

jesus  
is the  
victor

CHRISTOPH FRIEDRICH BLUMHARDT

# Jesus is the Victor

C H R I S T O P H F R I E D R I C H B L U M H A R D T

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## Preface

Christoph Blumhardt was barely a year old when his father, the pastor of the German village of Möttlingen, ended a two-year-long battle against demonic darkness. Johann Blumhardt had agreed to counsel a tormented woman in his congregation, and all hell had broken loose. The enemy, defeated, finally howled, “Jesus is the victor!” and fled. But that was only the beginning of the drama that ensued.

What followed was nothing short of heaven breaking in on earth. Sick and disabled people were healed, mental illnesses vanquished, and stolen goods were returned. Murderers confessed, and broken marriages were restored. Marked by the transformation of lives and relationships, this awakening spread like a quiet tide through Germany and beyond, despite the efforts of a cynical press and Johann Blumhardt’s nervous ecclesiastical superiors.

Christoph Blumhardt’s essay, *Jesus is the Victor*, is rooted in this experience. He refers to it in several places, and it is obviously pivotal to his thinking. Though what he writes here stands on its own, it cannot be fully appreciated apart from his father’s battle with—and victory over—the powers of darkness. For Christoph Blumhardt, what happened in Möttlingen was not merely a past event, but a continuous reality. The reader is thus encouraged to read, in conjunction with this book, *The Awakening*, by Friedrich Zuendel, a detailed account of Johann Blumhardt’s experience. The two belong together.

THE EDITORS

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## He Overcomes the Darkness

**I**t happened one day in Möttlingen, where my father stood in a fierce struggle with spiritual darkness, that he was walking in the countryside with several others from his congregation. He was so weighed down and agitated by the spiritual battle that his heart was ready to burst. Their path lay through a wood and across a large clearing. There they paused and my father said, “Let us sing a song I have written. It will encourage us.” He then recited to them the verse, “Jesus is the victorious King.”

Jesus is the victorious King  
Who o'er all his foes has conquered;  
Jesus, soon the world will fall  
At his feet, by love o'erpowered;  
Jesus leads us with his might  
From the darkness to radiant light.

The voices of the people rang out heartily. But as they were singing they could barely believe their ears—they noticed that they were not singing alone but that an invisible chorus grew louder and louder around them. It was as though an unseen host of angels was surrounding them and singing together with them. Amazed and elated, they hurried home, where yet another wonderful thing happened. As my father entered the house of Gottlieben Dittus, who had been under demonic oppression and who had been so much a part of my

father's fight against darkness, she sang him the same song. It was as if the invisible singers had gone ahead of them to bring the verse to her.

This verse has become my battle cry and song of victory. True, the battles of that time have quieted down, but they have never ceased. Each year there are new battles, but Jesus continues to be felt daily, not only in our hearts, but also outwardly.

We can easily lose sight of this, the way things are going in the world. What we see today is not God's salvation but mass corruption. Things have become so twisted that it is hard to even mention the gospel. The more time goes by the more the powers of sin and unbelief, of death and hell, ensnare the world. All the more must we be convinced that God really has the world's salvation in mind. And all the more must we gather courage to oppose the devils of this age and deny them their prey. For it is not God's intention that anyone or any part of his creation should perish (2 Peter 3:9). The final generation will not be one of doom, but will consist of a people who shall be a blessing to the earth—a people who possess the Promise in joy and hope and are a light to the nations.

Even if our age has become riddled with evil, even if death runs rampant on the earth, we will not accept these as final facts. We must not sleepily say, "It is the Lord's will. What will be, will be." No, we must resist and, like Moses, throw ourselves into the breach. Just as Moses strove with compassion, patience, and faithfulness for the people of Israel, rebellious as they were, so we, with the same courage, and certainly also with the same repentance, must proclaim that light has broken into the darkness. Salvation and healing are the will of God. To the devil and to all the powers of hell, which accusingly proclaim the hopelessness of our situation, we will cry out, "You will not win! We know this because we know Jesus, who is victorious over every devil."

The fact that Jesus became one of us, in flesh and blood, means that he identifies himself with all that belongs to us as human beings, even our darkest night (Hebrews 2:18). May this enter our consciousness with full impact.

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Let us not be led astray, especially in times of corruption when sin appears to have the upper hand and worldly seductions are so great. If we give up on the world, we also give up on a part of ourselves. If I think of someone or some group as being hopelessly lost, then I must feel that part of me is at the same time lost. If your neighbor cannot be made whole because of his present nature, then how much of your nature will also be lost in darkness? Or do you think that an exception will be made for those who have somehow “arrived”? God would not dream of that—He is just.

Although darkness reigns everywhere, it does so most especially within us. Therefore, let us each be on our guard. For before we realize it, we can become enslaved to corruption; even our most noble works can become tainted. If we are not careful we can become like the mute who could no longer speak the things of God (Luke 11:14). Perhaps this is why we so seldom see people joyfully, vigorously, happily looking up to God. We’ve become mute. Though people talk plenty about various kinds of weaponry and other instruments of power, who speaks of God’s will? Instead we hear lies and words of ill will. “We want it this way,” says one, and “We will do it that way,” say another. But who cries out, “We want God’s will!”? Do any of us truly want Christ to conquer—to come and make his kingdom great among us? Is he not the Lord? Or do we think we can save ourselves?

Jesus alone shows us the way out of darkness. He is God’s power that leads to salvation (Romans 1:16). He reconciles all that is broken and not right. So we need never lose courage, even when the world is so terribly torn apart, or when we do not foresee a quick redemption from our own sins. We must not lose heart because of God’s delay. God has sealed the world with the name of Jesus. If this were not the case we would have all perished in our need long ago.

Our battle cry is: “Jesus is the victor.” This cry must be heard again and again, especially in our day. For Jesus was given authority over dark forces while on earth and he continues to exercise that authority in the here and

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now (Colossians 2:9). Our attitude should be: “Just wait until you have been wrested from the clutches of darkness and your eyes are opened—then you will believe.” When we have this attitude we will be the first fruits, light and salt, pioneers for the others.

We cannot see into the darkness—not like Jesus can—but we can perceive its influence everywhere and how it imposes itself through human corruption and perversion. Whenever war breaks out, for instance, the power of darkness dominates. Who is to blame? It is the working of dark powers that get personalized in human history. We are captives, Paul says, and stand under the dominion of darkness. And yet it is out of this dominion we are to be liberated. When Jesus said, “If I cast out the devil through the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (Luke 11:20), this remains valid for today, not only when he lived bodily on this earth, but for us as well. Through the finger of God he wants to remove the darkness of our stubborn wills. When Jesus healed on earth he conquered the darkness. But when the hearts of the healed were open and believed, then a light from God broke in.

Perhaps it is good that darkness shows its ugly face from time to time, as it did at Jesus’ death. Yet Jesus remained steadfast. And herein lies our confidence. Right in the midst of the most terrible trials and fear and distress, Christ carries on his work and helps us so that we need not be mutes any longer.

Into the world he came; yes, into misery, into our filth. God loves the whole world, especially all that has become diabolical—the godless world! “The people who lived in darkness have seen a great light” (Matthew 4:16). It was to the desperate, the condemned, the damned, the murderous, the miserable, all those for whom there was no longer any consolation or hope, that Jesus came. They beheld the God who loves them. Light came into the darkness.

