
The Victory of God

SCOTT HOEZEE

We often sing of the victory of God: Won for us in Christ Jesus our Lord; in fact, many of us know the well-known hymn: *Victory in Jesus*. We sing of how on the cross... and then, after the resurrection, Jesus achieved victory over sin and death and the devil and hell; and that is, of course, a perfectly wonderful truth to celebrate; but often, we celebrate mostly what all that means for *us*; for those of us who are already in the Church; but in Luke's gospel, we are regularly reminded that the victory of God that Jesus brought had just as much to do with those who are outsiders. Today on *Groundwork*, we will explore this as part of our study of the Gospel of Luke. Stay tuned.

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And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is now the fifth program of our six-part series on the Gospel of Luke; and so far, in addition to the big overview of the book, we have looked at the role of the Holy Spirit, the theme of economic justice, prayer in the Gospel of Luke, the theme of how when Jesus came, he brought the ultimate year of Jubilee; and now, Darrell, in this fifth program, we are going to look at the victory of God in Luke, and how that victory meant over and over that those who have long been marginalized, or who were on the sidelines of society and of religion, they got brought back into the center of things.

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So, what I love about Luke is that Luke is a very inclusive writer. He wants to make sure that we do not lose track of those who have been silenced by society, who have been on the fringe; and he often brings them back to the center to show that God loves them as well. So, I love the fact that he is making sure that we understand the victory is not just for those who are close to God, so to speak, but those who are afar off as well.

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Here is Luke 5:12: While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." ¹³Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him. ¹⁴Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them." ¹⁵Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

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Yes; and it says: ¹¹Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹²As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" ¹⁴When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priest." And as they went, they were cleansed. ¹⁵One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

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So, Darrell, here are two classic healing stories involving people who had what in Jesus’ day was one of the more dreaded conditions you could ever contract. Leprosy. It was some kind of a degenerative skin disease that was thought to be, you know, sufficiently contagious that lepers were literally ostracized. They were not supposed to mingle in crowds. They were seen as ceremonially unclean. Such as, if you touched a leper, even if you didn’t get leprosy, you were religiously and spiritually unclean and you would have to engage in some fairly elaborate cleansing rituals before you would be allowed back to the temple, or even out and about in society. So, this is a really bad condition.

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And get out of the way so they don’t come into physical contact with a leper. So, they always felt alone and isolated and rejected. So, people would just...they looked at them...they looked away. They didn’t want to have any contact with them; and this is the situation that Jesus intentionally...he, by his love and compassion, becomes “contaminated” by this by touching in the first story, and forgiving in the second story.

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Yes; I mean, in Luke, Jesus is always extending his hands. In fact, the great Bible commentator, Frederick Dale Bruner, once said that if you wanted an image to accompany the Gospel of Luke, think about, like a Rembrandt-style painting, which was like a study...a closeup study...of Jesus' hands. There was healing power in those hands; and so, even when confronted, as you just said, Darrell, with an unclean leper, in Luke 5, Jesus doesn't do what everybody else did: rear back; shoo the man away; "Keep your distance; I have to preserve my own cleanliness. Get away!" No; he just reaches out and touches the man; but you know, we have said before on *Groundwork*, Darrell, with Jesus the contagion of Jesus' holiness was always stronger than the contagion of any diseases you could name. Not only did Jesus touch this man, but not only was Jesus not made sick or even unclean, he made the leper whole. So, it went the other way. Usually, you touch a leper, uncleanness goes to you. Here, Jesus touches the leper, Jesus' cleanness goes to him.

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And just imagine how the leper felt to be touched. He humanized the leper by touching him. It is establishing a wholeness and a restoration that is probably a pain deep down in his soul. He probably has not been touched his life; and so, the fact that Jesus is willing to make that connection with him...

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Yes; why? Because that was it. The priest would say: You are clean; and there were some rituals to do. So, he would restore the leper physically, but also religiously and socially. You know, I don't think we, Darrell, always appreciate what even that part must have meant to these lepers. I mean, some of us remember the COVID lockdown in 2020. Now, for me, my wife is an essential worker; so, during the COVID lockdown, she went to work every day, and I stayed home; and some days, she would come home and say: Oh, man; I

had several people interrupt me today and come to my office; and I was like: don't, don't, don't say that to me. I have been home alone all day with the dog. I don't see anybody. Well, imagine that these guys were in that situation for years and decades. So, to get restored to society—to where people could touch them, as you just said—boy oh, boy; that must have been amazingly liberating for them.

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Yes; so, the first time in the leper's life he has people looking at him. He has people talking to him. He has people sitting next to him and shaking his hand and touching him. This stuff might have been super redemptive for him to experience because he probably had not experienced it his whole life. So, it is really powerful to see that the Lord was able to give him this restoration; and then, in Luke 17, we see that there are ten who were healed...

