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Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York

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Easter...The Ultimate Battle

John 12:23-33

Prayer: Father God, we just again thank you that your Son arose. We thank you for the gift of Easter. We thank you for the resurrected Christ. And Father, as we take this time in the service to open up your book and to look into it, Lord, we again pray as we pray each time that we would have your Holy Spirit accompanying us. We recognize without your Spirit these are just words. And so I pray as we look into what it is you've accomplished for us through Easter, Lord, we pray that your Spirit would guide us, direct us and make this of permanent value, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Easter is about war. It's about war and warfare and the greatest victory in the greatest war that ever was. Now if you've been at Grace for any length of time, you will hear me oftentimes refer to the fact that we are at war and that in many ways, it defines our existence. I've often said we're in the middle of a proxy war between two great kingdoms, the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light, and this proxy war has been going on as long as mankind

has existed. We sing: Up from the grave he arose; with a mighty triumph o'er his foes; he arose a victor from the dark domain, and he lives forever with his saints to reign. He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose! That's not just a hymn, you see, that's a victory song and it's a victory song about Easter. I don't think we think about Easter in terms of warfare because warfare is so normal to us, I mean, we've grown so used to it, we just accept it as normal. I mean at any given time you're going to read about warfare on the national level between countries engaging in trade wars or cold wars or even hot wars, and on the macro level where we at home engage in culture wars, I mean at present we have a war on Christmas, we have a war on the gender expression, feminism, the second amendment, you name it, we have our own little series of culture wars. And on the micro level everyone in this room have people that they count on as dear, dear friends and people that in some way or another they are at war with. Conflict is part of our DNA and Easter is really a celebration of victory in the most important conflict that has ever been fought. I mean it's a victory won by the prince of the kingdom of light against the prince of the kingdom of darkness and right at the center of that war is us. Easter is a celebration of Jesus's victory over the dark kingdom that had enslaved all of us, and when you view Easter as I believe Jesus viewed it, knowing that it's about war and warfare and the ransom and the rescue of his sheep, then it makes

Jesus's victory all the more sweet. So this morning I want to take a look at the Easter story from the standpoint of war and warfare. I want to look at the passion of Christ as the ultimate battle. I want to look at Easter as the ultimate declaration of victory and Jesus as the ultimate victor.

When Jesus was about to enter into his passion, he clearly and he plainly identified who it was he was going after, how he was going to fight him, why he would go to the cross and how he would ultimately claim victory for himself and for us. Jesus announced the start of his passion by stating: *"The hour has come."* It was more or less a declaration of war. Many times prior to that he had purposely stated the opposite. At the site of his first miracle, you remember the wedding feast in Cana, Jesus is approached by his mother Mary. This is *John 2*, it says: *When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."* And when his unbelieving brothers insisted that He go to a festival to do some miracles, they said: *"For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world."* For not even his brothers believed in him. Jesus said to them, *"My time has not yet come, but your time is always here."* However when we get to the 12th chapter of the gospel of John, Jesus says: *"The hour has come."* He says: *"The*

hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there my servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say?" 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." Therefore the people who stood by and heard it said that it thundered. Others said, "An angel has spoken to Him." Jesus answered and said, "This voice did not come because of Me, but for your sake. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die.

This is Jesus entering into battle for us. And so first we want to look at the who of the battle. Jesus said in verse 31: "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out." So Jesus is going after the ruler of this world. Well that's the name that Jesus gave to Satan. Secondly is the how of the battle. Verse 32 says: "And I, if I am lifted up from the

earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." This He said, signifying by what death He would die. Well here Jesus is telling us how he will fight the ruler of this world. He said, "If I am lifted up from the earth," and it was the cross that would lift Jesus up. We'll see how the cross was God's weapon of choice. And thirdly, we have the why of the battle. Jesus addressed why he went to the cross and how he could claim ultimate victory again by saying: "Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out."

So first let's just look at who this enemy was that Jesus was engaging and how Jesus's death on the cross was going to cast out its ruler. And we ask the question how is it that Satan got to be the "ruler of this world?" Well, we live in a fallen world, I mean, we all know that, we acknowledge that when we say "nobody's perfect" because everybody knows that nobody's perfect. Well you know there actually was a time when somebody was here on earth who was perfect and it wasn't the Lord Jesus Christ. It was a man whose name was Adam and his help meet was Eve, and together they had a confrontation with a snake. The serpent appeared to Eve and tempted her and Eve took the fruit and gave it to Adam to eat. Adam and Eve thus rebelled against their creator. You have to understand they were given everything in all of creation as gifts. And they were forbidden but one thing in all of creation and it

