

He Chose to Give Us Victory

1. The victory accomplished through Christ's death and resurrection is sometimes referred to as the "paschal mystery." The word *paschal* (*pas-kuhl*) comes from the Greek word for *Passover*, the Jewish remembrance of when the angel of death "passed over" the Hebrew families prior to their Exodus from slavery in Egypt (see Exodus 12:13, 23).

The lamb sacrificed and eaten at Jewish Passover celebrations was the paschal lamb, a term New Testament writers also use for Christ (see John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7). The paschal mystery encompasses God's hidden plan of salvation revealed in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. In his first letter to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul summarizes the events of the paschal mystery when he writes: "Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said" (1 Cor 15:3-4 NLT).

The Paschal mystery is also understood as the recurring pattern of God's transforming work in our lives: that some form of death always precedes new life—and that death never has the last word. Speaking of the life that would follow his own death, Jesus said to his disciples: "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives" (John 12:24 NLT).

- For a seed, there is life on both sides of death (planting), but each life is a very different kind. What three words and phrases would you use to describe the life of the seed before death? What three words or phrases would you use to describe the life that follows death?
 - What parallels do you recognize between life on either side of death for the seed and the before-and-after life human beings experience whenever we encounter some form of death (a tragedy, a personal struggle, a choice to deny ourselves, etc.)? In what ways might the same two sets of words and phrases you used for seeds also apply to the human experience on either side of a death?
 - Overall, what does God's paschal pattern—in the natural world and in the life of Christ—suggest about what "victory" is when we experience some form of death in our lives?
2. Author and Pastor Eugene Peterson comments on God's paschal work in our lives when he writes, "All suffering, all pain, all emptiness, all disappointment is seed: sow it in God and he will, finally, bring a crop of joy from it."
 - If we think of the hardships and losses of this life as seeds, we have at least three options for what we can do with them: (1) we can cling to our seeds and refuse to sell them; (2) we can sow our seeds in God; or (3) we can sow our seeds in something other than God. In practical terms, how would you describe what it means to follow through on each option?
 - Of the three options, which comes closest to describing your tendency when you are in a season of hardship? Are you more likely to clean to life as it is, surrender yourself to God in faith, or try to bury yourself in distractions or self-defeating behaviors?

3. Speaking of Jesus's empty grave clothes, Max said, “God took a token of tragedy and turned it into a symbol of triumph.” We all face tragedy and hardships, but the promise of Scripture is that God is always at work to bring victory at new life, even from the rags of death. The apostle Paul writes:

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. . . . Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? . . . No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. (Romans 8:28, 35, 37)

The phrase translated “overwhelming victory” is a compound of two Greek words, *hyper* and *nikaō*. *Nikaō* means “to be victorious,” and *hyper* is an intensifier of whatever it precedes: “Overwhelming victory [*hypernikaō*] is ours through Christ, who loved us” (Romans 8:37 NLT).

You may be familiar with the Greek word *nikē*, the noun form of *nikaō* which means “victory.” The Apostle John uses both words when he writes: “Everyone who is a child of God conquers [*nikaō*] the world. And this is the victory [*nikē*] that conquers [*nikaō*] the world—our faith” (1 John 5:4 NCV).

- Based on how the apostles Paul and John describe the victory that is ours, how would you describe its opposite, *defeat*? In other words, how might we refuse or thwart our victory, perhaps especially when we are suffering?
- Trusting that God is always at work for our good does not mean pretending we don't feel the pain or loss or that everything in life is beautiful when it's not. Jesus never flinched from acknowledging the reality of suffering; instead, he gave us a reason to hope in an even deeper reality. We get a glimpse of both reality and deeper reality in the words Jesus spoke to his disciples after preparing them for his own impending death:

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33 NLT).

If living in victory is possible even in the midst of “many trials and sorrows,” how would you describe what that victory is?

In what ways, if any, have you experienced the deeper reality Jesus describes?

4. At the end of the video, Max suggested a simple exercise. Think for a moment about Paul's words: “In everything God works for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8: 28). Remove the word *everything* and replace it with whatever symbolizes a tragedy or hardship in your life. For example, “In hospital stays God works for the good,” “In divorce papers God works for the good,” “In prison terms God works for the good.” How would you complete the sentence? In _____ God works for the good.