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And it is the Samaritan. Again, that is the kicker—the despised one is the one who shows more gratitude, Jesus says, than he had even seen in Israel. But again, the same thing, right? Jesus says: Go show yourself to the priest; and on their way to the priest, they get healed. So, it is not the instant healing of the one in the other story, but basically the same thing; but the point being, again, here are ten men who have been on the outskirts...who have been on the outs...who have not been able to see family, friends; or if they did see them, you know, it was from a distance. No hugs, no kisses from loved ones. Who knows if some of these people got leprosy later in life and had had family and kids and they couldn't see them; but now, Jesus has healed them and he has restored them.

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So, in this episode, Darrell, we are talking about the victory of God and the salvation of God; and how, in Luke's gospel, again and again and again, it is those who are the most marginalized who get brought back into the center of all things. There are other examples of this in Luke's gospel. So, in just a moment, we are going to look at a little bit more of that. So, stay tuned.

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Segment 2

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And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, as we continue looking at what the victory of God in Christ Jesus looked like to those on the fringes of society and religion, we have two stories we are going to look at in this segment. One from Luke 7 and one from the very next chapter, Luke 8. Here is the first story. This is Luke 7: When (at the very beginning of the chapter) When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. ²There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. ³The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, ⁵because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." ⁶So Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. ⁷That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁸For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and (I say to) that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." ⁹When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel." ¹⁰Then the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.

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So, we have a situation here where this centurion sends his servant to say: Hey, we need somebody healed here; and the fact that we are talking about Jews and centurions...so, there is a racial difference here, and there is a challenge there because the Roman government is oppressing Israel. So, the people hearing this might have felt some type of way about this whole dynamic. Why would Jesus even do something like this?

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Yes; we hear the word *centurion* and we don’t bat an eye, but *centurion* reminds you of the English word *century*; and indeed, it has to do with the... So, a century is one hundred years; a centurion was in charge of one hundred soldiers. And these were...it was kind of the tightest group in the Roman army, Darrell...and these were the on-the-ground troops who were in charge of keeping order. So, Rome was an occupying force in Israel, and the centurion was in charge of one hundred soldiers who kept order; and they were known to be sometimes brutal. They were known sometimes to shake people down for bribes and for money and protection money. So, if you hear the word *centurion* in Jesus’ day, that would make your skin crawl; and then, the centurion’s servant is sick, so what? Let him die. This is the enemy, right? These people don’t care, even though the centurion is said to be a good guy, and boy he helped build a synagogue for us. He was still the enemy; and yet, Jesus does care. Jesus himself does not bat an eye to help this centurion and his servant.

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Here is what happened. So, the centurion says send a word, and if you send a word, I know you are busy; you don’t have to come all the way to my house; and so, Jesus marvels at the faith of this person, and Luke often brings up...like we said before, how people who are far away from God, people who are a different ethnicity...they showed more faithfulness than the people of Israel, who are supposed to have all the prophecies, have all the promises, and they are God’s people. They are missing the Messiah walking before them, and this centurion guy understands that it is this faith that needs to happen. So, it is really that Luke

always brings that irony right to the forefront, and it would really zing a Jewish person to hear this story and listen to this because of how they felt about the centurions and Roman guards.

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anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. ⁵²Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep." ⁵³They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. ⁵⁴But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" ⁵⁵Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat. ⁵⁶Her parents were astonished, but he ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

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So, Darrell, in this story, we have what amounts to two dead women, who are united by the number twelve. We have a 12-year-old little girl who is dying and who does die; and we have a woman who for twelve years has been socially marginalized due to another ceremonially unclean condition of essentially her monthly menstrual period, which never stops. So, this woman is socially and religiously dead, just like the lepers we looked at earlier in this episode. And as with the lepers, so the fact that this woman secretly touches Jesus, that technically makes Jesus unclean, but we are told that the crowd is shoulder to shoulder; so that would mean that everybody she touched, she made them unclean, too; and boy, if you want to have a crowd turn on somebody with anger, that could easily have happened. Somebody could easily have suggested to haul her away and stone her to death or something; but again, as we saw with the lepers, Jesus' power of holiness is stronger than the contagion of unholiness and she gets healed just by touching Jesus. Jesus wasn't even aware of it. He didn't even say anything. She touched... I mean, Jesus is like, radioactive with holiness. She touches him and she gets healed.

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And he is interrupted by something else that needs to be addressed. So, it is interesting that there are two different issues happening, and Jesus is trying to figure out who is it that touched him, because he feels the power go out from him. Now, this woman has been restored. So, she ends up coming to tell him this, and Jesus is letting her know that not only is she restored of this issue, but she is restored socially. So, the victory in Jesus that we see here...the victory in the theme of this episode...we see with this woman experiencing

restoration, not only physically but socially.

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You know, the woman who had been the subject of bleeding Jesus calls *her* “daughter”. That, again, if you want to talk about her social restoration, this woman who had been marginalized, he calls her a daughter, then he takes the young child who literally is Jairus’ daughter... And of course, when Jesus touches the corpse, that makes him unclean technically too, but again, no worries. The little girl is restored.

