

Jesus is the Promised Warrior!

“The LORD will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.”

How do you picture Jesus? We are probably influenced by those popular paintings by Warner Sallmann. We have one of Jesus as the Good Shepherd downstairs. In it he looks so kind and patient. Another Sallmann painting is in my office and there are two downstairs where he is looking off to the distance as to heaven itself. We think of him little children are not afraid to run up to him. We probably describe him something of a mix between Mr. Rogers and that guy at the zoo who is feeding a baby elephant with a baby bottle.

All of that is true. I don't think any of that goes contrary to what the Bible says about him. But that is only a small part of it. The Bible also describes Jesus as a highly motivated, skilled warrior who fights with all his might and takes no prisoners. This Lent we are following a special series that will picture Jesus as a great warrior. Tonight we will see that he was promised from long ago.

I. Promised in the Garden.

What do you think was the longest war in history? We maybe think of the thirty years war or the hundred years war. But historians have labeled a war known as the *Reconquista* which was fought between Christians and Muslims in Spain. It lasted 774 years and ended when Columbus sailed the ocean blue. That is a long time. But the longest war in history started at the beginning of time. The first strike came when Satan, our worse enemy, tempted Adam and Eve. They lost the battle and sin came into God's perfect world and death through sin. Satan succeeded and he ruined God's creation and made humans objects of God's wrath because of sin.

How bad is it? Let's look back at our Isaiah reading. And note that Isaiah isn't just talking about their sins. He includes himself. ***“For our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us. Our offenses are ever with us, and we acknowledge our iniquities: rebellion and treachery against the LORD, turning our backs on our God, fomenting oppression and revolt, uttering lies our hearts have conceived. So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is nowhere to be found, and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey.”***

Listen to those words that describe how bad we are: offenses; iniquities; rebellion and treachery against the Lord; turning our backs on him; oppression and revolt; lies in our hearts. There is no justice and righteousness before God, no truth, no honesty. We saw that already when God asked Adam, “What happened?” and he immediately blamed his wife. Our offenses are many. If you opened your car door and banged it against my car door, I might chalk that up to an accident. But if you kept banging it against my car door, that is no accident. Our offenses are many and we don't stop.

You know why it is this way. Flesh gives birth to flesh. We are corrupt completely. By nature we are sinful. There is no medical procedures that can remove it. There is no surgery that will work, no drug, no radiation. Our sins condemn us for time and eternity and there is nothing we can do balance it out or remove it. ***“... our sin testify against us,”*** and each demands punishment. Of course, we don't need Lent to understand this. As Paul confesses in Romans, on any given day we can take a look at ourselves and confess that the good we wanted to do, we didn't do, and the evil we hate we keep on doing. Finally, the cry goes out, “Who can save me from this body of death?”

You can't. I can't. But God can. Immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve, God came and promised Satan that he was declaring war right back. The Japanese gambled that the destruction of the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor might be enough to force the U.S. to cower and beg for peace. They were wrong. The United States was filled with a terrible resolve and declared war right back. You know how that ended. That is what the Lord did in the Garden. Too much is at stake including God's elect, those he named before creation to inherit eternal life.

Listen to the Lord's declaration of war: ***“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.”*** It is going to be total war. The war will not end until the unconditional surrender of the devil and even death itself. No prisoners will be taken. And it will be a bloody war. Isaiah described how much it would cost Christ. He will be crushed, pierced, wounded, despised, even alienated from God himself. Christ will die. But the outcome is predetermined. Victory. Christ will crush Satan's head.

Of course, the world had to wait. I don't know why God didn't send Jesus that day in the Garden. But God knows what he is doing. He tells us in Galatians when the time was right, fully come, he sent his Son, born of the woman, born under the law, to redeem those under law. Until Christ came, God told his world to wait and put their hope in him. That is why Abraham, who lived and died long before Christmas and Jesus, is in heaven. God's promise of victory is so sure, so certain, so guaranteed that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. It doesn't matter if you believed before or after he came.

And when that Christ comes, he will come not as a gentle Shepherd or quiet person, but as a mighty warrior: ***“The LORD will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies.”***

II. Fulfilled in Christ.

What are some of the elite soldiers out there? In history you think of the Roman legionnaires or the Japanese Ninja or the Spartans at Thermopylae. Today you think of the Navy Seals or Delta force. We consider them elite because of their training, their state of the art weapons, and their nerves of steel and fanaticism. Look at the fanaticism of Christ. **"... like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry."** Think about it. He goes out to fight for those who disappoint him, who are unlovable, who are his enemies because their sins. But Jesus is determined to save us. Like it said in our Isaiah reading. **"He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak. According to what they have done, so will he repay wrath to his enemies and retribution to his foes; he will repay the islands their due."** He is so zealous for us that he is willing to endure anything, even the shame of the cross, to save us. He went out and gave 110%. He tore into the enemy with vengeance.

And look at who he is. He is like us in so many ways. He cried when someone died. He was hurt when someone rejected him. He felt the pain with they whipped him. But there was one difference. He had no sin. He was pure and holy, just like God because he is God. Nothing he ever said or did was tainted by sin. When he got angry, it was a holy, righteous anger. He didn't get angry over jealousy or selfishness. He loved everyone, not just those who were kind to him, but even his enemies.

And he knows how to win. He actually used the devil's own hatred against him. He let the devil stir people up to arrest him, try him, beat and whip him and eventually crucify him. He was strong enough to stop them at any time. But he was also strong enough to let them mistreat him because that is the way he will win. Sin demanded blood and death. Jesus said fine, here's my blood, here's my death. We call it God's Great Exchange. He took our sins and paid for them. He took his own holiness and covers us with it. He won!

In the Mexican-American War, the cry was, "Remember the Alamo." In the Civil War, the cry was, "Remember Fort Sumter." In World War II the cry was, "Remember Pearl Harbor." And the battle cry of our warrior is, **"It is finished. With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit."**

"The LORD will march out like a mighty man, like a warrior he will stir up his zeal; with a shout he will raise the battle cry and will triumph over his enemies." The devil's head is crushed. Sin is paid for. Holiness is provided. And death is defeated. And this is a victory for all. Again from Isaiah, **"From the west, men will fear the name of the LORD, and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory. For he will come like a pent-up flood that the breath of the LORD drives along. "The Redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," declares the LORD."**

The war is won, but battles are still fought. After Lee surrendered at Appomattox Court House, some in the Confederacy still fought even though the war was over. Every day the defeated devil still tries to attack and do his damage. But with victory in the name of Christ, we resist and fight back. Sometimes we don't fight that hard and the devil wounds us with sin and temptation. But we are not beaten. We run and find refuge in our Savior Warrior who is our mighty fortress.

So, picture Jesus as one so approachable and kind that children are not afraid to run up to him. But don't forget to picture him as one who is a fierce, mighty warrior fighting our battles. You will hear more about that this Lent. Amen.