

## THE DESTROYER OF THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL

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Oct. 29, 2017

I think you'd agree with me that most to nearly all the portraits of Christ we have seen depict him as a wan, handsome, European wandering Palestine in a tunic or stripped and hanging on a cross. Nearly none of them depict Jesus as Arabic or Semitic, nor as carpenter who in that day would have been the equivalent of a construction worker. Carpenters felled the trees, hauled them, hewed them into housing beams, knitted them together with large stones and clay, and did all this under the hot sun or in a cold wind. None of the images would solicit the title to them of one book famous among scholars, the title *Christus Victor*

I love the texts in the Bible that are rarified with purpose like Jesus came "to seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10) or Jesus came "not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Our passage today, along those lines, simply exerts that Jesus came "to destroy the works of the devil." The reality about Jesus, whether the paintings and statues get or not, is that he is Christus Victor.

***How buff Jesus was  
and is, how blue  
collar he was and  
is, or how macho  
he was and is, is all  
...***

How buff Jesus was and is, how blue collar he was and is, or how macho he was and is, is all pretty inconsequential. Nonetheless, we want to understand him right. And just as knowing he is the smartest man ever makes our faith smarter so knowing him as strong makes our faith stronger.

So in a world that knows and revels in John Waynes and Bruce Waynes who stick up for the little guys and make the bullies run, in a world that knows and revels in scientists who knocked down polio, in a world that knows the fear of evil empires and revels in their demise, Jesus comes ... not to meet with the devil, the taproot of our problems, but to destroy ... obliterate ... pulverize the works of the devil. And in doing so, which he did on the cross, he is Christus Victor.

Martin Luther, hidden in Warburg Castle and translating the Greek NT into German, is said to have faced doubts and temptations and sometimes even the devil himself appeared to him. Defying him Martin picked up his inkwell and threw it at him causing him to flee. That's how the legend goes but its earliest form has the devil throwing the inkwell at Martin Luther! And that I think is the better version for the devil knew that Martin Luther would make clear to many, many people the truth: Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. The devil must have thought, "Stop this man and stop this man's pen for he will reveal that Jesus is the destroyer of the works of the devil."

In John's little five chapter letter he explains how Jesus is destroying the works of the devil. First note what the works of the devil are. He says the devil has been *sinning* since the beginning. He says that no one who belongs to Christ is just comfortable with sin because they have in them, belong to the one who came to destroy the works of the devil. So the works of the devil, for all the varied evils they may be, are in the middle, sin. The sin that you've done, had done to you. Jesus came to pull the plug on that.

There are three ways he does that according to John. A, by giving light to see. B, by giving a new birth for empowerment. C, by giving his life as an atoning sacrifice to cover us in our failings.

A, by giving light to see.<sup>1</sup> You just can't, in simple terms, do much in the dark. I know there are flashlights and infrared devices but the reason we have those in the first place is because we can't do much in the dark.

Some of you have been, I imagine, in those deep caverns and been on the tour where the guide turns out the lights for a moment and you cannot even see your hand in front of your faith. Then he lights a match and from that light so much can be seen. Then he turns back on the lights and so much more can be seen. Then you emerge into the sunlight and even so much more can be seen. In the dark you don't know. Something soft and furry you think might be a cat but in the light you see the fur connected to a huge vicious varmint ready to devour you. Something hard and cold you might think to be impersonal and unfriendly but in the light you see it is the armor of your white knight.

Jesus is the light of the world. In him there is no darkness at all. And his light brings understanding to us. He shows us what's what. He's not guessing or giving us an opinion. He brings us the truth. He destroys the devil's works by destroying the darkness and falsehood he uses to promote his works. Would you be wanting sin destroyed in you and the world? Step into the light and let Jesus shine upon your world.

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<sup>1</sup> | John 1:5ff.

Jesus destroys the works of the devil by giving us a new birth for empowerment.<sup>2</sup> Several places in the Bible talk about us being spiritually dead (or having hearts of stone, same thing). Before we existed or when we are dead, we couldn't just make ourselves life. But John tells us that Jesus is not only the light of the world but the life of the world. "In him was life." (John 1:4) He creates and brings into being and one of the things he brings into being is a spiritual self.

Jesus explained this to a man named Nicodemus pointing out to him that it is all well and good to have had a physical birth but on top of having that, we must have a spiritual birth. Akin to a physical birth, where we see someone have consciousness, appetites, and power ... they see a cookie, want a cookie, reach for a cookie, that happens when he gives us a new birth.

Deadened by sin we don't care and even if we did, we have no power. But with Christ, we are no longer consigned to that state. You've had your foot fall asleep and it's just a lump. But when the blood flows in, it becomes alive and responsive. He destroys sin by flowing into us and giving us life with consciousness, appetite, and power.

Jesus also destroys the works of the devil by C, giving his life as atoning sacrifice to cover us in our failures.<sup>3</sup> A great joy of the Christian life is that we will improve, that we will sin less and be good more. This by the light, power, and Spirit of Jesus. And by his atoning sacrifice.

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<sup>2</sup> | John 3:1, 9; 5:1ff.

<sup>3</sup> | John 2:2; 3:20

People fail. I fail. You fail. Fail often enough and you get defeated, you throw in the towel. As Christians I say to you and you say to me, “Every day is a new start with Jesus; he forgives.” And, “His mercies are new every morning.” We know we have the forgiveness and the every morning mercy that keeps us going because of the atoning sacrifice Jesus made for us.

The mercies ever new every morning message, his atoning sacrifice, is never a license to sin. It’s not, “What a deal! I sin and he forgives.” It’s not that he’s a patsy and a forgiveness dispenser if you just wink sorrowfully and say, watch this, ‘Forgive me, Jesus.’” That’s not a saving view of God. That’s not taking on his wisdom about how we should feel, think, and do as better than our own wants and opinions. This is faith but it is not SAVING faith.

Saving faith understands that God is supreme and his wisdom is best and its application in our lives is to be desired above fine gold. Saving faith understands and joins God in his plan to drive sin from us, to make us so good in character that we can manage life forever, and the kind of persons who can be his eternal friends.

When you go snow skiing, and especially when you are just learning, you fall. In fact, they teach you how to fall and how to get up. Imagine if you fell, again and again, and there was no snow but just hard ground. Imagine if you fell, again and again, and you had no poles to pull yourself up by. You’d give up. Isn’t it true that when we fall in the Christian life, we could get discouraged and throw in the towel. The works of the devil would not be destroyed. But Jesus has given us snow to fall in, poles to lift ourselves up. His word that his mercies are ever fresh

every morning, empowers us to keep going and as we keep going the devil's works are destroyed.

Thank you Martin Luther for writing about Jesus, for catching that inkwell the devil is said to have thrown at you and then writing about Jesus. And thank you Jesus for breaking the back of the devil on the cross and forever saving us. People, yes, you, today hope ... for Jesus is the Destroyer of the Works of Devil!

*If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call.*

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