing which clearly proves this, is, that even now you are using the armor of the god of this world, to defend yourselves against the truth which we are delivering.

Some of you are putting on as a defense, the breastplate of self-righteousness, and pretending that you cannot possibly be so bad as is now represented. Others are holding up the shield of unbelief to defend themselves against the terrors of the law, and resolving that they will not believe their situation to be such as has now been, described, or that the word of God is literally and strictly true. Others again are putting on the helmet of a false hope of salvation, though they continue in sin; while some, perhaps, are ready to bring forward the magazine of cavils, objections and excuses with which the father of lies furnishes them.

But, my friends, if any of you are trusting to this armor, you are trusting to the armor of Satan; and though it may defend you from the arrows of conviction now, yet it will not defend you, hereafter, against those bolts of divine indignation, which will fall, like blasting lightnings, on the head of the guilty. There will be no unbelief in hell, for even the devils believe and tremble. Instead then of uniting with the foe of God and mail to destroy your own souls, by madly hardening yourselves against God, and contending with the Almighty, let me entreat you instantly to throw down the weapons of your rebellion, and cry earnestly to Him who is able to save; to deliver you from the strong man armed, who now keeps possession of your souls.

This he is ever willing and ready to do; for it was the great object of his coming on earth, as he himself declares The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captive, and to set at liberty them that are bruised. Awake then to a sense of your situation; no longer indulge that false peace which will prove your destruction; but awake; arise; make a struggle for liberty now, or expect to remain forever the slaves of Satan, prisoners in the regions of despair, under chains of everlasting darkness.

Trust not however to your own struggles, but apply to Him who alone is able to overcome the god of this world. Look to Him for help, and you will not be disappointed, for his grace is sufficient for you. And you, my Christian friends, if you have relatives who are possessed by a dumb spirit, so that they will not pray, or a deaf spirit, so that they will not hear, or who have been long bound as it were in fetters of brass, by the powers of darkness, bring them to Jesus. Cry unto him like the woman of Canaan, Lord Jesus have mercy and heal my friends, who are ensnared, enslaved and vexed by an evil spirit; and though he appear to heed you not, to treat you unkindly, or to give you no answer, yet be not discouraged. Continue to plead, and hope all things from his infinite compassion.

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