

**Victory through Defeat**  
**Matthew 16:13-23, Eph 6:10-13**

Well brothers and sisters, it is that time of year again... it's the NHL hockey playoff season.

Which means the fans of the top 16 teams in the NHL will be cheering and celebrating that their teams are now competing for the most coveted of all Canadian trophies – The Stanley Cup!

And the rest of us hockey fans are left dealing with our disappointment that our team didn't make the playoffs this year and hoping that some changes get made over the summer break that will transform them into a playoff contender in the next season.

And there is nothing quite like playoff hockey in terms of how both fans and players experience the sweet taste of victory or the bitter taste of defeat.

If you are one of the lucky fans whose team has made it to the playoffs you have high hopes at the start, dreaming that just maybe your team will make it all the way through and hoist that Stanley Cup at the end.

But there is a roller-coaster ride of emotion ahead of you as your team battles the other teams to win the best of 7 games in each series.

They win the first two games and you are on top of the world... but they lose the third game and your excitement is tempered... the fourth game goes back and forth, ending on a tie – which gets decided in a shoot-out and they lose the game... now you are full-on anxious, worried that they might be on a losing streak that would see them eliminated.

So the series is tied at 2 games apiece - but your team wins the next game and you're back on top rejoicing and celebrating, knowing that if they win the next game they will take the series and move on to the next round... and you'll go through this emotional rollercoaster all over again – only it

gets a bit more intense with each series because your team is now one step closer to the final victory and thus there is more to lose.

And this is the emotional life of a hockey fan each year from the end of March to the middle of June.

Now brothers and sisters, I have a confession to make this morning.

Even though I am a born and raised Canadian, and for the first 13 years of my life I played street hockey, floor hockey, mini hockey, table hockey and ice hockey religiously, and even though I follow the NHL playoffs... I do not in fact *watch* any NHL playoff hockey, nor did I watch any of the recent Olympic playoff hockey either...

I simply can no longer take the emotional wear and tear that I experience as the hope of victory is swallowed up in the bitterness of defeat.

You see for most of my life I had been a Leaf's fan – and then ten years ago I moved to Calgary and I was excited to be able to cheer for a hockey team that would win, who had recently made it to the Stanley Cup finals and had the potential to go all the way again...

But it didn't take too long and the Calgary Flames started to fizzle out too. So what to do??

Now I've never been a really big CFL Football fan – but I began to notice that the Calgary Stampeders were doing a lot of winning – so I kind of started to watch them and it felt good to cheer for a winning team and celebrate their victories and while it's not quite the Stanley Cup they did win the Grey Cup in 2014 and so I became a Stampeders fan.

And then they had two amazing seasons in 2016 and 2017 – the best team in the league by far... and they should have won the Grey Cup in both of those years – but they lost. Back to back losses in the Grey Cup – and I'm still hurting over it.

So you see – I just can't take the emotional involvement of watching play-off hockey anymore, the bitter taste of defeat in the face of victory is too much for me.

Now I know that it's supposed to be "just a game" - but for myself, and many other sports fans across the world "the game" and its victories are symbolic and vicarious.

Part of the reason the 2016 and 2017 Stampeder Grey Cup loss hurt so much was because our city needed a win. We'd been hammered by the down-turn of the oil prices... thousands of people had lost and were losing their jobs, companies and businesses were folding – it was bleak.

Now what difference does a Grey Cup win make to those circumstances? Well it doesn't change them - but a victory such as that gives people a symbolic and vicarious experience which says to them that even though they are struggling in life and their backs are against the wall, they are still winners.

It says that it is possible to overcome those who are competing against you, those who oppose you and work against you – we live that vicariously through the victories of our sports teams

46 years ago - in 1972 Canada and the Soviet Union held a hockey tournament – a best out of seven series - to settle the matter of which nation was better in hockey.

But it wasn't really about hockey per say – for the fans and the nations it was a competition between ideologies of Communism and Democracy, national pride was on the line – winning the competition meant your country and political system was vindicated against the criticisms of the other.

46 years later – people still talk about where they were when they heard about the series winning goal by Paul Henderson with 38 seconds left in the final game.

So it may be just a game – but it's so much more than just a game. Because brothers and sisters, in various ways life is often a battle for us and we are looking for some victory.

I'm sure you can relate to what I'm talking about.

Now in our day and age and in our context here in Calgary and in Western Canada we speak about life being a battle and we mean that metaphorically.

But for the people of Israel during bible times life literally was a battle as they fought to conquer the Promised Land, and continued to fight against their enemies as they settled the land.