became the only thing that they wanted. The serpent convinced them that God was actually holding out on them denying them something that he said they were entitled to. He told them all they needed to do was eat the forbidden fruit and that they would have their eyes open and they, too, would be like God. And like everything the serpent says, half of it, and only half of it was true. In *John 8* Jesus was speaking to the religious leaders. He said this, he said, "*You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*" Well that first lie worked perfectly for Satan. I mean Adam and Eve ate the fruit and immediately their eyes were open just like the enemy said but not like he promised. You see their eyes were open but they were open to the fact that they were no longer the perfect creatures they used to be and they could no longer be with the perfect God who had created them. And ever since that day in the garden, we humans have been at the center of this proxy war between these two great spiritual kingdoms. You see, when the serpent got the very first human beings to rebel against their creator, he succeeded in polluting the well of humankind at its very source. Not only had Adam and Eve lost their perfection by rebelling against God, they subsequently passed that imperfection down to every single one of

their offspring including you and me. That flaw that we've inherited from Adam and Eve, it's not just biological. It is a form of inbred spiritual rebellion that every single son or daughter of Adam is now born with. And if you're a parent, you already know this. I mean you know you don't ever have to teach your children how to be selfish or to lie or to kick or to bite or do any of those bad behaviors that they come pre-programmed with. They come by these naturally. Think about it. They require no instruction whatsoever. In fact the bulk of parenting is training children away from those things that come to them naturally.

Ephesians 2 says: We were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. So naturally we are all dead men walking. I mean we're born with an original sin that has us just like Adam and Eve fearing and hiding from God. That single act of disobedience in the garden shattered the perfection of Adam and the world that he was the head of and it spread by birth to all of mankind. And God describes it this way in *Romans 5*. It says: *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.* Well, the created world also found its perfection shattered as well. *Romans 8* says: *For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the*

whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. God says that just like some form of moral infection, so sin entered into this perfect world through Adam and Eve's rebellion and it infected everything. There is now a profound separation from the God who created this world who is still perfect and the creation itself which no longer is. And so entering into this drama was the very one responsible for the earth's fall, the serpent who tempted Adam and Eve. He's the one we call Satan. He at one time was the greatest of all of God's created angels, and for reasons unknown to us at some point he decided to rebel against God himself. We know that much of what took place is hidden in mystery but we know for a fact this much, that he has an absolute hatred for us as the bearers of God's image and that he stands before God day and night as our accuser, which is really what the name "Satan" means, it means "accuser." See, the enemy knew that God's justice was perfect because he knew that God was a perfect God and that means that every single infraction, every single time we fell short of the glory of God from the act of murder itself to stealing a paper clip, they all had to be paid for. Folks say well, I don't get it. If God is all powerful, why doesn't he just forgive everybody of everything? Well, the simple answer to that is if he does that, he is no longer perfectly just. I mean we ask the question should Hitler get a pass? I mean how about ISIS or Boko Haram or Al-Shabaab? They kidnapped and

murdered 147 university students. They just confronted people and asked them if they were Christians and if they said, "Yes," they shot and killed them on the spot. That's out there. But you know, closer to home we have Donald Smith of Jacksonville, Florida. He kidnapped, raped and murdered an eight-year-old girl. Should God forgive those murders just because he's all powerful? I mean where would the justice be? You see, we can understand the need for justice when it comes to murder but how about lying or stealing or gossip or slander or any other sin you can think of? I mean, can God allow his perfect standards to slip if the sin is not as bad, quote, unquote, as murder? The answer has to be no. Because perfection is perfection. And any sin that shatters that perfection, whether it's murder or stealing a paper clip, every sin that we commit will incur a cosmic debt that has to be paid for by someone, and either Jesus will pay for that sin or you or I will, but no sin is ever going to go unpaid. I'll admit it's easy to see the need for justice in wanton acts of murder, and it's much harder to see the need for justice in stolen paper clips, but the fact is anything less than perfect has to be accounted for in the moral universe that God occupies. And you know God knows that but so does Satan. He has no power over God whatsoever and God owes Satan absolutely nothing but God does owe his own sense of justice the perfection that stems from his character. And Satan is quite happy to point out each and every time we fall short of that perfection.