Light is possible for every pit of despair. This light is love. The gospel is God’s love in our darkness. With every word of the gospel, God lays claim to the darkness, a loving claim. We need no longer fear, for God lays claim

to sin, death and hell through his love. He loves each one of us as his child. What, his child? You and I may be terrible sinners. So what! From the cross God says to us, "I lay claim to you not to judge you or condemn you, but to help you." This is the light of the gospel and the darkness cannot overcome it (John 1:5).

## He Conquers Sin

**T**oday we are especially concerned about the dire social conditions and human need we see around us. There is a lot of talk about this. It's amazing to think of how many people still dream of a world in which there is nothing but peace. Then I think, of course, they are right. But if the One who made the world and has our life in his hand is not acknowledged, if we refuse to turn to him as the power we need for this, this dream is very much a fantasy. Nothing will come of it. Our misery resists and wriggles like a snake. Set up ten states and base them on the various opinions of outstanding leaders who believe they have the answer. Let one be based in a community of goods; or let one operate according to some benevolent, supreme authority, perhaps with a religious framework; or have one in which only the poor, the workers, have anything to say. Then make the laws as strong as can be; we will still see the same awful mess we experience today, and have experienced for thousands of years. Only its form will have changed a little.

Apart from God we will not be able to do away with the discord in our hearts and the discord between us. Sick in mind and body, we have no hope of creating a healthy world. Inwardly and outwardly unclear and confused, torn by emotions and passions, we cannot form a society of truth and justice. Every time we honestly think about the human condition we cannot help but thirst for God, for the living God. For nothing ever gets solved without this God.

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The greatest obstacle to the kingdom of God is us and our clever solutions. Self-will leads so many people and so many nations to destruction. Not even our Christian institutions are very helpful. Too much pride has crept into them. No doctrine or organization, Christian or not, or anything else we can think up, will lift us out of our confusion. Unless we arrive at the point where we dispel the foggy atmosphere of human effort and humanly devised ideals, unless we can look clearly at the world and say, “Without Jesus, we are nothing,” we are lost (John 15:5). So we must pray, “Come, Lord Jesus. You must be victorious in us. You must be the conqueror in us as well.”

If there is no breakthrough in us, if we do not achieve a victory over our own ego-driven selves, if God does not receive the honor—then, oh, what a night could come over us! I shudder to think of it. But this shall not come. For today we are all invited to enter into the battle. Everyone can join in. This is actually what Jesus demands of us: Fight against your own selves! Do not fight with your own strength and understanding. Believe in God. Give God the glory and go boldly ahead. Let your heart be filled with earnestness in the certainty that your life can still be changed.

For Christ will not let us go on as we are. He opposes every injustice with God’s justice. He fights against all that resists him precisely because he has won the decisive battle: “...having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us, he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Colossians 2:14-15). In the war against sin, evil has been dealt the decisive blow, but it continues to fight. It is senseless, therefore, to simply seek some kind of spiritual peace, as though the gospel wanted to make life comfortable for us. To the contrary, Jesus said, “I have not come to bring peace on earth, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). As long as the war against sin and evil continues, we only have peace in the fight. Our peace is not well-being, not a placid quietude. Our peace is found by enlisting in the campaign of our Captain, who came in the flesh to destroy the works of the flesh.

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In this struggle against ourselves, our fists, our intelligence, and our understanding are of little use. We cannot just get hold of sin and drive it out. We must turn to Jesus for help, for he came and comes in the flesh to conquer it. And were he not in our flesh today, I would give up my faith. It would all be an illusion. If I cannot have God fight in me, then God's cause for this earth is lost.

By grace, though, we can break the laws of our sinful nature. "We have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God... We have been released from the law so that we can serve in the new way of the Spirit" (Romans 6:22; 7:6). It is not true that we belong to sin. Who we are as sinners is not who God created us to be. These are our false selves. What I am in my sin-filled state is not who I truly am. Only when God dwells in me am I truly human.

Need I fear my own sin? No, because Christ is victorious over it. Even though I am still a sinner, I am free. Christ's victory is on my side, on your side. Nothing else is needed. We need not appear to be better than we are. We can all be different, though not one of us will ever be perfect in this life. For we stand in a movement toward a new heaven and a new earth. We live in the awareness of victory, not only today but every day. In joy and confidence we know that nothing has authority other than the Christ who is victorious.

This does not mean that God offers us a good earthly life if we conquer sin. Jesus is not interested in improving our temporal circumstances so that we might have an easier life. He did not come into our situation for that. He does not bring healing so that we might be pain-free. What would we gain from this anyway? No, he wants something else. He wants us to see heaven wide open and thus gain courage to overcome the world-spirit marred by sin and evil. He wants to lead us to the great victory, the great conclusion when he is Lord over everything, including sin.

How is he to do this? How, when so many of us only want to be helped in our human, temporal need? Don't we realize that Jesus wants to bring into being a new world, the powers of which are already at work and will continue

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to work until the whole creation is freed (2 Corinthians 17)? It is toward this that we must strive. We must not remain preoccupied with our earthly cares, burdens, and ailments, as if that was the main reason for Jesus' coming. This only serves to rob us of the vision of that great, new reality that God gives in Christ.

Many are driven to Jesus because of human need. Need has to be the Savior's ally. But how many of us run to the Savior because of our sin? Very few. When we are afflicted we so easily go running for help. But it will only be well with us if we turn our wills completely over to Christ. It seems as if we turn to all sorts of different things in our need until we have tried everything but surrendering to Christ's will. Only after we've exhausted all our remedies is the Savior good enough for us. Then, perhaps, we come to him. It is almost as though we desire to hold onto the present age as long as we can feel even a little bit at home here.

But look what has happened to us as a consequence. How much have we had to suffer over the centuries because of our stubborn pride. How much we are burdened by need, by death, by sin. Even when suffering under terrible evil we don't devote our energies to getting to the root of it. Instead, we skim off the nearest misery from the surface of our distress and bring that to God, saying, "Help me here, and then I will be happy once more!" As though that could help. As though that could make any difference to our twisted natures. Even if God healed a hundred thousand people today, would that bring any lasting change? In five, ten, twenty, thirty years all would be forgotten and everything would be back where it was. Something must happen on a deeper level if lasting change is to occur.

All this should humble us, for from the very beginning God has intended, through his word and his deeds, to make us loathe our sin, to be disgusted with everything wrong, with all that is powerless and ungodly. We need Jesus to free us from ourselves, to overcome in us the powers of sin and evil. This is what moved Jesus when an official pled with him to heal his son who was

sick unto death (John 4:46-53). And that is how we are to be moved. We desperately lack these powers of new life. Patching up the old is no help—the old order must go! We need to devote our whole lives in faith to the One who has come to lay the foundation for a new, glorious world.

This does not happen overnight. It's not like an angel suddenly appears where there was formerly a little devil. The Sun of God works slowly, just as the sun outside melts the snow slowly. If it goes too quickly, there are floods. Similarly, those who are bent on becoming like angels overnight become fanatic and foolish, and often self-righteous. All the same, we need never fear being left in our sins. We can be certain that sinful as we are, as bound and miserable as we may be, we belong to Jesus. This reality will help us forward. God will reveal himself in us and free us more and more. Our sin will lose its stronghold because Christ's victory and his deeds in the world show us that we belong to no one else but him.

