

Easter 2022

1 Corinthians 15:55-57

### Victorious!

He was an unlikely hero. Horatio Nelson was born in Norfolk, England, on September 29, 1758. He was a pastor's son from a small town in England, but he didn't follow his father into the ministry. Instead, he joined the navy as a teenager. By the time he was 20 he had been promoted to captain. He traveled to the West Indies and Central America, even commanded a ship that was fighting in the American Revolution.

In 1793, Britain went to war with France. Following the French Revolution, Napoleon Bonaparte was a rising power in France. Even though France had become a world power, England had the stronger navy. Nelson first became famous in the battle of the Nile in 1798. His ships destroyed the French fleet, which was under the command of Napoleon. Five years later, Napoleon had amassed a great fleet he hoped to use to invade England. Horatio, the pastor's son who went to sea, was called the Admiral Lord Nelson. The homeland of England was at risk. Lord Nelson, was given the command over the fleet sailing on England's flagship, *Victory*. Using a brilliant tactical plan, Lord Nelson's fleet destroyed 22 of Napoleon's 33 ships of the line—and the British lost none. It was a victory, unparalleled in naval history. It ended the threat of invasion and instantly installed Nelson as one of Britain's greatest heroes.

However, on the flagship *Victory*, Lord Nelson lay wounded, shot through the lung and spine by a French sniper perched on the mast of an enemy ship. In the moment of his greatest victory, on October 21, 1805, at 4:30 in the afternoon, Lord Nelson died. He was victorious. But death makes everything past tense. Word began to spread throughout England, Lord Nelson had died.

What were the followers of Jesus to think on that dark weekend? He had so captivated their hearts and minds. But now, he was dead and gone. He was their teacher. He was their friend. They thought he was their Lord, but death makes everything past tense. Jesus had made huge promises to them. He had promised them that he was the Son of God, who had become man to be the world's savior. He promised them that he was the way and the truth and the life. He promised them that nothing could separate them from him, nothing could snatch them from his hand. And they had believed him. But then he died—killed on a cross—and his body was laid on a cold slab of stone. Just when they thought that He was on the verge of Victory, he died. He died and all his promises seemed to die with him.

They should not have been afraid. Jesus had predicted this. He had told them, that he was going to Jerusalem—that he would be arrested—he even told them that he would be crucified...and after that he would rise again and meet them in Galilee. But now those seemed like just empty words—he was dead, and none of those promises mattered. Because a dead Jesus is worthless. What can a dead man do for you?

Lord Nelson had won a great victory for Britain, but once he was dead, he could do no more for England? The news reached England that the navy was victorious, but Nelson was killed. The Times of London wrote: "*We do not know whether we should mourn or rejoice.*" The country had gained a great victory, but they also knew the price that was paid for that victory – Lord Nelson was dead. The whole country mourned the death of Lord Nelson.

In Jerusalem that morning the women had come to do grim work. Arms full of spices, but hearts full of disappointment. All they hoped to do was to go and anoint a dead body—and so the biggest question on their mind was, "**Who's going to roll the stone away from the mouth of the tomb?**" When they got to the tomb, something was wrong—government guards were gone... and stone, was rolled away...the grave stood open... and when they looked in, they didn't see a dead body, they saw angels who told them the Easter truth that changes everything: He is Risen. He is Risen indeed.

The angel said, "**He is not here. He has risen! Remember how he told you?**" Remember how he told you...This is why Jesus had to come to earth. This was the reason that he took on flesh and blood. This was the point of his ministry, his miracles, his mission. He had come to defeat our great enemy called Death, and those ladies were looking in the wrong place, because he was alive. They heard the words and the Spirit started stirring them to believe the promises. And on that Sunday morning the chant of Easter victory started to build in the hearts of his followers:

**“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?”  
The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God!  
He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Have you ever heard people say that death is just part of the circle of life? Have you heard them say that death is just natural? Death is the most unnatural thing a human can do, because God never created humans to die. He made us to do that what all want, deep down: to live, and to live, and to live; to never die. But sin changed all that—the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve; the sin of our hands and mouths and minds this past week. The sin that’s been in our heart since it took its first beat. Sin like that pays a wage. And the wage it pays is death. It’s as simple as that. Sinners die. Sin is what makes death hurt, what makes it the final indignity. Sin gives death its sting. And no matter what you and I try to do, we can’t make the sting go away, because you and I can’t do anything about our sin.

So, God sent someone who could...the one man out of all men of all time, who could be the hero we needed. Someone who is truly God and truly man—holy in every way; human in every way, and God tied up our fate with his. On a Friday, at 3 in the afternoon, on a lonely hill, the best of men died for the worst—for you, for me. God had gathered up all my failures, all your guilt, all the wrong of our heart and hands, and he placed them on Jesus and punished Jesus with the hell that I deserved. And Jesus paid for every bit. And then he said, “It is finished!” And with his death, sin is paid; guilt is gone.

Do you see what that means? God says that your sin is gone. They are gone. Forgiven. Forgotten. Forever. God put them on Jesus, and he says to you, today, *I have forgiven your wickedness and I will remember your sin no more!* Now God promises you that not even Death can hold you anymore—not even Death. It’s been swallowed up in victory. How can that be? Jesus didn’t die as a casualty of a battle for victory, like Nelson. No, Jesus’ death is what caused the victory. Because when Jesus died...he won.

On Easter Sunday morning, the whole world got to see just how victorious Jesus is. If you go to London, you can see a memorial to Lord Nelson. His statue stands 170 feet high on a Corinthian column surrounded by four huge lions. It memorializes this man who was victorious but now...is long dead. Jesus needs no square. He needs no statue. He does not require the past tense. Because he didn’t just die. He rose from the dead. For today, he is risen and he is risen indeed. Amen.