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I think, Darrell, what we can summarize so far, the victory of God is sweetest for those who first know the bitterness of rejection and isolation. In a moment, we are just going to round out this program with some concluding observations about all of this. So, stay tuned for that.

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Segment 3

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DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*; and we are going to pick right back up with the last part of this program from a passage in Luke 13. It says: ¹⁰On a Sabbath, Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, ¹¹and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. ¹²When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, “Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.” ¹³Then he placed his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. ¹⁴Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, “There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath.” ¹⁵The Lord answered him, “You hypocrites! Doesn’t each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? ¹⁶Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?” ¹⁷When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were delighted with all the wonderful things he was doing.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Darrell, this is one of multiple examples in all four of the gospels of Jesus doing a wonderful work of healing, and getting criticized on account of it being the Sabbath day. You know, but it is difficult to imagine something more fitting for a day set aside to honor God and God’s redemption of all things, than seeing something that was broken being made whole again. That is the kind of thing you should want to see on the Sabbath day, but the religious leaders counted even a healing as work, and no rule was more inviolate and sacrosanct to them than *not* working on the Sabbath, so Jesus ends up getting dinged for healing a woman who had been stricken for eighteen years. So again, Jesus pulls somebody whose condition had sidelined her, and he pulls her back into the center of things; and like with the woman with the bleeding we just saw in the previous part of the program, he calls her a daughter of Abraham, shaming those holier-than-thou religious leaders who thought that giving their donkey something to drink was more important on the Sabbath than healing this daughter of Abraham.

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DARRELL DELANEY

So, Jesus actually zings them twice, because: 1) He explains how the letter of the law is not more important than this person, proving what Mark* talks about, how the Sabbath is made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 2) They made an exception for the donkey, but they were not able to make an exception for a real person, who is a daughter of Abraham. So, Jesus is making it clear that, oh, so, it is okay for you to make exceptions, but we cannot make exceptions to help a real person here. So, that is why they were humiliated, but he is showing that the victory...and this is what I was thinking about between segments...this is victory of God through Christ; it goes against these regulations that were set in place, because the image-bearer is more important—the person restored to God and to the community is much more important than the letter of the law at this moment; and Jesus, who gave them the law, is able to override it whenever he needs to.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and when I think about what we have been looking at in this program from Luke, Luke, of course, also wrote the book of Acts, and so, it makes you think of Peter's great sermon on Pentecost in Acts 2, where Peter says, beginning in verse 36 of Acts 2: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." ³⁷When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

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He is showing that everyone who is far off, no matter if you are Samaritan, no matter if you are female, no matter if you are a centurion—Roman; no matter who you are, God loves you and God wants to help you and restore you. That is the victory that everyone gets to rejoice in together; and when Jesus resurrects, he removes the separation between Jew and Gentile; and Luke has given us a foretaste of that in these miracles that happen.

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removes the separation between Jew and Gentile; and Luke has given us a foretaste of that in these miracles that happen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, how can we do this? How can we bear in mind the victory of God's salvation that the Church proclaims is for, not just us on the inside but the far off...how can we do this? Well, three final takeaways here, Darrell: One, like Jesus, we need to *see* those who are outside first. You know, Darrell, the thing about people who exist on the fringes and the margins of society, they are sometimes what we call the invisible people. You are never going to be able to invite the outsiders in if you don't even know who they are or see them in the first place. Different places have different outsiders...different groups. So, we need to know our own communities, but the first step is, see these people; know who they are; know that they exist. That is step one.

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DARRELL DELANEY

And *Adonai Ro'i* is one of God's names. It means the Lord who sees me. It is very important that we follow him in that. Another thing we need to do, once we see who these people are, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us overcome whatever biases, whatever squeamishness, whatever these things that happen inside of us that keep us from befriending and making this division between us and them. Those are the things that make it hard for us to see them, to love them, and to welcome them into the community.

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I mean, we don't have probably quite the elaborate purity and holiness and cleanliness codes that the Pharisees had back in Jesus' day that made them loathe to reach out to other people, but we have our own scruples, we have our own things of people that we would just as soon not associate with; and yes, as you said, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us overcome that.

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Unfortunately, when you decide to shine your light as bright as God called you to, that light is going to hurt the eyes of some of the people around you; and they are going to want you to...you are going to make...they are going to feel like: Oh, you are making me look bad; or they are going to feel self-conscious when they see you shining your light as bright as you are called to shine it; and unfortunately, when people acquiesce into the status quo, they don't want to be challenged; they don't want to be stretched; they don't want to be pushed; and God is always going to be moving us out of our comfort zones if we are following Jesus.

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SCOTT HOEZEE

So, the victory of God, as we said at the top of the program, is the greatest thing we celebrate in worship every week, but Luke challenges us to remember it is not just for us, it is for all who are far off; thanks be to God.

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