If you are familiar with the stories of the Judges in Old Testament then you will remember how the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, or the Philistines were always invading and raiding and oppressing the Israelites.

And the nation of Israel would cry out to their Covenant God – Yahweh – and he would send a Judge who would rally the nation and lead them in a battle against their enemies and God would give them victory and they would be freed from

oppression until the next enemy invaded and the cycle would repeat itself.

Now this whole notion of God giving Israel victory over its enemies winds its way throughout the whole Old Testament

We could go all the way back to how God gave Abraham victory over an army of five kings who had carried off his nephew Lot as a prisoner of war...

We certainly can't forget how God drowned the army of the Egyptians when Israel was crossing the Red Sea...

There was Israel's first "official" battle against the Aggagites where Joshua led the men in battle while Moses prayed for victory up on the mountain...

There is the battle of Jericho where God brought down the walls of the city after the Israelite army marched around it seven days and then seven times on the seventh day...

There's the incredible victory God gave to Gideon over the Midianites after paring down his army from 32,000 men to just 300...

And who can forget Samson's victory over 10,000 armed Philistines, with a donkey's jawbone

And the ultimate victory has to be David defeating the giant Goliath with just a shepherd's slingshot and a small stone.

Of course that victory over Goliath set in motion events for David that would one day see him become Israel's greatest warrior king whom God used to defeat Israel's enemies on all sides and bring them national peace and security.

From that point on Israel no longer worried about minor battles with local nations but contended with world empires and powers such as Assyria and Babylon, and when such powers came to threaten Israel God granted victory to His people against them as well.

Like the time King Hezekiah sought God's help when Assyria was besieging Jerusalem, so the Lord sent His angel and wiped out the Assyrian army of 185,000 soldiers overnight.

There are so many examples of Israel receiving victory from God in the scriptures that you can spend a whole day reading about them.

It wouldn't be too far off to summarize the history of the nation of Israel as a story about being oppressed and then freed by some sort of amazing victory from God.

And then if you add in all the Messianic prophecies from the prophets, which talk about deliverance and a day of judgement for Israel's enemies...

Well brothers and sisters we can forgive our friend Peter for confronting Jesus and rebuking him for saying that *"he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed..."* (vs. 21)

Peter takes Jesus aside and essentially tells Jesus this is not how the Messiah should be talking; this is not the language of faith and trust in the God of Israel who has time and time again come through with a mighty victory over Israel's oppressors. This is not how the Messiah, the Son of God talks and Peter won't hear it.

This is the equivalent of the Stampeders star quarterback Bo Levi Mitchel giving an interview saying – *“we’ve got a strong team – best in the league again this year and we’re going all the way to the Grey Cup this year and when we get there our plan is to let the opposing team’s defense sack me and injure me, and we plan to make several consecutive fumbles to facilitate some turnovers that will cost us the game.”*

That’s just not how a star quarterback talks about the playoff game – we would expect that the reporter or a team-mate or the coach would pull Bo Levi aside and say *“what in the world are you talking about! Stop that – we don’t win victories and Grey Cups with that kind of talk!”*

Now we are so used to this story that we forget this aspect of it. We are so used to the story of the gospel where we know Jesus must die for our sins that we think *“duh! Peter – how can you be so dense as to not see this!”*

So we are not shocked at Jesus’ reply to Peter where our Lord tells him point blank *“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”* (vs. 23)

Now Brothers and sisters, I have to tell you that I’ve left out an important part of the story about God giving Israel victory thus far.

You see all these victories are set within the context of God’s Covenant relationship with Israel, and it is part of the cycle of Israel being unfaithful covenant partners by worshiping other gods and then God allowing them to experience the consequence of their unfaithfulness in being oppressed by their enemies.

The victories which God gives to Israel come after Israel cries out to God in repentance for their unfaithfulness and then God steps in and delivers them – only to have the whole cycle repeat itself within a generation or so.

So while talking about how often God gave Israel great and amazing victories throughout the Old Testament sounds like its biblical, and sounds like the language of faith and trust in an Almighty God - it is easy to forget about why those victories were necessary.

That the heart of the nation of Israel was fickle and treacherous and prone to idolatry and unfaithfulness to Yahweh.

And what we need to understand is that God could have easily given Israel a great and mighty victory over the Roman oppressors – yet again... once more... step in and rescue the partner who just can't help themselves in being unfaithful to you.

