

Victory After Defeat
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The year is 1956. The pastor—my age, only he's no longer preaching; he's walking the streets in Peking, China, and he keeps muttering, "I'm Peter. I'm Peter."

That really wasn't his name. His name was Wang Mingdao. He had been born in early 1900 during the middle of the Boxer Rebellion. His father had committed suicide during that time. His mother, destitute and struggling, raised young Wang with all that she had...which was a Christian faith.

He found Christ as a teenager, and he found a gift for talking about Jesus. And he talked about Jesus a lot. In fact, eventually they put a little hut in the back yard of his poverty home, and people began to come to hear him preach in this hut. And by the end of the 1920s he had a growing church building in the back of his mother's home. In fact, it grew so strong that eventually, by 1937, they were able to build a building and consecrate it in Peking China—a growing, thriving church run, and set up, and organized, and put together by Chinese without any outside missionary help. A tabernacle devoted to worshipping Jesus Christ in Peking China!

That very year, as they inaugurated this new building and the church moved into it, and they celebrated and dedicated it to the worship of Jesus Christ, the Japanese invaded and they took over China...and they took over Peking. They tried to control the churches. Specifically, they tried to control Pastor Wang's church. But you couldn't control him. The Japanese had too many other concerns to worry about this resistant faith over in this church, so they just kind of tolerated him.

The war ended, and there was more political upheaval. In 1949 the Communists took over China; and when they took over they couldn't tolerate anything. And so they began to press Pastor Wang and his church to join in the national organization of churches that they had put together and that they controlled, and that they demanded all Christians become a part of or stop worshipping. Wang resisted, and he refused to do that. But eventually they decided 'We won't tolerate this', and they arrested him.

They put him into prison—1955. Twelve brutal months later he was released. He was released because, in prison, under the torture that both he and his wife went through, he had finally written a confession of false belief. He denied Christ. He agreed that if he were to be let out, he would join the church organization that the Communists had put together; and not only that—he would preach whatever they wanted preached, wherever they wanted it preached. And so, 1956, they released him.

He found that he couldn't, however, bring himself to join that organization, and he couldn't bring himself to preach. He could only bring himself to live in his distressed depression, muttering "I am Peter. I'm the disciple that denied Jesus."

The Communists kept pressing him, and he still refused to join the organization. He just didn't have the heart to it, and he refused to preach. They gave him about two years, and they put him back in prison with his wife. They sentenced her to fifteen years; they sentenced him to life.

Three brutal years later they gave him an opportunity to get out—another chance for release. This time, however, when he was given the opportunity, he asked for pen and paper and he wrote out a confession. Only this was a different sort of confession. In this confession he renounced all the previous things he had said. He affirmed his faith in Jesus Christ, and he affirmed he would serve Him and Him only.

And so, instead of being released, he continued on for twenty more years in prison, in some of the worst tortures and the worst conditions that believers could find. His wife was released in 1975. He was released in 1980...the Communists finally gave up on him. He died in 1991. All observers of the church in China to this day say that Pastor Wang is one of the great patriarchs of the Chinese church. It was because of his inspirational suffering through the worst of times the church hung on, sustained, and survived. And not only survived, but thrived, and is growing even today in China.

Interviewers came from all over the world to talk to Dr. Wang...Pastor Wang, not Doctor. As they did so, one interviewer at one point particularly asked him "What mattered most to you in prison?" His response was, "The word...the word...scripture." Specifically, one passage of scripture; a passage of scripture he had memorized early in his career, and he had forgotten. But then, in his distressed and depressed time of denial, this verse came back to him, and this became the verse he hung on to. And it's the verse that is our communion text today.