Therefore, even if occasionally we have to bear some evil or misery, what have we to complain about? Our goal is something greater, the liberation of humankind. God's purpose is the great redemption, the great freeing, from the whole mass of sin that has lain upon us for centuries. Our goal is the destruction of all that lies hidden in shame and guilt. It is the coming of life in Jesus, who came to us so that we, as his brothers, might come to the Father of lights.

Believe, then! And those of you who do believe, consider whether you really believe! You devout people, consider whether you really are devout! You righteous ones, consider whether you are truly righteous! Consider whether you can accept the cross, temptation, and need—yes, even death—without any hesitation, because Jesus seeks to conquer sin here and now.

## He Destroys the Powers of Death

**D**eath can only be fact as long as we live for our selfish desires. As soon as we live again for the Spirit, then life prevails (Romans 8:2). In Jesus, death is no more. True, we shall physically die. This cannot be changed. But if we surrender ourselves to the death of Christ, resurrection and life will be revealed in us. For “Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?... Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:54-57). The Savior transcends the powers of death and speaks a new word: “You shall live! I live and you will live also. O, you who cling to me, you who expose yourself and your sins to the judgment of God, you who want to live in the Spirit of God and not carry on in your self-sufficient ways, you shall hear this: ‘I live and you will also live!’”

My anchor lies in Möttlingen. That is where an indescribably great light dawned, which has never yet set. God gave something there that was truly amazing. What God did was so great that nobody understood it, and because of this it was soon hushed up. But what God did has not gone. That is why I continue to believe and hope—not only me but many others as well. For we have tasted powers from on high and we pray that they would descend upon all the suffering and sorrow in the world.

It was plainly evident in Möttlingen that God was gathering a people together around the powers of life. There were thousands who were literally

showered with blessings. But this also angered people, those who could not tolerate that so many sick people, ailing and lame, would come to my father and find healing. It got so bad that the church authorities even forbade people from entering the parsonage. All around the house stood guards to prevent others from going in for help. All my father could do was to tell people they should go into the church and believe that Jesus would help them there, and they would be healed. I do not exaggerate: hundreds were healed without ever seeing my father.

Once a woman who lay on her bed completely paralyzed came with her doctor. Suddenly after the sermon she was able to get up and walk around. The powers of heaven were simply there. And so also were many unobtrusive signs, as when people never got hungry or tired, even though they had traveled for ten or twenty hours. People would leave their villages and drive through the night and arrive just in time for church. In the evening they would leave Möttingen, full of joy and energy. Life was bursting.

Yes, once he starts, Jesus can achieve something here on earth, particularly for the miserable and the poor. We may count on it. He can open the gates of heaven. And once they are all finally opened, when all hindrances are removed, God's powers reach right into the forces of death. One gate after the other must open, one fetter after the other must disappear. We have to wait patiently and trustingly. Even if it still takes many years, it doesn't matter. For who is the Lord? Jesus is Master. If we accept him as our captain, we will come to him again and again saying, "Look, dear Savior, death reigns here, and death reigns there, and here people are bound, and there people are oppressed." Not only will the gates of heaven open but the heavy gates of hell will collapse.

Sadly, Christ has become a stranger to us—the true Christ, who destroys death itself. People say, "That is going too far. The church offers us consolation in life and in death, and that is enough." Yes, but is that all Christ's victory entails? Buddhists and Muslims also receive consolation. Jesus wants to

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bring us more than comfort—he wants to change our lives. With him comes a new and different atmosphere, one no longer under the shadow of death. Is this not why Jesus came? “He shared in our humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free us who were held in slavery by our fear of death” (Hebrews 2:14-15). So why do we only want be comforted? If this is all that Jesus brings we might as well put aside our Bibles, for the prophets and the apostles were surely mistaken!

We must grasp anew the life-giving power of Christ. When Jesus went to the town of Nain he came across a funeral. His heart naturally went out to the widowed mother who had lost her only son. So Jesus touched the coffin and exclaimed, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” And the dead man sat up and began to talk. And the people praised God saying, “God has come to help his people” (Luke 7:11-17). That is what we can expect, even today. But no, we drag our feet and only desire to die blessed. What a stark contrast to the apostles, who, with all their energy, fought like soldiers for the goal of Christ’s victory over death.

Why shouldn’t we expect Jesus to perform miracles again? Why can’t the dead rise? If Christ’s victory is to mean anything, then the aura of death must change. Yes, we must proclaim the abolition of death, as strange as this might sound. I do not mean that we should pray for many miracles to happen, although they may. What I mean is that we must allow ourselves to be infused by the power of Christ now, or else treat God’s deeds as a thing of the past. For Christ really wants to be among us in resurrection and life—in actual fact and not just in our heads or in our creeds. Without this, we will remain dead.

People think that death is something dead. But death is like a bacteria; it is alive and finds soil everywhere in which to propagate itself. It kills not only the body but often, long before this, the spirit and soul. We must therefore be filled with a more intense heat, we must glow with a fire hotter than that with which we are able to kill physical bacilli. We can obtain this heat, this ardor, when we distinguish between the things of heaven and the things of this

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world. The life of Jesus makes this possible. Nothing else matters. It is not a matter of nursing “dead” people, but of becoming new people.

At Nain Jesus intervenes to bring the dead to life. On meeting death, therefore, we need not plunge ourselves into endless grief. We may weep, as Jesus did on hearing of his friend Lazarus’ death, but we must mostly think about Jesus’ victory. Whether the departed are raised from the dead or not, Jesus does not allow death to have the last word. So we must stop our wailing. If Jesus is a stranger to you, then wail. But if he is near to you, then believe, and free yourself from the dead. If you encounter the workings of death in other ways—in different kinds of need and sickness—Jesus wants to be so near that you may encounter his life in your misery. Don’t let your misery separate you from him.

There are all kinds of natural disasters, too, a kind of active destruction gripping the creation. What shall we do? Shall we fret? No, I say, Stop! The Conqueror will not allow the forces of destruction to be victorious. We don’t need to climb into the coffin with the deceased. Tear the dead from your heart. It is Jesus who wants to live there, and he will not let us wallow in grief. He makes the seed of life grow. Let us not endanger its growth by siding with death as so many others do.

So I ask, why all this mourning? Black as night, the procession approaches. But where is the Victorious One? All our weeping bogs us down. Jesus needs people who come to meet him and are able to say in their sorrow, “Stop! Jesus is alive. He will not tolerate all this sadness. We are not at the mercy of every sickness. Death and its misery can no longer come as they will.” For when death comes, light can still break in. There is no lack of proof that Jesus lives.

This is what I have experienced among epileptics, the blind, the lame, and the deaf, and in general among the so-called incurably sick. I always say to them: Be glad if you are like this. Your task is now to bring something of Christ’s resurrection into your tribulation, into the realm of the incurable. Bring something of Christ’s life. Be a faithful worker in your situation. Then

Christ's victory will be furthered and you will experience the truth of Christ's words: "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."

