

Victory
Part 4: Victory over Brokenness
April 18th & 19th, 2015

When I dream of the kind of community that Jesus has called us to be...and pray that He is shaping us to become, Paul's words in Colossians chapter three come to mind, where he provides a breath-taking vision of God's heart for his church!

We've been looking at the victory Jesus Christ has given us over things such as condemnation, sin, and death. And it's been wonderful to consider...and yet I know by my own experience and through countless conversations with other Christians, that there can be a massive gap in our lives between **knowing about** the victory we have in Christ, and **experiencing** that victory firsthand!

As we close our series today, I want to encourage you by sharing what I believe will enable us to move from a knowledge of the victory Christ has given us to a day-by-day experience of that victory...

And Paul describes it for us in beginning in vs. 12...

"Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves. 3:12

Notice the text doesn't say, "God chose you to be the holy person (singular) he loves, but the holy people (pl.) he loves." **Does God love you as a person? Yes he does!** At the same time, while God loves us individually, historically God has worked out his good purposes and plans in his people as they live together in community...

I'll show you this in Scripture...

Adam and Eve: For example...Genesis chapter two...God created Adam and placed him in the garden. Now, there's no shortage of things for Adam to see or do, yet God says, "It's not good for man to be **alone...**" *If we don't bring someone alongside this guy, there's going to be way too much ESPN and very little productivity!* So...God created Eve...and told them to get to work stewarding and filling the earth. So from the very beginning, we find **community**.

Abraham: In Genesis chapter twelve God spoke to Abraham. Now, He didn't say... "My boy Abe...you and me are going to save the world!" Instead, God said, "Go to the land I will show you and I will make you into a **great nation** with descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and grains of sand on the shore! **That's community language!**

Israel: Abraham's family eventually lands in Egypt as slaves, and moved by their cries for help, God called Moses to rescue his **people**. Do you remember what God said to Moses? "I am the God of your father – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob...now go, you must lead my **people Israel** out of Egypt... **Community with a name!**

Victory
Part 4: Victory over Brokenness
April 18th & 19th, 2015

New Testament: When we get to the New Testament, Jesus furthers this idea of a community. He didn't choose to disciple one elite protégé to change the world. Instead, Jesus spent his entire ministry with twelve ordinary men, teaching and showing them what it meant to be *citizens of the Kingdom of God* and eventually sending them out to change the world as the church...the community of Jesus! A people rescued by Jesus Christ, purchased with his blood, and knit together so intricately and intimately in our love for Jesus and his mission that we are described as *members of the Body of Christ*... the visible manifestation of our Lord, Jesus, on this earth...

As we live in the community of Jesus, filled with His Spirit, celebrating Christ, loving one another, encouraging, serving, forgiving...confessing sin to one another...we begin to experience victory in our day-to-day lives over condemnation, sin, shame, fear, despair, hopelessness...

Truth: Victory becomes Reality when we live in Community!

In a moment, I'll explain why this is...but first, I want to suggest that for many of us, our natural bent is not to draw near to the community of Jesus. I'll give you two reasons why this is...

#1: Individualism – First...as a society, we are in the process of moving away from community and toward individualism.

Bowling Alone – 15 years ago, Robert Putnam, a professor at Harvard, wrote a book called *Bowling Alone*, in which he studied social trends of the past twenty-five years.

Did you know that bowling is the number one sport in America? I like to bowl...I'm terrible at it, but it's a great family game. But bowling...the number one sport?

Apparently, in an election year, more people bowl than vote! However, as the amount of bowlers continues to rise, a strange phenomenon is happening. Leagues, the place where people once gathered in community and significant relationships were maintained, are down by 40%. People are bowling alone!

Putnam goes on to identify other trends, which he believes show that in America, the quality and quantity of our social connections are on the dive.

Today, the average family eats dinner together 33% less than they did 25 years ago, while fast food dining is up by 50%! There was a day when homes were built with

Victory
Part 4: Victory over Brokenness
April 18th & 19th, 2015

front porches as places to host and entertain neighbors, but today we build two-car garages (and we close our garages before we get out of the car...anyone with me?).

Try this one on! The average person, according to Nielsen Media, watches TV for 4 hours and 35 minutes every day. That's 32 hours a week, which amounts to 13 years in front of the TV for the person who lives to 70!

Let me ask you...when was the last time you had someone into your home for four hours who wasn't directly related to you? We spend more time in front of the TV than we do in front of real people...

Putnam attributes these trends (and many more like them) to an increasing *attitude of individualism, which says, 'I don't need others. I'm good on my own.'*

And he concludes that this attitude is killing community in America!

On a whole, we are shifting away from community as a society, which has created in many of us a resistance to being connected to the community of Jesus in a meaningful way.