It was written by a prophet named Micah. You'll find it in Micah 7: 8. It's dark in here...you won't be able to read in your text very well, but we have it printed up here on the PowerPoint. It's found in Micah 7: 8. It's written about 700 years before Christ, when the church...excuse me, Israel...was in a very difficult time, in fact, a very desperate time in its history. And things were very...they were stumbling. Israel was stumbling, and stumbling bad. And Micah was one of God's spokesmen during that time. And he would give grim warnings; he would give dark warnings to the nation. At the same time, he would give words of promise and hope. What we're gonna see here is a word of promise and hope; but it was still a very dark and difficult time for that nation. It was failing; it was stumbling. And the nations around it were gloating over it. They were rejoicing over the fall of these proud Israelites.

This text starts off with Micah responding to their gloating, and he says

Don't rejoice over me, O my enemy.

Don't rejoice over me. Don't celebrate my defeat. He says

Though I fall I will rise;

I will.

Though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me.

That was Dr. Wang's verse when he went back to prison for life. I want it to be your verse by the end of this day. I want it to be your verse, but I want you to say it how it was written. I want you to hold to it the way it was given. I want you to speak it the way Micah spoke it, the way Pastor Wang spoke it. And so we're going to take some time to look at those...the statement. We're not going to spend a lot of time with the actual phrasing that introduces it.

Though I fall I will rise. That's pretty straightforward. *Though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me.* 'Though everything is closed in around me I see a glimmer of hope, and it's my God.' What I want to do is focus on how it's said. The verse that precedes and the verse that follows gives us an idea of *how* you say this, *how* you grip this truth, *how* you live it.

The first reality is that it's spoken with a God-ward patience. There's no rush to this statement. There's no rush to this commitment. There is no rush to live this truth. As you read the passage, and it begins in verse 7 that introduces our text, he says

But as for me...

'Others may do it differently, others may approach life a different way;' but he says

But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the Lord;

The idea is 'I'm gonna keep looking and keep looking, and I'm gonna look and look, expecting He's gonna show up.' And he adds to that; he says

I will wait for the God of my salvation.

'I won't stop looking for Him.' I wanna underscore that word in our text. The idea, he says, "I *dwell* in darkness." 'I'm not just passing through it. I'm not just visiting for a day. I am living here.' For Pastor Wang, it was twenty-two years dwelling in darkness. There's somethin' about that wait—it's focused on a person. It's a God-ward patience. He says

But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the Lord;

'I'm not waitin' for a political change here. I'm not waitin' for economic change. I'm not waiting for a change in health. I am waiting for a person, and it's my God!' He says

I will wait for the God of my salvation.

Finally, in verse 7 he says

It's God who will hear me.

'I will wait; I will dwell in this darkness, no matter how long it goes, looking for a person—my God.'

I find that astounding. Because the person who says this, the person who says 'I will wait for my God; no matter how long it takes, I will wait for Him,' the one who says that is a sinner! He's a failure. He says, 'I'm gonna wait for the very God I failed.'

That's why verse 9 is so critical here; 'cause this verse is not simply about a God-ward patience. It's spoken, it's lived, with a confident repentance. Verse 9, Micah says

I will bear the indignation of the Lord

'I will bear His wrath; I will accept His anger as it comes upon me.' He says 'I will do that *because...*' he says,

...I have sinned against Him,

This is not the testimony of a person that has done everything right. This is a testimony of a person who has done wrong. And he doesn't excuse it. He doesn't deny it. And he doesn't blame anybody else. He says, 'I have sinned.'

It's interesting...the six verses that lead up to these...this set of verses. Micah, as a prophet, is describing Israel at the time, and he's describing the sin of his nation, and he's sayin', '*Is there anybody righteous among us?*' And he says there is not. And he goes around and he says, 'You can't even trust your leaders; you can't trust your priests; you can't even trust your brothers and sisters, your mother and your father, your sons or your daughters.'

Now, at that point he could become a typical radio talk-show host, or he could become a nay-sayer in our public right now that could tell everybody what they're doin' wrong but won't acknowledge *they've* done wrong. But no—the prophet says everybody is wrong. And when he comes to this, he says 'I myself have sinned. I'm a sinner among sinners.' And he says

Though I fall I will rise; though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me.