I once met a Buddhist, and I disputed with him at length about human torment and the suffering of our world. Sadly, I was not able to get through to him. His sweet sense of surrender, of no longer wanting to live here on this earth were too deep. His quest was a life of resignation in suffering. He would rather sink into oblivion than to see life flourish.

Now, how many of us Christians are the same? How many people have actually told me: "Oh, if only my life would end! I just cannot bear the torment of existence!" What does this have to do with Jesus? He came to the dead multitudes so that life, not despair, might reign. Right here a living faction can be present within death's domain. Jesus lives with us in time and in eternity. For him there is no difference. There is life with him at birth, there is life in all his deeds, there is life in his death, and there is life in the misery of human existence—for the blind, for the deaf, for the dying, for the poor, for everyone, for sinners and for the righteous.

The Christ we serve is now the Lord of life (John 14:6). We know that in our misery there is still something alive at work that destroys death. For Jesus is the firstborn of those who are being born out of death, of those who want to be reborn so that their situation can be changed and brought to life. From the dead and among the dead he is the new man, who will not leave us nor allow us to remain as we are. There are some who somehow live beyond the senses, beyond thoughts of earthly existence. Be that as it may. With Jesus it is different; he was not born into the hereafter, into the supernatural, into the beyond, but into our world of experience. And he rises from our deathly existence so that we too may be born into this world as a living people full of life.

Jesus lives in our world, the one we can see and feel and grasp with our thoughts and understanding. Our king is no escapist, he is not about to snatch

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a chosen few and separate them from godless humanity. No, he would rather let himself be called a sinner among sinners, a prostitute and wrongdoer, a glutton and drunk, than to set himself apart from human misery. When we read, “He is the firstborn from among the dead,” it means he appeals to the dead. “Rejoice, you who are dead! He is born among you.” You who are dead, he is yours. And you who feel worthless, whose life seems of no value, can now say: My life must be worth something, since the firstborn from the dead has come into it. Yes, from out of the world of the dead, new life is born here on earth. Let us then rejoice over this birth, this momentous birth.

But how many of us moan and wail the moment we have to suffer the actual pangs of death, even when we know that Christ went down into death? People say, “Yes, but Jesus was quite different. Of course he came out of this—for he was righteous. But who am I, poor wretch that I am?” We despair because we are such terrible sinners.

All I can say is that we all must go the way of death. Die, therefore. Submit to Christ’s death, even if through all the tribulations, anxiety, and need, something in you seems to be shattered forever. Let it shatter, and do not fear, even if you have to suffer in spirit and have to recognize that you are not such a strong person after all. Christ can so permeate your weakness that, as one who dies daily, you can be more alive than many proud people who, with apparently sound bodies, waste away in the world. However much your physical strength withers away, you can be strong. You will, like Jesus, come out from the grave.

This does not mean we won’t have to suffer any more hardship. Christ did not come to take away all our troubles. He does whatever he wishes, so we must not set up some formula for healing and expect that he will act in accordance with it. A true person of faith can be “thrown into prison,” just like Job, whom God allowed Satan to torture to the verge of death. Should we not also be prepared to accept this out of love for Jesus? Whoever is not able to endure tribulations in faith is not a true fighter in Christ’s army. Real fighters are those who will not whimper the moment Jesus lays something on them.

Anyone who tries to push hardship away from himself cannot be used in a war. There have to be people whose spirits are in heaven, even if on earth their lives are sorely afflicted and they are subjected to all kinds of torment. It's not that God wants to plague us. Rather, he wants to use us as soldiers in his war on death. When we suffer tribulation, when we bear sickness, when we have to stare death in the face, we can conquer if we remain faithful.

Put differently, and quite bluntly, if nobody is willing to be sick, how can we fight against sickness? If we are afraid to be lame, blind, deaf, always thinking, "Oh, I should like to walk, to see, to hear"; if we are always groaning because we are not as healthy as we would like to be, then we are useless for God. If you have some sickness that appears to be incurable, stand still, reflect, and remember that the One who is the first and the last is with you, the One who died and came to life. Rejoice! Make use of the "ten days" of your imprisonment (Revelations 2:10) and call out in faith to Jesus, who will stand by you in your prison. If you can do this you will be happier in your prison than all those who walk the streets in good health.

It grieves me that so few believe that Jesus conquers death. It saddens me, too, that so few mourn for their enemies. We are too preoccupied with our own pain. But each of us knows someone we do not care about, toward whom we feel a certain animosity. The spirit of hatred lurks within us; let's admit it. If we fail to tear these hidden hatreds out of our hearts, we are overcome by death. We are murderers in our hatred, our jealousy, our bickering and our cliquishness. And unless we overcome these, we shall not know Christ's victory over death.

Be as religious as you like. If God's love does not drive out hatred, we shall not experience the fruits of Christ's life and resurrection. And if he is not with us we will remain unchanged and without understanding, like an ox at the barn door. Therefore, let us rise from death—that is, from hatred, envy, and bickering—so that Christ can free us with the love that the Father has for all. This love permeates creation and brings true comfort. Where hearts are not

filled with this love, death and despair remain. So let this love completely fill our hearts, and death will be no more.

## He Vanquishes Every Hell

**M**any people are afraid because of what is mounting. Hell seems to be boiling over. We are afraid of war and the shedding of blood. We are afraid of revolutionary movements and are anxious about the necessities of ordinary living. The times are such that we don't know what tomorrow will bring. Everything is being pulled out from under our feet. It's as if hell is about to break loose. Industries are collapsing, trades from which many were making their livelihood are being ruined, agriculture is suffering, through the alliances of nations everything is being changed, and we anxiously wonder how we are going to carry on with our lives.

Yet I have never for a minute had fear of what confronts us. Since the dawn of civilization these changeable, uncertain conditions of human society have existed. All in all, for the one who seeks the kingdom of God these are of secondary importance. I would say further: So what if our generation perishes? Are we more important than our fathers? How are we one bit superior to all those generations that were swept away? What good does God derive from us if we are not a people that live for the kingdom of God? I pity those generations that are left behind more than I pity our own generation. If our generation fails to wake up and to live single-heartedly for God, then no statesman, organization, movement, or anything else will protect us from destruction. We are only safe if God's kingdom comes.

The kingdom of God will most certainly come. But will there be a generation, and will it be our generation, that will start moving toward this kingdom, and thus lay a basis for it? For what we have now will not prepare the way for God's coming. Our Savior is not free to be fully what he wants to be. No one feels a need to understand who Jesus really is. The gates of hell have yet to collapse.

In the end the only one who can conquer hell is Jesus. We must make room for him. In him we must live and have our being. We must stand up for him, with repentance and the crushing of our own wills, with the sacrifice of all that we have and are. If we surrender ourselves to him, body and soul, and have nothing of our own, he will be victorious, even in the worst hells, whether on earth or elsewhere. He lives; we know it. We know that when we sacrifice ourselves for him before God, he will be with us. And with him we will have no fear.

In the sixth chapter of Revelation, John sees the Lamb of God as if strangled, and a book with seven seals. This book contains what shall happen on the earth—the woes that must precede the victory of God, when the kingdom appears in glory. Who will open the book? Nobody except the Savior, who appears in heaven as a slaughtered lamb—he alone is allowed to open the seals. Whatever happens in human history, he is coming. He is coming on a white horse, a hero and conqueror. Many afflictions may strike us but one thing is certain: Jesus is Lord. Everything that opposes him must vanish or be swallowed up in his victory.

