

**+ Deuteronomy 33:26-29 + Big Words of Easter: Victory +  
+ 7th Sunday of Easter: The Ascension of Our Lord + 8 May 2016 +**

**CIR HIRI!**<sup>1</sup> Dear Fellow Victors in our Ascended Lord,

What if you knew that victory was guaranteed? Now I'm not talking about questionable means that might involve gambling or the Mafia or physical threat, but that you simply knew victory was guaranteed. For example, what if you knew that the horse Nyquist was guaranteed to win the Kentucky Derby yesterday? What if you knew that Syracuse or your favorite professional team was guaranteed to win it all—the national championship, the world championship, the Super Bowl? What if you knew that you as an athlete or your team would win? You'd go into that game with complete confidence and excitement, because you know that victory is guaranteed.

Or look at it from a different perspective. What if you knew that your success was guaranteed on a test or in a business venture or with a major decision for your family or your company or your church? If you knew that success or blessing is guaranteed, you'd take that test or begin that venture or make that decision with complete confidence. Maybe you'd even go into it with joy and excitement, because you know that success is guaranteed.

...But that almost never happens, right? No matter how good or skilled or dominant an athlete or a team might be, victory is almost never guaranteed. It may be very likely, perhaps even assumed, but rarely is it ever rock-solid guaranteed. If someone guarantees victory, they're often seen as an arrogant fool. The same could be said about that test or business venture or major decision. Success may be likely and even assumed, but guaranteed? I don't know if any of us are that completely confident. So we go into the game or the test or the venture or the decision with a certain amount of fear and trembling or at least uncertainty. Yet when you are blessed with victory or success, as you had hoped, you realize that in hindsight you really didn't have anything to worry about.

This morning we find God's Old Testament people—the Israelites—in a similar situation. Forty years before the Lord had miraculously rescued them from slavery in Egypt. With ten supernatural plagues, the Lord had brought the Egyptian empire to its knees and set his own people free. The miracles didn't stop there, but the Lord held off the Egyptian army, parted the Red Sea so the people could escape on dry land, fed a couple million people every day for four decades, provided jaw-dropping victories over fearsome enemies, and brought them to the eastern bank of the Jordan River. The land that God had promised to his people—**“a land flowing with milk and honey”** (Exodus 33:3)—lay just on the other side of the river. Looking back on all that God had done, you would think they knew that victory was guaranteed.

...But that's not necessarily what we find among the Israelites. There were tense nerves and a certain amount of uncertainty. The Jordan River was at flood stage and they had to cross it. The Canaanites had heavily fortified cities waiting for God's people on the other side of the river. Forty years before when the parents and grandparents of these Israelites heard about the strong armies of big soldiers and heavily fortified cities of Canaan, they had actually turned against God and his servant, their leader Moses.

Not so with this generation. They trusted in the Lord, but standing before them, giving his farewell sermon was Moses—the prophet, the shepherd who had taught and led them for the past forty years. For most of those Israelites, Moses was the only pastor they knew, but once he was finished talking, he was going to hike up Mount Nebo and be taken home to heaven. Moses wouldn't be leading them. His right hand man Joshua would do so, but even Joshua was nervous—and needed the Lord's encouragement for strength and courage going into the Promised Land.

Moses knew how uncertain and nervous and sad they felt about the future, about this new chapter in Israel's history that was just beginning. They did trust in the Lord. They knew what he could do. They assumed that victory would be theirs, but they didn't have complete confidence. So with his final words to God's people, Moses told them what was going to happen. “Go into Canaan with complete confidence. Serve the Lord in this hostile world because victory is assured and God will bless you. God himself will win for you! You have nothing to worry about because victory is guaranteed!”

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<sup>1</sup> “Christ is risen!” “He is risen indeed!” This is known as the *Paschal Greeting*, one of the oldest and most widespread traditions in the Christian church. Throughout the weeks of the Easter season, whenever the minister says to the people, “*Christ is risen!*”, they automatically respond loudly and boldly, “*He is risen indeed!*”

Now how could Moses say that? These were practically his dying words to his beloved Israelites. He wouldn't cross the river with them into the Promised Land, but yet Moses wasn't just giving them a motivational speech like a coach getting his team fired up for a championship game. No, he had facts, truth to back up his victory guarantee.

***“There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty.”*** Victory is assured because there is no god like our God! No god of wood or stone or gold or silver, no god of pleasure or wealth or self is like our God. He created the heavens and the earth. He created time and space. He brings out the warm sunshine and brings the rains and the snows to water the earth. He sustains the vast universe, and yet he creates the tiniest miracle of life in a mother's womb and enables that little one to grow and develop and live a fruitful life for decades. There is no one like our God!