It's said with a brokenness. You don't utter these words lightly. They're spoken with a reality that the very One you're waiting for is the One you have wronged, and you've sinned against. But with that brokenness there's a confidence, 'cause Micah goes on and he says

He will bring me out to the light,

'He will. He will show me a righteousness I could never imagine. He will bring about for me a justice, a rightness that I don't deserve. My God will do this. I will bear my consequences. I will accept my sentence. I will live out whatever punishment God ordains. But I know He will bring me out of it to the light'

That's why this passage has a ring of triumph to it, the tone of victory. My favorite commentator on this particular passage points at this verse, and he says "That is what victory looks like the morning after defeat." That is what victory looks like the morning after defeat, to say 'I fall, but I'll rise up. In the darkness of consequence, I have a light—and it's my God. And He will bring me out of it.'

It's a confidence the Apostle Paul has when he says 'For I'm convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor things present, or things past, or things future, or principalities, or height, or depth, nor any created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ.' This is what victory looks like the morning after defeat.

Some of us need that. Some of you are ending 2007 with defeat. In fact, I'm convinced everyone in this room...there is some point of failure in your life over the past year. There is some place in your life where you've wronged God, where you've sinned against Him. I don't even name it; your conscience will prod it. It may be on a careless word; it may have been a foul deed; it may have been a chronic attitude. But you have failed God at some point in this past year.

In the wilds of Wyoming a 24-year-old man, having served two years of duty...two tours of duty...in Iraq, was back home and living with his family, and readjusting to civilian life. And it was a Christian family; he was a Christian man. They went up into the wilds. They were going to spend a day out in the wilderness out in Wyoming. They were up having a great time, his family and friends.

And he and a brother and a couple other relatives went further off into the wilderness. They went up on a ridge. They were climbing on a ridge. And as they were climbing along the ridge they were throwing rocks over the edge. And they came to a certain point and the guy picked up a rock and he lofted it over the overhang. And as it went out over the overhang he dropped and he looked over the overhang. And he saw, down below, the helmets of two climbers on ropes.

And just as he looked, he saw the rock he threw land and instantly kill the lead climber.

That young man killed someone. He's a Christian, and he killed someone; a respected, wonderful, father, parent, outdoor leader died in an instant because of a negligent, careless moment by a Christian. The authorities said that he was criminally guilty. By the law he was negligent and careless, and it was a negligent homicide. But they did not choose to charge him.

He found no relief in that. As he put it, "Pete's death was my fault. And I can't ever justify it. I can never set it right. I can never make up for it. I can never change that. I was careless; I was negligent. But I can never change it."

Listen...there is something in your life this past year that I am sure you would have to say is your fault, and you will never be able to justify it. And you say, 'No, there isn't.' You haven't looked close enough.

John Piper, writing a tremendous article, makes this statement. He says, "So many young people are being lost to the cause of Christ's mission because they're not taught how to deal with the guild of sexual failure. The past two decades we have seen a plague of pornography released through the powerful communication tools of the internet. We're seeing a whole generation of people sucked into sexual addiction at a rate never before seen." And he's sayin' we're seein' a whole generation of young people...as Christian leaders, we're seein' a whole generation of young people compromising their Christian future because they are such failures at recovering from sin. They don't know how to cope after defeat. He says the problem is not just how not to fail—you are going to fail. At some point, some time, some place—it may be a word, it may be a deed, it may be an action, it may be an attitude—, but you will fail. The problem is not just how not to fail. The problem is how to deal with the failure, and do it in such a way that it doesn't sweep your whole life away into a wasted mediocrity with no impact for Christ; a wasted life that just simply says 'I could never get it together. I'll settle for whatever.'

You never settle for 'whatever.' You learn how to get up after defeat. The question is, how do we do that? How do we say what Micah said? There's only one way. You grip the cross.