That's why it's known as the accuser. Revelation 12 says this, it says: *And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God."*

See God in his omniscience, God in his justice had to deal with our sin, not because of the accuser but because of the accusations that he was able to make. You know if God were to allow imperfection into his heaven, then heaven by definition would become imperfect. So God must root out imperfection and he must deal with it, and that includes your sin and my sin. You know, dossiers are in the news a lot these days. Do you know that there's a personal dossier about you and your sin that is added to every single day from the day that we were born until the day that we die? God's made that clear in his word. He says in Romans 2, he says: *But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: To those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. There will be tribulation and*

distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek. In Ecclesiastes 12, it says: For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil. And Luke 12 says: "Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have said in the dark shall be heard in the light, and what you have whispered in private rooms shall be proclaimed on the housetops." Those words spell catastrophe for every single person on the face of this planet who doesn't have Jesus as Lord and Savior. See, God must point out every single sin that we commit but the very same God has offered to pay the price of every one of those sins. God tells us that we are all under the curse of sin but he says: *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE")*.

So the stark truth is this: every sin you and I have ever committed will be paid for either by you and me or by Christ. And it's the payment itself that caused Jesus to say at the very beginning of his passion, he said: *"Now my soul is troubled."* Well that takes me to point two. See, point one is the "who" of the battle of Easter and who is this battle against? That would be Satan, our accuser. Point two asks the question of "how." How did Jesus defeat the accuser at the battle of Easter? Well, we answer

that question by addressing another question. Jesus gave a very specific commandment to his disciples and he gave it to them about having troubled hearts. This is what he said in *John 14*, he said: *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me."* That's what he said to the disciples. But after Jesus announced his intention to go after the accuser, he said this in *John 12*, he said: *"Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour."* So we said, okay, is Jesus guilty of saying do as I say not as I do? Well the answer is no, and here's the reason why. See, the reason why Jesus could tell his disciples *"Let not your hearts be troubled"* while his soul was deeply troubled, the answer to that is found in *Isaiah 43*. There God says this, he says: *"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."* And what God is promising in *Isaiah 43*, whether it's flood or fire, pain, humiliation, fear, he would go with us. We think of David who says: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. Why? Because thou art with me.* That's the promise of God. Jesus told his disciples: *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in Me"* because He knew that he would be their shield and

their strength, but he also knew something else. He knew with absolute certainty that when his hour of deepest need came, he could expect no such help, not from his followers, not from his disciples or from his heavenly Father and that's why his soul was troubled.

You see, when we speak of the cross, we speak of things that are observable, things that are understandable, things that are knowable. But those three areas in no way cover everything that took place that day at Golgotha. There is a great deal that took place at the cross that is simply beyond human understanding. There's also a great deal that took place at the cross that easily escapes human observation. I mean we all tend to focus on things that we can identify with, such as fear or pain and humiliation, and to be sure Jesus experienced all of that in great measure but they were all outside terrors that pressed on Jesus testing every fiber of his being. But none of those terrors caused Jesus to say what he said in *John 12*: "*Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!*"

So we have to ask, what was it then that troubled Jesus's soul if it wasn't fear or pain or humiliation, if it wasn't the cross itself? Well it was something that started in the garden of

Gethsemane and it continued all through his passion until he finally said, "*It is finished.*" The inexplicable part that we will never be able to fully understand is that Jesus did not go to the cross to nobly shoulder the burden of our sin that was somehow outside of himself. There was something far more horrifying that was going on inside. The pain, the fear, the humiliation, that was minor act warm-ups compared to what God tells us went on inside Jesus while he hung on the cross. *2 Corinthians 5:21* says: *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* A statement like that, it's got to be pondered, it's got to be kind of turned around in your mind, you've got to meditate on it, you got to chew it like a cow chews its cud for the full impact of it to sink in. What God is saying here is that Jesus did not nobly shoulder the burden of our sin at the cross as if it were some outside agent that he had to contend with while still maintaining his identity as the perfect Son of God. That's not what it was at all. See, Jesus didn't pay our debt like you pay an earthly debt as if the debt and the debtor were separate. They were not. Instead God is insisting that Jesus paid the debt by becoming it. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us. Jesus's flawless life qualified him to become a flawless sacrifice, and it was on that sacrifice that our sins were laid. All those animal sacrifices in the Old Testament, they were just pictures, they were signs, they were symbols of the ultimate

sacrifice that Jesus would become for us on the cross. The reason why Jesus's soul was so troubled is that he went to the cross having become the very sin that he never once was stained with. And when the sinless one became sin itself, God took all of our sin and he quantified it and he objectified it and he placed it on the head of his Son and then he poured out all of his righteous fury, all of the righteous fury that a perfect God must pour out on sin not on us but on his Son. When Jesus was first baptized God looked down from heaven and he said in *Mark 1*: "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*" God the Father looked down on his Son hanging on the cross, he saw nothing at all pleasing. What he saw was sin objectified. What he saw was what his son had become: lying and murder and conceit and deceit and adultery, pornography, drug abuse, wife beating, gossip, you name it. All of the sins of his sheep had attached themselves to this living sacrifice nailed to a cross and put on display. And it had begun earlier in the day. I mean if you recall, Jesus began to sweat great drops of blood while he was in the garden of Gethsemane. It's quite possible that it was right then and there that he began the process of starting to take on the sin of the world.