#2: Imperfection –

The second reason why some of us stay on the fringes of the community of Jesus is that, if we're being honest, the church can be a mess. In many of our experiences, the church has been inconsistent, hurtful, exclusive, unjust, hypocritical!

Why would we draw near to that?

Charles Spurgeon: In 1891, the great English preacher, Charles Spurgeon preached a message called *The Dearest Place on Earth*, in which he encouraged his community to draw near to the church instead of pulling away from it...

"Give yourself to the church. You that are members of the Church have not found it perfect and I hope that you feel almost glad that you have not. If I had never joined a Church till I had found one that was perfect, I would never have joined one at all! And the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect Church after I had become a member of it." Charles Spurgeon

Isn't Spurgeon's honesty refreshing? Some of us are waiting to commit to a local church and build meaningful relationships with other believers because we're looking for a perfect church filled with perfect people! We've never stopped to

Victory
Part 4: Victory over Brokenness
April 18th & 19th, 2015

consider, that if we actually find a perfect church (and we won't), we'll ruin it the moment we walk in!

Spurgeon goes on to say...

*"Imperfect as it is, (the church) is the dearest place on earth to us...All who have first given themselves to the Lord, should, as speedily as possible, also give themselves to the Lord's people... As I have said, the Church is faulty, but that is no excuse for your not joining it, if you are the Lord's. Nor need your own faults keep you back, for **the Church is not an institution for perfect people, but a sanctuary for sinners saved by Grace**, who, though they are saved, are still sinners and need all the help they can derive from the sympathy and guidance of their fellow Believers. **The Church is a nursery for God's weak children** where they are nourished and grow strong. It is the fold for Christ's sheep – the home for Christ's family."*

Don't you love that? The dearest place on earth...the home for Christ's family!
Listen...if you want to find faults in the local church...you'll find them because most churches are filled with people. But you need to consider that your pursuit of the perfect church is rooted in pride, the assumption that imperfection is beneath you. This attitude will blind you from seeing what Spurgeon taught about the community of Jesus...

"The Church is not an institution for perfect people, but a sanctuary for sinners saved by Grace."

If we are called to be part of the messy community of Jesus, and yet victory in experienced when we're living in that community, what do we do...it's a catch 22!

Look again at verse 12...

*"Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember the Lord forgave you, so you must also forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.
3:12-15*

Now...I want to spend our last few moments applying this text to our lives, but first I'll suggest that most Christians don't need another sermon about how to love one another (as Paul describes here). What we need is for the Spirit of God to break through the resistance in our lives that keeps us loving!

Victory
Part 4: Victory over Brokenness
April 18th & 19th, 2015

Juan Carlos Ortiz: Juan Carlos Ortiz is a pastor who leads one of the largest churches in Argentina. He shares about a time in his ministry when, over the course of the year, he would preach the same message, week after week, until the people began to put it into action. Can you imagine?

One Sunday morning, Ortiz taught about the importance of loving one another. Throughout the week, he had spent a great deal of time praying over the message, studying, and carefully recording his thoughts, and believed that God had guided him through the entire thing...

But as he approached the stage, Ortiz heard God asking him... *"Juan...how many times have you preached on this passage in this church?"* To which Juan replied, *"I don't know, maybe a dozen."* As he stepped up onto the stage, the same voice asked, *"Did any of those sermons do any good?"*

Ortiz stood still, frozen in time...looking out over the congregation. Seeing people he had led to Christ, counseled, and cared for...people who had listened to God's word over and over in worship gatherings and small groups, but were still struggling to live out the message.

Finally, after a long, drawn-out pause, Ortiz spoke three words. "Love one another." Then he walked back to his seat and sat down.

This was a Pentecostal congregation that was used to passionate preaching and praise...and they were getting utter stillness. **The people sat in motionless silence.**

Then Pastor Ortiz stood up, walked to the pulpit again, and said, *"Love one another."* As he returned to his seat once more, heads began to turn from side to side... People looked at each other with questioning eyes, *"What should we do now?"* Eyebrows rose. Shoulders shrugged.

After waiting a few minutes, Ortiz walked to the pulpit one more time and very deliberately said, "Love one another." And then returned to his seat...

After a few moments a man stood up and said, *"Brothers and sisters, I think I understand what Pastor Ortiz is talking about. He is asking me to love you."* Then he pointed to a family seated next to him and asked, *"But how can I love you when I do not even know your name?"* Then he proceeded to introduce himself to the family and ask them questions in the hope of discovering ways in which he could love them.

