

SERMON: "THE CROSS & THE ORB"

**TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT
NEW TESTAMENT**

**ISAIAH 25:1-8
ACTS 1:6-11**

June 25, 2023

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INTRODUCTION

Looking ahead to my retirement in a few years, I've started working on a gift to myself
I'm visiting every church I have served from Kentucky to NC to Georgia to TN
and Iowa taking pictures - one of the pulpit from the pews, one from the pulpit
I'm going to put them all together, a nice reminder of people and places loved

I stopped in Bowling Green, Kentucky on my way to a Georgia football game
(I mean continuing education). My first church is there. I was the associate.
I worked with the youth, the deacons and preached about once a month.
We did a building campaign and updated our youth room. Sounds familiar

We decided to build the furniture in the youth room with kits popular at the time
So when I was there 30 years later. I went up to the youth room,
laid down on the floor and looked up at the bottom of the table
All our names and initials are still there from when we signed our work

You ever do that? Signed your name or initials on your work?
I look around this place for everyone and see plenty of work that Julian and Nate
and Jerry and Judy could have signed. I've encouraged Cooper
to sign his name on that awesome grill / smoker he is building out back
We gonna get Old Testament round here and offer up some sizzling sacrifices

Now what if it wasn't just initials with our names we put on it ... but also what we did?
Something like CPB or CPG - Cooper Parker built ... or Cooper Parker grilled
That is what we have going on in the third window in this "Sermons in Stained Glass"
At the top you will see a cross that sits atop an orb (think globe)
And you see the initials – IC XC on top. And below NI KA

Those are Greek letters shifted to their closest equivalent in English
IC and XC are meant to be initials for Jesus Christ
And NI and KA ... Think the brand name "Nike" meaning 'victory'
Put it all together and the symbol with cross and orb (think globe)
plus the initials and we get what is called 'globus cruciger' ...
'Jesus Christ conquers'

That is the message being proclaimed by the third window – Jesus Christ conquers
So let me connect this week to last week when I talked about healing
and how honesty and humility help us heal. We're going to need honesty
and humility to unpack what it means that 'Jesus Christ conquers.'

POWER USED

The passage referenced by the people who put the windows in is from Acts 1
You see the descriptions they wrote for each window in the bulletin each week

The first chapter of Acts includes the story of Jesus' ascension

He has appeared to his disciples several times since his resurrection

Luke tells those stories in volume one (Luke) He wrote Luke and Acts.

Volume two (Acts) begins with Jesus last conversation with his disciples

So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

We don't know if they knew that he would ascend to heaven then and there

They probably didn't know. Would this have been the question they asked if they knew it would be their last question? It makes sense as such

It makes sense after his resurrection – a 'what now?' kind of question

It is also a question that reflects a bit of bias. They ask about the future the only way they and we know how ... by comparing it to the past.

'Is this the time you will restore the kingdom of Israel?'

It is biased by what they knew and by what they wanted

They wanted Israel 'restored.' It was, in many ways, a political question

Restoring a kingdom. Sounds a bit like 'Make Israel Great Again'

Jesus did not answer that question about times or periods of history

He went another direction ... forward.

He told them they would receive power

And what they were to do with that power ... to be his witnesses

The verse cited by our forebearers is Acts 1:8. the one about receiving power

That's why they choose the cross and the orb ... very much a symbol of power

The cross sits atop the globe. Think planting a flag on the moon

The cross and orb symbol in our window has been used throughout history, especially so by European monarchs. This is where we need that honesty and humility. The slogan 'Jesus Christ conquers' has been used to conquer

Let's talk just a bit of history. We start with the man probably most responsible for putting the organized into 'organized religion' - Constantine

Constantine was the emperor of Rome, one of them. He fought his rival

in a decisive battle at the Milvian Bridge outside of Rome in 312. His victory changed Rome's understanding of authority – one emperor, one dynasty

