

VICTORY THROUGH CHRIST

by Kenton Miller

KEY VERSE:

But they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they did not cling to life even in the face of death.

Revelation 12:11 (NRSV)

FAITH STORY:

Revelation 12:1-17

FAITH FOCUS:

John, the writer of Revelation, gives a picture/story of the spiritual warfare that takes place between Satan and God. The first 6 verses cover the birth of hope and salvation to the world through Jesus. Satan seeks to thwart God's intentions but Jesus rules over him in authority through his sacrifice for atonement. Like every story in Revelation, God is the final victor. Satan then focuses his attention on attacking the community or church of Christ. A war in heaven takes place in verses 7-12 as Satan's rebellion is overturned and he is thrown out of heaven. Satan inhabits the earth from then on and works to destroy the church through persecution. Those faithful to God overcome Satan by Christ's example on the cross and they too offer a testimony of faith through their martyrdom. Satan continues to seek to wipe out the word of faith but God intervenes to preserve its continuation. Verses 13-17 function as a slightly different camera angle on the same scene as verses 1-6, showing Satan's plot to destroy the church and those who remain faithful to the cause of Christ.

SESSION GOAL:

Students will learn that the way to truly defeat evil is not to cling to their lives, even in the face of death, but to know that victory over death belongs to us because of the death and resurrection of Christ.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Students will learn the symbolism of the images portrayed in this passage in Revelation.
- Students will connect the cosmic happenings written about in this passage with the cross and the example Christ gave of winning out over evil through his sacrificial death.
- Students will express the hope found in this chapter for the hardships we face.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Chalkboard with chalk OR dry erase board with markers.
- 2 Bibles for the students
- 3 The movie, *The Radicals*, cued to the scene near the end where Michael Sattler is tried and then burned at the stake.

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (5–8 minutes)

Welcome students and then divide them into small groups. Ask them to share with each other the three things they consider most important in their lives and why.

Bring the class back together and make a list of the things shared. Then go through the list and ask students what things on the list they would consider dying for.

CONNECT: (5–8 minute)

Say: *On April 20, 1999, twelve students and a teacher were shot to death at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Cassie Bernall was one of those students, and she is known through the tragedy for her courage in the face of violence. When the two teenage gunmen asked her if she believed in Christ, she said yes, and that's when they killed her. Her story has touched many lives and inspired people to be courageous in the faith. She is an example of a Christian martyr.*

Ask students to name other Christian martyrs.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (15 minutes)

Explain to students that it is important that we do not take the stories literally as they are told in the book of Revelation. They don't need to be afraid of them, but to rather seek to find the meaning and context behind them.

Read Revelation 12 as a class.

Share the following mini-lecture about this passage:

- The woman mentioned in a glorious array is the core of the faithful church. Her pains of pregnancy are the cries to bring in the kingdom of God and provision from the evil one's torment.
- The red dragon appears on the scene to disrupt her birth and it symbolizes Satan. This birth is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The importance in Jesus' "birth" lies in the work of the cross and ultimately spells defeat over Satan.
- Jesus' death also leads us to his example as the faithful martyr. It was when he looked completely helpless on the cross that he actually won out over evil.
- This also brings back his rule over all the earth with "an iron scepter." This rule or new kingdom is not set up in force but in a non-violent way of absolute authority (Yeatts 222).
- The description of the dragon (Satan) with its 7 heads, 10 horns and 7 crowns represents his power and authority (Grimsrud 90).
- The sweeping of its tails implies the war that waged in Heaven when Satan and his angels were kicked out. He then inhabited the earth but knew he was ultimately defeated by Christ's death. He was known as "the accuser" but was no longer able to do that before God because his place was outside heaven.
- This also reveals to us that God would never hear of the accusations against his people because of the forgiveness that was offered to them by the shedding of Christ's blood.

- Satan's power over humans had also diminished when he was cast out of heaven because humanity was now given the authority under Christ to prevail over him (Grimsrud 91).
- Satan then works fervently to battle those who are faithful to God because he knows that his days to wreak havoc are limited. I Peter 5:8b gives us another image of Satan's dangerous hunt for believers by saying, "Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour" (NRSV).
- We should know that spiritual warfare is very much a part of the realm around us because Satan wants to disrupt any believer's life no matter how firmly planted they are in Christ. We can't see those battles around us but we should be aware of them. Ephesians 6:12 says, "For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (NRSV).
- Read verse 11 as a class. Ask students what they think these phrases mean:
 - Conquered him
 - Blood of the Lamb
 - Word of their testimony
 - For they did not cling to life even in the face of death

Continue with the mini-lecture:

- We see that those who are faithful to Christ win out through his death and that in turn breaks the power of Satan.
- The "word of their testimony" means martyrdom. These are the believers who are not afraid to die for something so significant and they willingly portray this in a non-resistant way (Grimsrud 96).
- In verses 13-16, we see the dragon continuing to try to destroy the mother and her offspring, but God intervenes to save them from dying. In this symbolism, we find that Satan's plans to thwart the church through persecution are still not working and that the body of believers finds nourishment and growth despite the hardships.
- The passage leaves us with the image of Satan's continual drive to overtake the believers. A call for faithfulness follows in the encouragement to persevere despite what Satan throws at us.

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Show the clip from The Radicals where Michael Sattler is tried and then burned at the stake for his faith.

Discuss:

What have you learned today? What stands out in your mind?

How can you follow the examples we've heard about and give testimony to your faith in a non-violent manner?

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Divide students into pairs and ask them to turn to Ephesians 6:10-18. Instruct them to pray their way through this passage, asking God to help each of them put on the armor as described in this passage.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

It is important to remember not to take message of the book of Revelation in a literal context. We must consider the literary forms, cultural and historical contexts, message of the whole book in reference to the whole Bible and the different types of translations (Grimsrud 12). We must also be open to the speaking of the Holy Spirit as we read the text. The overall theme within Revelation that John conveys is a message of hope for salvation and a bringing in of the kingdom of God. The struggle of persecution on the church helps to develop faithfulness in the believers as they also gain their confidence and endurance through Christ's victory (Yeatts 218).

Satan is described as a dragon in the passage while in other parts of the Bible he is mentioned in the form of a serpent. Genesis 3:15 connects us to beginning of the conflict between the "woman's offspring" and the serpent or Satan. It talks about the curse that God put on the serpent after the fall of Adam and Eve in the garden. It says that humans will ultimately crush the serpent in the end and this refers to Christ's victory over Satan. Satan's rebellion actually falls into God's ultimate plan to destroy all evil. This takes place when Satan works to cause the tribulation. Satan's defeat has already happened but those events worked through him will usher in the existence of God's New Jerusalem (Grimsrud 92).

WORKS CITED:

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The NIV Serendipity Bible for Study Groups. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Bible Publishers. 1988.

Yeatts, John R. *Believers Church Bible Commentary: Revelation*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003.