Another many stood up and said, *"I also understand what Pastor Ortiz is saying. He wants me to love Carlos (a man sitting a few seats in front of him) when I still hold a*

Victory
Part 4: Victory over Brokenness
April 18th & 19th, 2015

grudge against him." The man then left his seat and approached Carlos, seated just in front of him, to apologize...and the two were reconciled.

At this, people began to circulate the room asking what they could do to for one another, looking for ways to serve and care for one another...

Ortiz remained seated, praying and watching one of the most powerful sermons ever delivered in that church. From that day on, his congregation was never the same.

Application: I believe Colossians chapter three is one place in Scripture where if Christians would simply listen to God's Word and prayerfully ask God to make Him to make it true of us, and then look for ways to put His Word into action...it would change everything!

Broken relationships healed. Bitter hearts softened. Grudges broken. Marriages restored. Parent/child relationships redeemed. Neighborhood friendships forged. Church communities bonded together! If Christians love like this...the church would once again be a voice of relevance, redemption, and restoration in our world that is desperate to see Jesus! (JOHN 13)

If you're taking notes...let me give you three ways to put Colossians three into action in your life...

#1 - Dress

Lydia: Having young children has reminded me how deliberate of a process is getting dressed! There have been times, with each of our children, when I've had to contort limbs and pull things over heads that barely fit, only to realize that I forgot the Onesie...so I had to strip them down and do the whole thing over. It's a miracle that they don't break in the process.

As we get older...we get dressed without thinking! It becomes part of our daily routine...

In the same way, Paul says in verse 12 and 14 that if we're going to love as Christ loves us, each day we must walk through a spiritual routine of getting dressed.

"Clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience...(14) Above all, clothe yourselves with love..." 3:12, 14

Victory
Part 4: Victory over Brokenness
April 18th & 19th, 2015

Now...Paul isn't talking about a wardrobe, but a posture...an attitude of our hearts...

If you want to be meaningfully connected to the community of Jesus, begin by prayerfully asking God to show you where you can demonstrate these characteristics...

Is there an opportunity to extend mercy to someone who is hurting? Do you know someone here well enough to know where they hurt?

Has someone been unkind to you? What would it look like to clothe yourself with kindness toward them instead of retaliating? (Jesus said, 'love and pray for your enemies')

With whom do you have a tendency to be impatient or harsh? Repent of that and ask God to give you a spirit of gentleness and kindness!

Are you critical (always finding fault with others)? Ask God to give you a spirit of humility instead? Instead, begin serving...

Then, as you come to the end of the day...reflect back on your relationships...on the opportunities God gave you! Celebrate where God gave you victory...and confess sin...

Getting dressed, growing in the character of Christ, is a day-by-day process...not a one-time moment!

#2 - Forgive

"Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." 3:13

Many Christians are surprised when another Christian says something offensive or insensitive, or we feel ignored, or someone makes a decision we don't agree with or doesn't meet our expectations...and we think to ourselves, "I thought this was the church!"

And when we're offended, our tendency is to distance ourselves, but Paul writes, don't run away, run toward...bear with one another's faults, forgive offense!

How? Forgive others in the way that Jesus forgave you?

Victory
Part 4: Victory over Brokenness
April 18th & 19th, 2015

How did Jesus forgive you?

Gospel – Jesus drew near to us in our ugliness! When there was nothing loveable or desirable, he poured out his mercy on us! When we were obstinate and proud, he humbled himself to death on a cross! Through Christ's death, we who were enemies of God became friends!

One of the things that breaks my heart as a pastor is when Christians allow offenses to become grudges and walk away from one another's enemies, when Jesus died to make us friends!

Paul says we're to love one another as Christ loves us! The cross is the ultimate picture of Jesus-honoring love...

Let me ask you...are you willing to die for what Jesus died for? How do you respond when offended? Do you forgive? Do you walk away? Do you fight for unity or fight to win? Jesus said, *"If you're worshipping and realize someone has something against you, go to them and be reconciled!* Do you say, 'we need to talk...what you said hurt or offended, but I love you and forgive you?' Do you do that?

Let me ask you...is there anyone you need to go to and offer forgiveness today?

#3 – Sing

"Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. Teach and counsel each other with all the wisdom he gives. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts. And whatever you do or say, do it as a representative of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father." Colossians 3:16-17

Victory: Worshiping...and teaching, singing, counseling one another with the gospel!

Who in your life is singing the gospel over you? Who are you so close to that you're reminding them of the victory they've been given in Christ?

Communion: Singing of our victory!

Victory
Part 4: Victory over Brokenness
April 18th & 19th, 2015

We are victorious, what is true of Christ is true of us...our limitations, faults, inconsistencies and experiences can't negate what Christ accomplished...but Jesus' desire is that we would experience victory today...in real time...

Together, we experience victory in community!