...And yet our God doesn't just ride the heavens! ***“The eternal God is your refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms.”*** The Lord is always there. He doesn't go on vacation. He doesn't fall asleep. He's not bound by time as we are. He has no beginning, like we had, and has no end, like we will. Yet that also means that he will never let you go and will never, ever fail to be there to hold you up. He is your hiding place, ***your refuge.***

This God, like no other god, was the reason that victory was guaranteed for Israel. ***“He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, ‘Destroy him!’ So Israel will live in safety alone; Jacob's spring is secure in a land of grain and new wine, where the heavens drop dew.”*** They had nothing to fear, no reason to worry, no reason to hesitate—even if that word ***Jeshurun*** made them pause. ***Jeshurun*** means “upright one” making God the “God of the Upright Ones, the Upright People.” The Israelites knew their sin all too well. They knew how often they and their forefathers had failed to be upright. Yet the Lord in his mercy, the Lord like no other, would make them ***Jeshurun***—upright in his sight because they were ***“a people saved by the LORD...your shield and helper and your glorious sword.”*** Victory in the Promised Land was guaranteed because they had a God like no other.

We're not standing on the eastern bank of the Jordan River this morning. I'm pretty sure that none of us have 40 years of wandering in the wilderness in our past. We're not sitting at Moses' feet listening to his farewell sermon or standing with Jesus' disciples on the Mount of Olives listening to his farewell sermon before visibly ascending into heaven. Yet if you take a look around, do you ever find yourself wondering, “Where's the guaranteed victory? Where's the blessing? Where's the promises kept? Where's Jesus?”

You know about Jesus' Easter victory, right? Ever since the first cry of ***“Christ is risen!”*** on Easter morning, we've been celebrating his victory and we've seen how that has impacted our lives in so many ways with all those big blessings guaranteed by that victory—peace and confidence and faithfulness and service and faith. We've seen all that. We know what Jesus and his Gospel (good news) are capable of doing, but do you and I live as if we know that victory in Christ is guaranteed? Do you wake up ready to face the day because you know Jesus always wins? Or do you find yourself like the Israelites on Jordan's bank uncertain or nervous or hesitant or fearful?

That's why we need to sit by those ancient Israelites and listen to Moses tell us what's going to happen, except we get the benefit of seeing how God not only kept his promises of victory to the Israelites, but of eternal victory through Jesus. ***“There is no one like the God of Jeshurun,”*** is there? No one and nothing out there is like our God—no god of pleasure or self or stuff, no god of wood or stone or wealth, no god of manmade invention and devilish lies. No human leader or hero or prophet or group is like our God!

No, our God ***“rides on the heavens to help you.”*** That's why Jesus visibly departed from his disciples—to rule all things and guide all things for your eternal good. That ***“eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”*** Isn't it true what Jesus promised to his disciples before he left for heaven? ***“Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age.”*** (Matthew 28:20b) He's always there and always holding you up with his eternal arms.

Yet he also kept his promise to destroy our enemies. Is that not what Jesus did on Easter morning? Just as the Lord alone drove out the enemies that stood before his people in the Promised Land, just as he made the walls of Jericho come tumbling down, so also the Lord Jesus made the power of death come crashing down when after paying for your sins he rose from the dead! By ascending into heaven, doesn't Jesus make it clear that when he will raise your body from the dead on the Last Day, you will live forever with him with a risen, restored and perfect body? He guarantees it! After all, he is both your Savior and your brother, both God and human, ruling all things so you may have a home in heaven with him someday!

To get there, that God made you **Jeshurun**. He made you “upright” in his sight by conquering the guilt of your sin, by saving you with his unconditional love, and by making you his holy son or daughter. Truly you are “**a people saved by the LORD!**” That God “**is your shield and helper and your glorious sword.**” That living and ascended God guarantees you victory! That living and ascended God endures all and triumphs for you! That living and ascended God is in heaven ruling all for you and pouring out countless blessings for you to enjoy here on earth and forever in heaven.

In Christ, victory is guaranteed. He saved you. You have no need to worry. He shields you. You have no need to hesitate. He helps you. You have no need to fear. He fights for you. In Christ, victory is guaranteed. So how will you live knowing that victory is assured through Christ? Confident? Joyful? Excited? Eager to serve your Lord and see him again? That’s how the Israelites responded after Moses told them about God’s guaranteed victory. That’s how the disciples responded after Jesus told them about his own guaranteed victory—and that’s how we respond because victory is ours through our living and ascended Lord Jesus Christ. **CIR HIRI!** Amen.