It is remarkable that according to John, the woes of this world begin with a victory—Jesus' victory. And this is not so surprising, for when Jesus goes out to conquer, all the powers of the enemy resist him and are thus revealed. The enemy of God is a hostile spirit, a war-spirit. Time and again it resists the rulership of Christ and, by doing so, reveals the sin of the world. It always appears as if there is no Lord of history, as if there were no help anywhere, as if there must always be war where nations slaughter each other.

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When the victory of Christ is fully accomplished, evil will be revealed for what it is. How else shall the church overcome hell if it is not revealed? This is how it always is. Whenever people are moved by the Spirit a terrible time follows. The Reformation is a great example of this. What came soon after? The most terrible war history had ever seen, the Thirty Years War. Despite this, Jesus remains faithful. Even on the battlefield, where only guns seem to hold sway, he is victorious. He remains on every battlefield, and in the midst of all the afflictions which come afterwards, such as starvation and disease. These are nothing but Jesus' enemies attacking him.

For this reason, world history is, for lack of a better expression, Jesus' history. This does not mean that Jesus approves of war. On the contrary, his fight is against the world-spirit (Ephesians 6:10-18). On Jesus' side is the greatest weapon there is: the spirit of reconciliation. Peace will come, the peace we all long for. And the real sign of the last days will be that there will be no person, no nation, whom the Savior cannot reach. When all hindrances, all fetters of the heart and spirit, have been removed, only then will the last days come. Then the whole earth will collapse. We can already see something of this today.

Jesus is always in the fight. He steps forth after the first seal has been opened to do battle here on earth. And when he finds resistance we should not think he has been vanquished. No, all the more we must trust. Whatever the war, whatever hellish powers are unleashed, it should be seen as an occasion for the revelation of Jesus' victory. We do not know how long bloodshed will last. Horrible things have come to pass, and more is yet in store. There will undoubtedly be unrest among the nations until the end. Murderous passions will be roused. The gospel will nearly be forgotten. And yet, we can have full assurance and complete joy knowing that a new time will come. And when the spirit of war is poured out over the world, we must believe that it will lead to an outpouring of God's spirit everywhere in favor of Jesus Christ.

There are, of course, still many hells to be emptied. I've experienced many of them myself, but they have an end. There is enough death, but it has an

end. There is also enough sin, but it has an end too. I can bear the darkness because I know that to God's righteousness belong reward and punishment, grace and judgment. As long as good and evil are confused, darkness belongs under God's righteousness. But in the end it shall cease.

So why do the powers of hell rage so? Why is there so much ill will among the nations? Why is everything so hopeless and gloomy? It is actually because the Savior is near and hell is making its final but futile effort. Therefore, we need not feel sorry for ourselves or for others because so many forces lash out against God. Rejoice. Enter the fray and endure. Now as never before we need to have faith and to raise our heads.

Even if one generation after another should fall away, one society after another become corrupt, let them fall wherever they will. Just hold on to Jesus. With him is victory, and together with him we will bring the world back to God. Even if the whole world despises him, if only we, in small believing circles, hold on to this hope in his power, then the earth will be our reward. All creation will come under the church of Jesus Christ, who is the head over all (Ephesians 1:22-23). This cannot fail; it is the word of God.

## He Lives and Brings New Life

**I**t is easy to wonder whether anything will ever become different, whether anyone really wants to change. Everything humanly possible is being tried, but it seems so miserably inadequate. Whatever we do to try to change values or morals seems to have no effect. Even with all our civilization, all our technology—and I do not want to belittle the advantages of these—on the whole, human nature is being increasingly bent and twisted.

But our hope has never been built on human ideals. Our hope rests on the fact that there is one who lives now in the power of God (Hebrews 10:12). True, all that is earthly is still engulfed in weakness. Jesus too had to suffer all the limitations of human life. However, he is no longer buried in these human things. He has risen healthy and whole, full of life and with the power to give life.

Christ's resurrection is not just something that happened in the past. There is resurrection today just as much as there was back then, after Christ's death. Our renewal is real to the extent that we find ourselves in an entirely different order.

So many Christians seem exclusively concerned with the life beyond. They are under the illusion that God stays eternally in heaven. They think that we are condemned to endure the pain of suffering for the time we live on this small orb called earth. And after our life here we will be either condemned or

blessed, depending on our religious belief. And so it goes on throughout the ages—and we are content to leave it at that.

But this is nothing but unbelief. If all we aspire to is to get out of this world in order to be free in the next, then we are paying tribute to sin and death. We are also showing the greatest disdain for the scriptures when we reject the joyous hope of God's coming reign, when we simply resign ourselves to our fate on this earth, letting things continue as they are. Because our religious lives are so bankrupt, we think that God is also bankrupt and unable to accomplish his will on earth.

Tell me, which of the two are more central to the message of the Bible: our death and flight into heaven, or God's future reign here on earth. From the first to the last chapter, the Bible deals with the coming of God into this world. There is so little about this business of dying. Every word in the Bible guarantees the deeds of God right here where I stand. Down here is where Jesus appeared, not above in the invisible world, not around the throne of God. Here on earth is where he won the victory, and it is right here that we may find him. We should lay claim to our right on this earth—the right to victory over sin and death here on earth—not because of our faith, but because of God's power to make things right.

This is the goal of Christ's victory march. And need and misery will finally be overcome, once the barriers between eternity and this world are broken through again. An opening must be made from above downward, not from below upward. Today's religions see it the other way round. We would rather find an opening out of this world and fly like doves into the sky and be saved. We all want to get to heaven, even though we haven't the slightest idea of what lies beyond. In other words, we want things to end, not change. Even so, when we get to "the other side," we will surely rub our eyes sore. It sounds harsh, but I must say it. I can't stand it when people continually babble about heaven and their salvation. They are the most self-centered people. They think only of God in relation to themselves. This is sheer folly—a fabrication of the first order.

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It is such a pity that grace has come to mean only the forgiveness of sins. But God's grace is the revelation of his power, of his loving kindness to us as expressed in deeds. To experience grace is to see in our own lives that Jesus lives now. There is no greater joy or fulfillment than this. When the Savior does something in me, in you, for this one or that one, that is the greatest and most wonderful thing we can see or know. When we actually experience that people's souls come alive and change, when hearts become different, then Jesus lives and his battle is won.

Our task, therefore, is to demonstrate the power of the resurrection. We can look to many human powers. Here and there one can find something of beauty and something relatively good, but all of it is maimed, and it is powerless to overcome evil. We must look to a higher life, to a mightier power that is not of this world. This power is not so far away, because Christ is alive. He cares about the earth as much as for the heavens. Otherwise we would never know his reality. His resurrection would be history, but not a reality, and we could never conceive of anything becoming different. At best, we would think that his resurrected life was some spiritual thing that we human beings could not understand. That's not what it is. His victory is within our reach.

New possibilities can dawn on us, and the more we sense these new possibilities, either in our bodies or in our souls, the more we can ask for, the more we can look for higher and greater things here on earth. Actually, there are no limits. And for this reason we can bring hope into everything, right into our daily lives. The power that comes from God is ready to be brought into our human situation, and in such a way as to transform it.