You know Mark's gospel describes Jesus's troubled soul beginning in the garden of Gethsemane. It says this, it says: *Then they came to a place which was named Gethsemane; and he said to his*

disciples, "Sit here while I pray." And he took Peter, James and John with him, and he began to be troubled and deeply distressed. Now the Greek word for "troubled" here is the word "ekthambeo," and it's an interesting word, it means to be completely and utterly astonished. King James translates it "sore amazed." You know what "sore amazed" means? It's a combination of terror and amazement. Terror at the horror of what you are undergoing and amazement that it is so much worse than even Jesus could imagine. Jesus entered into that garden and he began to be engulfed with human sin. And it's possible that right then and there Jesus began the process of absorbing our filth. See, it was that process and not the fear of physical pain that drove Jesus right into the ground and made him sweat blood. And where was his Father? His Father at that time was in the process of abandoning him. God the Father had no choice but to reject and abandon the imperfection that Jesus had now become. And it was that horror that had Jesus saying, "*My soul is troubled.*"

If you read the accounts of the crucifixion you will never find Jesus crying out about the physical torture that he underwent because as hideous as that was, it was nothing, nothing compared to the spiritual torture as he who knew no sin became sin for us. I mean no human, in fact no entity in the entire universe has any idea what Jesus went through as he was transformed from flawless

perfection into the living embodiment of sin itself. I mean we know that the physical torture aspects of the crucifixion were not what caused Jesus to be sore afraid and cry out. We know that because we know all during his trial and execution he never cried out at all. *Isaiah 53* says: *He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth.* We read the accounts and it's time and time again during the process of his arrest and his torture and his crucifixion, we see Jesus being questioned repeatedly, he's questioned by the high priest, he's questioned by the Sanhedrin, he's questioned by Pilate, and his silence proves absolutely baffling. *John 19:10* says: *Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?"* See when it came to answering to his guilt or innocence, Jesus answered not a word, and the reasons for the silence were simple. It's because Jesus, the spotless one was now Jesus, the guilty one. *Isaiah 53* says: *But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

There was a second reason for Jesus's troubled soul, and that was in addition to everything that was taking place, now Jesus had to face the wrath of his Father, not for his sins but for ours. *Psalm 22* takes us into the mind of Jesus as he faces his Father bearing our sin and he says: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me? Why are you so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent.* Jesus is crying because he's utterly forsaken by his followers, by his disciples and by his own Father. He who knew no sin had now on the cross become sin itself. The Father, the Son and the Spirit had planned this before the dawn of time. See, only God himself taking on flesh and only through God himself taking on flesh could God express perfect justice by pouring out his righteous fury and perfect mercy in absorbing that fury in the person of his Son. Jesus's own father had no choice but to thrust him out, and it was far worse than any external torment that Jesus ever experienced. In fact we know that the entire expression of Jesus became so unrecognizable as to be unrecognizable as human. *Isaiah 52* says: *As many were astonished at you -- his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind.* The flawless one who had delighted in his fellowship with his Father from all eternity had on the cross become every single repulsive thing that sin represents. And God poured out his collective righteous just

fury going backwards to Adam and forward to the very last believer who will ever be born. And God poured out that fury not on the heads of those who belong to Christ but on Christ himself.

Let me go back to Satan here. You see, Satan intended to see Jesus's ultimate sacrifice of himself somehow, some way made flawless by some kind of failure in Jesus. You see, if Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf had not been flawlessly perfect, well then God's justice could not have been satisfied. Jesus would have stayed in the ground, dead. And so from the moment that Jesus gave up his spirit to the moment that he rose from the grave, the entire universe held its breath just waiting for the final proof that Jesus's sacrifice was accepted. Well the empty tomb was the final proof. That dossier that Satan held over every single one of us, it was taken by Jesus and paid for in full at the cross. Listen to what God says in *Colossians 2*. He says: *And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made alive together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.* See Paul is painting a picture of the triumphal portrait of the cross and Jesus as the ultimate victor in the ultimate battle. And he

sees Jesus for what he actually accomplished, with your record and my record, our dossiers, nailed to the cross. I mean the rulers and the authorities knew all too well the legalities of God's perfection. They knew full well that the wages of our sin was death, and they were prepared to demand for justice sake that that debt be paid by each of us spending eternity in hell. At the cross God figuratively and literally shut them up, and that's why he went to the cross, to glorify his Father by rescuing his sheep. Again *Revelation 12: And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God."* You see, Satan could still accuse us day and night but Christ now had the ultimate response. *Romans 8:33: Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died -- more than that, who was raised -- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.* Paul completes the note of triumph in verse 15: *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