HISTORY LESSONS

The way the history is told (remember history is written by the winners) is that on the eve of the battle Constantine had a vision of guess what? A cross just above the sun (cross and orb) and he heard a voice tell him 'under this sign conquer.' This began the shift from Roman Empire to Holy Roman Empire. Spread your conquest, spread the gospel

Constantine did unite the church. He called together the Council in Nicea in 325 That effort codified the early church's beliefs, the Nicene Creed. He saw the power religion had to unite a people. And used that power He also used his power to unite people by eliminating their options An ancient pattern – spread your message by way of sword and suppression

Reminds me of roughhousing with my friends at the neighborhood pool I'm going make you believe, going to 'baptize' you which meant hold you under water until you struggle to breathe and give up We were just playing. Constantine and other conquerors were not

Rather ironic, isn't it? In these verses, the disciples asked about restoring Israel, which would mean freedom from their Romans oppressors. And that same passage used by Rome centuries later to expand their power, to conquer in Jesus' name.

Remember that verse, Acts 1:8. They were given power to do what? To witness! Lots of supposed witnessing has been done by way of conquest That conquering under the sign of the cross isn't just ancient Roman history It is more recent (colonialism) and ongoing (Christian nationalism)

The 'Doctrine of Discovery' just renounced by the Roman Catholic Church this year is a prime example of how Christians have used 'Jesus Christ conquers'

In 1452, Pope Nicholas V issued the bull [Dum Diversas](#), which authorized King [Afonso V of Portugal](#) to "subjugate the pagans and any other unbelievers and enemies of Christ", and "reduce their persons to perpetual servitude", to take their belongings, including land, "to convert them to you, and your use, and your successors the Kings of Portugal.'

What this did was give one monarch, then many monarchs, the church's blessing to conquer and subjugate and reduce to perpetual servitude people of other lands this kickstarted the colonial movements and slavery as an economic model all in the name of Jesus. We've seen this around the globe and right here. It is our history, a history of violent conquest – lands taken, people enslaved.

It is also part of the current conversation. Christians today, not exactly being honest or humble, ignoring the lessons of history demanding religious freedom not for some marginalized people but for themselves – so we can use our power to witness how – putting the ten commandments on display in schools or pulling books off the shelves of our libraries

SUMMARY

I really like how our forebearers thought to put a crutch in the church window
It speaks to our need for healing. It is honest, humble, hopeful. But the cross
and the orb, that symbol (and the history of how we have used it) troubles me.
That is why I felt it important to include some history lessons in this sermon.
The cross and orb are symbols of power – and power can be misused

I want no part of beating someone up with a cross
I regret those swimming pool baptisms. I wasn't being fun or funny.
I was being a bully. Seems quite clear to me reading the stories of Jesus
that he had something far different in mind giving his followers power
He gave his followers power to witness ... not conquer

Here's how I'd like to take some valuable counsel from the people who
put these stained glass windows in the sanctuary. Sure seems like they
heard Acts 1:8 correctly when they describe the window
The description they passed down to us is there in the bulletin
'This symbolizes Christ's victory over death'

Remember what I said earlier about the brand name 'Nike'?
How it means victory? How the roots of that word come from this symbol
And the initials that go with it – the initials for Jesus Christ
And the initials for victory ... not conquest

And that victory? It is not a victory over supposed pagans or over 'those people'
who with some twisted theology somehow deserve subjugation and servitude
Christ's victory is not some rationale for more killing, more death
It is the victory over death

Wouldn't you much rather witness to that ... to resurrection
Than trying to restore Israel or America
Than trying to make the empire holy
Than using Jesus as a cover to conquer

The victory over death that's got Jesus on the loose
I'll be a witness to that!

And as for how to witness to that victory over death
I'll add my voice to the prayer penned by Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa
I'll add my voice to all those pray it, say it ... and sing it. It is a hymn in our hymnal.

*Goodness is stronger than evil.
Love is stronger than hate.
Light is stronger than darkness.
Life is stronger than death.
Victory is ours through Him who loved us.*