Romans 5—a beautiful chapter, one of my favorite in the Bible; and I'm not going to go through it in detail. I'm just gonna point out the central truth of it...the fact that through the obedience of the One—and the reference here is the great act of obedience, where Jesus Christ accepted God's call to the cross, and Jesus said "I will do that." And in talking about the cross, it says [*Romans 5:19*]

Through the obedience of the One...

Jesus going to the cross...

...the many will be made righteous.

In that one act of right, Jesus made up for all the wrong you and I have ever done, will ever do, or could ever do. Because of who He is, and what He did, and when He did it, and how He did it, He made up for every sin—past, present, or future. What a statement! One act of obedience—the many will be made righteous.

The outcome of that is described later in verses 21 and 20...

...but where sin increased...

...looking at the panorama of history; but where sin increased, the Apostle Paul said,

...grace abounded all the more,

For sin, there is a greater answer; and that greater answer is grace—God's favor extended, unmerited, unearned, undeserved, simply received. And it is greater than any sin you have committed. And that grace that abounds is so that sin

...as sin reigned in death, even so grace would reign...

...that sin would not be the last word on you. Grace would be. And that is through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

You say, because of the cross, because of what we remember this morning, 'Though I fall I will rise; and though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me.' That's how victory sounds the morning after defeat—because of the cross. Though I fall, I will rise.

We're gonna take Communion. The servers will come and take their place, in just a moment, around the table; and I will read a passage of scripture, and then I'll lead us in prayer. And when I'm done, the musicians will play; and there's music they'll play. Eventually there's some songs that we'll sing together as we go through the rest of the service. But as we do that, we'll invite you to participate with us today and take Communion. Very simple thing; the procedure's very simple. The individuals will be up here. There will be a man and wife at each table—one of our elder or pastors and their wives. And if you desire to take Communion we invite you to come forward. As you come forward you may stop at the table. You'll be given some of the bread; and as you're given the bread you'll be told "Eat this in remembrance of Him." Then you'll be given a cup and you'll be told to "Drink that in remembrance of Him."

Now if you desire, if you want to take that cup and that bread and go back to your seat for a while, that's fine. If you want to stand off to the side, and eat it and drink it off to the side, that's fine. If you want to just stand right here and do that, that's fine. There's no hurry to this. We allow plenty of time for it. The music will play. You don't all have to stand up...please, in fact, don't all stand up and try to line up at one time. Just let the line kind of develop slowly. And if you stand back at that first row of chairs and kind of clear out as people come. We invite you to participate with us today.

To participate is an expression of your faith. This is something to affirm your confidence, your faith, in Jesus. It's not something you do just because it's ritual, a neat tradition. It needs to be an expression of your faith—that you believe that Jesus Christ did die for you, was crucified for your sins, buried, rose again, and that He's alive, and He's your savior. If that's the faith that you wanna express, then listen—we invite you to do that.

If it's kind of new and you just want to observe and say "What's this about?" we invite you to sit back, enjoy the music, have quiet time with God, and just observe.

But I want to encourage each one of you as you come forward today to take that Communion, to say in your heart "Because of this, because of this One who died for me, though I fall I will rise, and though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me."

I'll ask the individuals to come forward to serve; take their places.

The passage of scripture I'll read that introduces Communion is found in 1 Corinthians 11. The Apostle Paul, writing about this tradition that Jesus gave us, this practice that He asked us to pursue, participate in; he says [verses 23-26]

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Our Father in Heaven,

We come to this table in obedience, to do what Jesus asked us to do—to remember Him, and remember Him specifically as the One who died for us. Father, we pray that as we participate in this act of obedience, this expression of faith, we pray and we ask that You would meet us with Your Spirit and You would refresh us and renew us; not just individually and personally, but Father, even as a congregation and we participate in this together, Father, meet us with Your Spirit. Renew us in the reality of Jesus, the One who died for us, who opened up the gates of the grace that abounds beyond any sin, the One that has put within us the sound of victory the morning after defeat.

We thank You, Father, for Him. In Jesus' name, amen.