Therefore we must not focus on the evils and imperfections of this world. Nor are we to try to figure out how this or that matter is going to turn out. If we try to pursue higher goals by the usual methods or even with extraordinary works of love, we will accomplish nothing for God's kingdom. In every case where we want to help someone along, we must find our strength in Christ. Those who think things have to be done by human ways and means are wrong

(2 Corinthians 10:3-4). If that is the way we are supposed to approach our situation, we are beaten. God's kingdom remains far off if it depends on what we do or what we may yet accomplish. Indeed, we can spoil the work that God does through us if we think it depends on our strength. If Christ is victorious, then our happiness depends upon God exercising his power, not we exercising ours (Psalm 92:4).

Our redemption, then, consists of deeds that we can do nothing to bring about. It is thus not so much a question of our wanting to be converted. The first and most important thing is that God gathers us in. On the day when we have breathed our last and stand before God, we shall be amazed at how much God has done for us and how he has used his power to save us, despite our will.

Whoever is truly in Christ experiences an abundant variety of divine powers, and is so filled with the sense of them that it is natural to live by them. Indeed, these powers of life can come to us, powers that other people would never think possible. That is what it means to be risen with Christ and to go forth in his victory.

## He Calls Us to Fight

**O**ur whole life must be based on the conviction that Christ has delivered us. But too few of us experience this to be true. Where today is the person who lives in the awareness that God delivers his people? People cry out and lament all right, but who lives in this reality?

I can honestly say that my father lived in the awareness of Jesus' victory. Yet when people heard this word "victory"—the word which actually set the tone at Möttingen—and when there really were instances of deliverance, even from death, there was a great outcry and a lot of opposition. "What nonsense!" people shouted. If we had been living in the Middle Ages my father would have surely lost his head. The most pious Christians withdrew from him, and it took all his wisdom, patience, and love to win back his good name. This was all on account of his conviction that "our God is a God of deliverance; Jesus is victorious!"

People resist this only because they refuse to concede their own power. If God is the God of salvation, then we cannot deliver ourselves. Nor can we rely on our faith. In fact, our faith, in terms of how much we believe, is not important. Only God is important, for he alone has proved himself to be the God who helps, who takes care of us, who leads us out of the house of bondage, as he led Israel out of Egypt. All that we are comes from this one God, and whoever surrenders to him will discover that he has the power to liberate.

Yet who believes this? Most people get excited when there is a new advancement in medicine or some new technology, but who gives a wit about what God can do? That is how it is. That is why we accomplish so little and why we are incapable of being truly moved for God and his kingdom.

Those of us who remember the spiritual battle my father waged at Möttlingen know that it was simple faith that brought about Christ's victory. Simple faith, or as one prominent person put it, foolish faith (1 Corinthians 1:18-31). God protected this faith, even during those times when we believed things were going backward. Childlike faith won and still wins to this day. Let us not deceive ourselves. We fail to experience the fullness of Christ's victory because we refuse to put our trust in God. We must become like children who believe that nothing is impossible.

So many times I have wrung my heart when people who have lived pious, church-going lives fall apart with no assurance on their deathbeds. When the gospel becomes only a familiar religious form that is exploited for our comfort, then the forces of evil just keep on rampaging. For do you think this fallen world will disappear, or that sins will be absolved, if we only casually accept Christian views and practices? Try throwing evil out of the front door—it will come in again in no time by the back door!

We live in an age where everything precious is endangered. In spite of all our "Christian" conventions, all our missionary activities, the nations and cities of our world are getting worse rather than better. And how much missionary activity there has been in our time, at home and abroad! Never before has the gospel been preached so far and wide, or with so little impact. It is shocking when we see how people gradually retreat, slipping a little here, a little there—people who just a few years prior were "serious believers," but who just drift away through Christian respectability. Save us from that! How hideous it is when nothing can be called unbelief any more! Underneath it all is nothing but an obsession with other things. There really is no feeling for Christ or his cause, and consequently so much of our "Christianity" has become little more

than idle talk. But it cannot go on like this. Our lives must come under the sway of eternal life.

We desperately need the simplicity of heart that releases the power of Jesus into this world. The world pants and groans under a thousand woes, and we stand here without any decisive help. In a war, the time comes when we must drop the skirmishing and risk our lives in order to gain the major objective. Doing spiritual battle is no different. Everything else should recede into the background in light of one desire: to descend simple-heartedly into the hells of this earth and overtake enemy territory. I repeat: into the depths of hell, where there is eternal misery, eternal need, the effects of which cling to individual hearts and seek to perpetrate sin and corruption. Here we can fight.

A beginning was made in Möttlingen. We joined in with the cry, “Jesus is the victor!” New beginnings have been made elsewhere and throughout history. Today in simple faith—not in self-love, or in a self-satisfied way that is concerned for personal comfort—we can also confront the powers of death and hell and cry, “Jesus is the victor!” But we must have a child’s heart (Matthew 18:3). We need not analyze this. We know only one thing: the ground upon which we dwell is undermined, and our world is in the clutches of principalities and powers that cling to our self-centered desires. So we must cry down into hell itself, “Jesus is the victor!” For the gates of hell cannot prevail against the church.

God will protect us if we willingly and believingly descend into the depths. But we must be willing to fight. And if we are, Christ will preserve us, even through the worst things. For it is in the most horrendous events that the victory of Christ is revealed. But, again, we must believe like children. We must not try to achieve something through a complicated pietism or an intricate spirituality. Look only on what Jesus is doing. Don’t even consider what may or may not happen the next day. Don’t strive to be clever. And don’t overanalyze, or try to make everything smooth. Only when we are weak can we be made strong (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

Yes, we have a task to perform, despite our weakness. God's children must accomplish something. Whether a mountain moves or not depends upon us. If we stand idly before a mountain, it will not move. When we see obstacles before us, when we stand before the mountain of evil, we who are followers of Christ must say, "This mountain must go! We will not allow it to remain." Then it will go. Still, we must not strive to remove the evils of this world in human strength. Our task is to believe that God will clear away all that hinders his righteousness. Faith means doing something about the mountains, but this something is trusting God to remove them.

Faith has little to do with indulging in religious feelings of being saved, or in the advocacy of some idealistic view of the world. If that were so, we would have long since been lost. Nor would we have ever seen Jesus' intervention in our lives, saving us from the evil of our hearts, the half-heartedness of our faith, the sleepiness of our character, and the constant eruption of lustful desires from within.

Yes, we often have to wait, sometimes for years, for things to improve. It is tempting either to compromise and say, in the face of corruption, "We can't do anything about that; it's human nature," or to try to force something in our own strength. We cannot let anything slide. Jesus alone can save us, not only theoretically but in truth, tangibly, right here and now. Certainly we cannot overcome all that drags us down. Not even our good intentions, which some mistake as faith, can help us. Christian sentiments aside, unless we experience the power of Christ we shall remain in the old ways, unredeemed. We fight so that his power, not ours, may prove itself.