But in sending Jesus Christ as the Messiah the Son of God – as Peter correctly understands Jesus to be – this time God is determined to get at the heart of Israel's unfaithfulness so that He can fix it, this is why Jesus tells Peter that he does not have God's interests in mind.

Now the means by which Jesus is going to tackle the root issue of Israel's unfaithfulness, which consequently found them defeated and oppressed by their enemies, is also going to look like a defeat for Jesus.

He is rejected by the religious leaders who can't even recognize Him as the Messiah, they betray Him over to the Romans in order to have Him put to death as a despised criminal – how is this going to accomplish the deliverance that the Messiah was sent for?

Well brothers and sisters we've spoken at length during Easter about the mechanics of how Christ's death and substation pays for Israel's covenant unfaithfulness and begins a new and

unbreakable covenant so I don't want to go over all that again right now.

What I do want us to do is to be able to appreciate is how in order to have victory over the root cause of the issue that makes life in this world a battle – both figuratively and literally for Israel and for us... that victory had to be accomplished through defeat.

Or perhaps it's more accurate to say that the spiritual victory which was needed was accomplished through a physical defeat.

Now brothers and sisters this is an important dynamic to keep in mind – just as we learned last week that life comes through death – this week we see that Jesus accomplished what we consider to be the most single-most important spiritual victory through a physical defeat.

And we need to remember this because all too often we fall back on the same mistake that Peter made and we look back

at all the victories which God has given to Israel, we look back at the victory of the Resurrection – and we only see a winning God, a victorious Jesus...

And we become fans who are not only looking for a vicarious victory – because who doesn't want to cheer for the victors and be on the winning side – and we are also looking for some actual victory.

If God can do it then – if Jesus defeated death and rose victorious – then we can expect God and Jesus to bring about some amazing victories in our lives now as well!

And this is true brothers and sisters – when people turn to Jesus Christ and put their faith and trust in Him they often experience victory in their lives.

But, as time goes by and we grow as disciples and followers of Jesus Christ I often see people become confused and struggle with the opposition they eventually begin to face. It doesn't seem to line up with the Victory they initially experienced and



expect to continue as they follow the Risen Lord Jesus who has been given all power and authority.

Maybe you can relate to this development in your own life as a disciple in following Jesus Christ – that instead of life becoming easier... it starts to get harder and you have more challenges.

Well brothers and sisters, let us be reminded of the reality of why this is, first from our Lord's own words as he responded to Peter's well-intentioned but misguided opposition to His path – Jesus says "Get behind me Satan..."

And secondly from the Apostle Paul, who at first also opposed the early Christians defeating many of them by imprisoning them and persecuting them, Paul writes in Ephesians 6:11-12 that we must *"take [our] stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*

Brothers and sisters, if you are following Jesus as a disciple and you are not experiencing opposition in your life from the enemy in some form - then Lord has either decided to bless you exceptionally for a season... or you are not really following Jesus.

Someone once wrote *"If the church is gaining ground, the devil fights back – so if you got no troubles, you better pick up the slack!"*

So brothers and sisters as we heed the encouragement of the Apostle Paul in how to deal with the opposition of the enemy against us – by standing firm in the armor of God (which is another sermon series in itself...)

We need to keep in mind the dynamic of victory through defeat.

We must remember that God's plans don't always come about in ways we would see as victorious

Take the life of Joseph for example – in the end his position as the most powerful man in Egypt, second to the Pharaoh, was a huge victory for God’s Covenant promises... but look at the path that took him there.

Though he was the favored son – he was betrayed and defeated by his brothers, sold into slavery.

Though he showed himself well to his master as a slave, and was promoted and refused to betray his master by sleeping with Potiphar’s wife – she defeated him and twisted his integrity so that he was thrown into prison.

In prison he again showed himself well and was promoted, and evidenced his spiritual giftedness in interpreting a dream favorably for an influential servant of Pharaoh – but circumstances defeated him and he was forgotten...

Each time he seemed to get ahead, he was opposed in some way and defeated – and yet in the end those defeats were exactly what God used to position Him and prepare Him to be

given the rule over all of Egypt and save his family and fulfill his part in continuing the Covenant promise.

Brothers and sisters, following Christ as His disciples is going to mean that there will be battles – spiritual battles, and physical battles with spiritual sources – and as we put on the armor of God and stand firm against that opposition in our day to day lives...

Be encouraged and remember – that however those battles turn out – God will often work victory through what looks to be a defeat.

So take heart friends – and remember these words of Jesus *“In this world you will have troubles, but take heart I have overcome the world!”* (John 16:33)

Victory that has been won through defeat. Amen.