This ought to make us humble. Yet some think that all we need to do is to change our way of thinking or take up a more Christian attitude. It's as though nothing more is asked than that we join the "party" of Jesus. But that's not how it works. When, for example, a liar is attracted by the gospel and a light dawns for him and he believes, something radically changes. What happens now about his lies? Does he simply ignore them because he believes? No,

the Conqueror reveals and overcomes what is hidden behind the lies—the hellish power that binds him. If this power is not deposed, then what kind of victory or redemption is that?

Unless redemption breaks through into our life, we who call ourselves Christians will be an obstacle to the kingdom. The bonds of sin, of death, and of hell must be severed. Something completely new must happen to us, something that truly comes from God and sets our life in a new direction. This is faith. In short, we must become co-fighters with Jesus, in small things and in great. Then will we know the certainty of eternal hope.

Therefore we must not become anxious, but fight. Even if we have to suffer and endure much more, we can be confident. For even in death, life comes. All who cry for help will be snatched from the dark domain. Our task is simply to sacrifice ourselves and remain faithful. Instead of serving our own wants and wishes and seeking a cozy life, we must yield every material and spiritual possession to him and fight. For Jesus rules the whole world, and we must testify to this.

## He is Lord and Savior Over All

**I**n his letter to the Colossians, Paul writes:

Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)

Here we sense something of the greatness of Christ. He was before all things, all things were made through him, and all things were created for him. Through Jesus, this Lord, this man, this image of God, God himself looks upon heaven and earth and reconciles everything.

So this is Jesus—the man of heaven and earth! In this man, and ultimately in humanity itself, we will be allowed to see perfection. However corrupt, humanity still contains the spark of life that he will use to bring his new creation to light. And as Paul writes, God has qualified us to share as heirs in this

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kingdom of light, and has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and set us in the kingdom of the Son he loves. (Colossians 1:12-13).

If we stop to consider who this Jesus is and what is to happen through him, then we cannot help but be thankful. Everything is God's and it must all become like Jesus. He is, he was, and all life must be as the life of our king.

Only when we experience the rulership of God's Son—only when we hear God whisper, "You belong to me"—can life's riddles be solved. Where this has not occurred everything remains in a fog. For darkness consists in not knowing what one is, in not knowing how to come to terms with oneself, with heaven and earth, with everything we see and feel, and with what our inner selves sense.

Goethe, on his deathbed, cried, "Light! Light!" He sensed the approach of night in which we see no more. It is just the same before one dies: one sees nothing. Millions of people see neither earth nor heaven. They live like animals and lack even a faint idea of the true meaning of life. They have no sense of the relationship of human life to the rest of creation; it simply baffles them. Even though we have a great deal of scientific knowledge, life remains a mystery. People study life's questions ad nauseam: What is this world? What is life all about? Who are we? What are our origins? What is our final destiny? The search for answers seems futile. Everything is shrouded in riddles.

Just now, when we have perhaps reached the height of human achievement, when people seem to recklessly strive for more and more, we fail to reach life's highest goals. Work gives people temporary release from the nagging questions of life. New inventions are discovered and people have a degree of happiness. But we must admit, if we are honest, that none of this has led us to enlightenment, to fulfillment. In all that we possess and do today, what does it really matter? What this last century has brought us has only been certain practical advantages for life. But how has this really helped us? We still complain; we're still not satisfied. Inwardly we feel oppressed, empty. Even with all the riches and pleasures offered us, we are burdened and wretched, and hanker for something more.

The fact that we are not satisfied, however, is a sure indication that we sense something of Christ's victory, albeit only vaguely. People want something different. They don't know what, but they sense something is missing. This is because they can only be at peace when they experience Jesus as the Lord of creation; when they realize that they are actually God's children. For Christ is the center of creation itself. He is one with everything that lives and moves. As long as we feel separate, divided from heaven, from earth, and from God's life in the world—as long as we are conscious of this—we shall remain unhappy.

Why are we unable to show the world, which always clamors for more, the real causes of its discontent and the real reason for living. People think they need more money, but that's not it. Or they think they need more self-worth. That isn't it either. Too many people let circumstances determine their lives, and so fail to find lasting happiness. What people lack is knowledge of the God who can liberate them from their fate—from those daily events that rule their lives.

But our destiny is to rule with Christ, the cosmic king. We are here on earth for God's purpose. Fatalism or stoicism cannot make us happy, nor can we meditate ourselves into some kind of detached joy in suffering. Neither can we simply accustom ourselves to life's afflictions. We are not created for sorrow but for joy. We can rise above life's pain, knowing that all suffering has an end. For Christ holds all things together, and this enables us to bear anything. Any struggle and temptation is bearable where Christ's victory shines ahead.

All that happens, good or bad, contains traces of Christ. Instead of resignation, instead of worry, we can always hope that things will change. Even if I have to go through death and hell myself, it will change. For the purpose of life is Christ. "Behold, all things shall be changed. I make all things new!" (Revelation 21:5). God promises the re-creation of heaven and earth—the translation of the whole world into the light of the Savior. This is our heart's deepest longing. The great thing is that Christ reconciles the cosmos. He is the ruler over all; and light from heaven will fill the entire universe.

There are thus not two worlds, one in God's hands and the other one not. There are not two species of people either, one totally under God's rule and the other completely outside of it. No devil can do what he wants, no wicked power or principality can act on its own. Even the Evil One is in darkness because of God's will. There he lives his own kind of life, one that is contagious and deadly to those who are attracted by it, yet the entire realm of sin and death remains in God's domain, firmly held in his hands. Let us carry this knowledge in our hearts as a witness. We can proclaim to every devil, to every demonic stronghold, "You are under God. No one can make a single move without God. We are all under God!"

Unless we grasp this, we will never understand why Christ came into the world. Even if you should meet someone who is a devil, know that, ultimately, he is God's. No other power, no ruler, no one, in heaven or on the earth or under the earth, can move a finger without God's love. "Christ is head over every power and authority" (Colossians 2:10). He is Lord over all that lives. Even if a torrent of unbelief suddenly seized the world, in total rebellion against God, as powerful as that current might be it is in God's hands. For the victory has been won. "It is finished." We need never fear the devil, for there is no other master than Jesus. Not even in the deepest depths or blackest night can one escape from yielding to him. There is but one Lord, one God, one Father of all, "who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:6). Nothing else has any right or any claim for itself. No hell, no death, no devil can make any claim. All things are God's because Christ is all, and is in all (Colossians 3:11).

If we should suffer for him, we shall also rule with him. He has been given all authority. Even today Christ suffers, but we rejoice and are glad, for we, who stake our lives on the suffering Savior, shall rule. Not as the world does, in arrogance and fear, but in the way Jesus rules. We will rule in the love of the Father. We will say, "In the name of Jesus, I say to you, darkness, you must be destroyed. You serpent, you Prince of Death, you must perish. You are nothing to us."

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We can live in this expectation because God holds everything in his hands. Again, there are not two kingdoms, a kingdom of darkness and a kingdom of God. There is but one dominion, and it is God's. And although there is in this kingdom some who are bound by sin, it is nevertheless one kingdom. There may be two rooms in a house, but it is one house, not two. All things are under God's command. And in the house of God, we may rule even in the darkness, in sin, in death. We need not grow weak, nor think that we cannot carry on. We can always go forward.

Let this live in your hearts. Let there be no room for grumbling about the world's situation. Those who grumble are not living in the victory of God. We cannot condemn the godless, the unbelievers. That is not our business. Don't even think of people as unbelieving—they are not unbelieving, but tormented. They cannot open their eyes, they are drunk with their misery, saturated with distress, and can't see the stars for the roof. Our task is to witness to the truth that God is God and none other, and that he offers hope to everyone.

This does not mean that God will not or cannot judge sin and evil, but this is determined in the final hour and is God's concern alone. Until God has come to that decision, it is in our hands to make known the name of Jesus to any and everyone. If Jesus is to be truly victorious, then our task must be to live in compassion, and to bring all people the possibility of redemption. Whoever comes to you, wherever you may be, you shall say to him: "You will be saved, for you belong to Jesus. He represents God's will that no one be lost, but that everyone repent and live."

Of course, not everyone grasps this, nor is it necessary. I don't even think everyone needs to be "converted" to our Christianity. The millions must, in the long run, simply be transferred to the rule of God, to the lordship of Christ. They must go in even though they yell and howl. Don't we all at one time kick and scream? All must go in. Why? Because God has set us in the kingdom of his Son, and if this is our final domain, then we are in a fight, like Jesus, to our last breath, to our last drop of blood. And this fight is for the

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coming of the new heaven and new earth, where even the underworld will be brought into the hands of Christ.

If I should have to give up hope for any person, any country, any world, or any situation, then Jesus would not be the one who holds the universe together. There would still remain the burden of death, of travail, a load of night and darkness. Then Jesus would not be the light of the world, and his would not be a cosmic cross that brings everything back together. He would not be victorious. For what else could Jesus' resurrection mean but eternal hope for all he holds together?

One hears about all the millions who are eternally lost, as if this were the essence of pious talk. Why is this? Unless we believe that all that opposes God must end, that hell, death, and sin must end; unless we believe that every domain belongs to God, and unless we spread the love of God to the whole earth, then Jesus is not Lord. We will not be able to freely rejoice in our faith, nor invite others to believe themselves.

I know from personal experience of people who have been set free by my reminding them, "You belong with me, because you and I belong to God."

"Oh, no," they reply. "I am a terrible person."

"No matter," I say. "You belong with me."

"But you do not know the evil things I have done" they say.

"Nevertheless," I reply, "you belong with me, and I belong with you. For we both belong to God." This truth changes people. They receive so much encouragement just by having fellowship that there is simply no more talk of wickedness or sinfulness.

There was a kleptomaniac who came to me to be healed, who continued in this way for a long time, also after we got to know each other. In spite of this, I kept telling him, "You and I belong together. You can go on stealing as long as you like, but I will not let you go." Lo and behold, after a time he gave up stealing and become a totally different person. How many others—proud, avaricious, jealous, quarrelsome people—have been given power to change

simply because they felt, for the first time, genuine, human solidarity. How much more happens when they finally realize that they belong to Jesus. I mean truly realize, not with empty religious words. When we become truly conscious that we—and not just we but all things—belong to Christ, then sin will simply melt away.

Let us then think in cosmic terms. To Christ, heaven and earth are not big enough. We must cast off our chains, and throw off all pious hatred that denies Jesus the universe. Those who expend their energies judging and condemning have no part in Christ's army. No, we must give our last drop of blood so that Jesus' victorious reign comes into the world. The gospel of hell, the gospel of Satan, the gospel of lies must be trodden down, so that at last Jesus, the Living One, can redeem all creation. "The kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Christ" (Revelation 11:15).

How much longer do we have to wait until Christ freely reigns? And yet, what is time to God? It is nil, nothing. Jesus is today what he was yesterday. Evil will capitulate before the name of Jesus. The powers of death and destruction will submit and be redeemed. Yes, demons too, whatever they may be—deceit, sickness, death, corruption, misery—are captives. They too are in misery. Therefore, Christ's victory must be for them as well (Ephesians 4:8). His redemption will dissolve the darkness because the light of God's glory will fill creation—so much so that every tongue in heaven and on earth and under the earth will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). This power, which makes holy what is evil, which redeems what is lost, will finally overcome all inhuman forces, all spirits that mock God, right down into the depths of hell. The victory is ours. God will be all in all.

## Postscript

**T**hough Christoph Blumhardt is relatively unknown today, in his lifetime (1842-1919) his impact was felt by thousands. Even so, he is not easy to characterize—theologically, politically, or otherwise.

Blumhardt possessed no “theology,” although he was behind two movements that accepted him as one of their forerunners without having any direct contact with them: Religious Socialism (in Switzerland and Germany) and Dialectical (“Crisis”) Theology. His ideas had seminal influence on the likes of Leonhard Ragaz, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jacques Ellul, and Jürgen Moltmann. And then there are contemporary “charismatic” movements that claim Blumhardt and his father, Johann, as forerunners of today’s signs and wonders. Lastly, both Blumhardts continue to influence the faith and life of the Bruderhof, an international communal movement based on Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.

Blumhardt didn’t care much for matters of religion and church. Faith was a matter of living in expectation of God’s coming kingdom. This kingdom, the victory of God over injustice on the earth, was something alive for him, not an abstraction. To many people his message sounded dangerously worldly, even irreverent. His critique of ecclesiastical and individualistic piety touched a nerve that is still raw today.

Blumhardt’s aim, however, was never to attack. It grew out of his father’s experience with a suffering and tormented young woman in his small par-

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ish. His father's two-year fight against demonic possession ended when the evil spirit was driven out. This led to a movement of repentance and healing, taking hold of his father's parish and extending to the neighboring towns and villages. This stood as a backdrop to everything Christoph Blumhardt would experience.

When Christoph was ten, his family moved to Bad Boll, a complex of large buildings that had been developed as a spa around a sulfur water spring. This became a kind of retreat center where thousands came to find healing and rest. It was there that Christoph spent his adult life, free to operate according to God's leading.

Eventually, out of frustration with the constant attention people placed on miraculous healing, Blumhardt retired from public preaching. Instead, a burning desire arose within him for God's justice, which led him to a deeper awareness of the misery, poverty, and inequity around him in Germany and in the world. He began to sense God's voice in the new movements of protest and revolt—against capitalism, injustice, and war. Despite socialism's foibles and shortcomings, Blumhardt believed that Christ was surely hidden in it.

When circumstances compelled Blumhardt to join the Social Democrats (he acted as their elected representative to the Württemberg parliament from 1900-1906), he was asked to renounce his position as pastor in the state church, and marked as an outcast. But Blumhardt accepted this as a freeing: "State and church are no soil for the fire of God." This same attitude eventually led Blumhardt away from politics; after his first term in office he went back to Bad Boll.

Blumhardt believed that the prophets and Jesus wanted a new world; the rulership of God over all things. He thought the idea that God was only in heaven and that the gospel applied only to the inner life was disastrous. For Blumhardt, the gospel demanded a revolution of life. What mattered was God's coming reign; a reality not to be confused with any human philosophy of progress or religious system—including Christianity.

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“God’s kingdom comes visibly to this earth. We do not have to wait until we lay ourselves down to die and be buried. Here and now we can hear with our ears, see with our eyes, who Jesus is, who the life-giving Spirit is.”

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