This brings us to how. See, how God triumphed over them was by superintending Satan's unintended consequences. You see God pulled the ultimate fast one on Satan himself. By superintending Satan's

unintended consequences, he took what Satan intended and he stood it literally on its head. You know when India was under British rule they adopted a bounty plan to reduce the amount of deadly cobras that they had in that country. So what they did was they assigned a cash bounty for every single cobra that was captured and killed. And at first it was extremely successful, there was an enormous amount of cobras captured and killed and they started to realize after a while that it wasn't making any dent on the amount of people who were damaged and attacked. So they started to investigate it and they realized that people were now breeding cobras in order to obtain the bounty. Unintended consequence, they thought. And when they realized the unintended consequence of the bounty, they put an immediate stop to it but they didn't realize the unintended consequence of that was that all of the snake breeders who now knew their snakes were worthless released them into the wild, vastly increasing the population of cobras. Such is the nature of unintended consequences. You simply cannot predict ahead of time how an action is going to play itself out. But you know God's sovereignty precludes unintended consequences. We humans don't have God's capacity to superintend even bad intentions for good but God does. God saw Christ and the cross as it truly was, intended by Satan as the ultimate defeat not only for us but also for the Son of God, superintended by God as a victory for us and a triumph for Christ. And so the how of the battle comes down

to a battle between shame and triumph where the enemy intended only shame and Jesus nailed like a common criminal to a tree, the kingdom superintended a triumph. They saw King Jesus nailing our sins to the tree. And where the enemy intended only shame and the King of the universe subjected to the scorn of religious leaders who mocked him, the kingdom superintended triumph. They saw King Jesus disarming the spiritual rulers and authorities by removing their right to accuse his saints. And where the enemy intended only shame and a public display of beatings and mocking and nails and nakedness, the kingdom superintended triumph. They saw King Jesus displaying a humility and obedience that stunned the whole universe into silent worship. And where the enemy intended only shame and the King of life itself having bowed his precious head in death, the kingdom superintended triumph. They saw King Jesus openly and willingly displaying the splendor of God's justice and mercy and then three days later proving his sacrifice on our behalf had been perfectly accepted, they saw him rise triumphantly from the grave. See, when the enemy gloated in what it intended to be the ultimate display of shame and humiliation on the cross, the kingdom triumphed superintending that very same display to showcase and publicly display to the universe the height, the breadth, the width and the depth of the love of God in Christ Jesus. And that's why Easter is a celebration of the greatest victory the universe has ever witnessed. Jesus had glorified his Father by ransoming

and rescuing his sheep and he did it by standing the enemy's intentions on their head. He stood our understanding on its head as well. And his life and his ministry while he was here on earth Jesus frequently told us that heaven's economy was the exact opposite of earth's. He said if you want to be exalted, you're going to be humbled. But if you're humble, you will be exalted. He said if you want to lead, you must serve. If you want to be rich, you must become poor; you want to be wise, you must become as simple as a child; if you want to live, you must be willing to die. If you want to understand God's economy, just take planet earth's and turn it upside down. That's exactly what Jesus did throughout his life and ministry and that's exactly how he turned the shame of the cross into the triumph of the cross. Quite frankly, the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly realms, they never even realized they were being had. Even while they thought they were gloating in victory, verse 15 says: *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.*

You know, the Chinese say he who laughs last laughs best, and God says something very close to that in *Psalm 37*, he says: *The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them; but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming.* There's good news in that and there's good news for all of us and

that good news is this, it's that God's superintending power overwhelmed the enemy's intentions at every turn. God says: *We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose.* And if you love the Lord Jesus Christ, then God has been superintending your life as well from the very beginning. But you know, if God hasn't touched you, then all of this is going to seem like an elaborate fairy tale and it will mean nothing to no one. But if God is speaking to you today, his superintending grace can turn Easter into a day not of chocolate bunnies and Easter eggs but into a day he intends it to be, a day that celebrates God's ultimate victory over sin and death, a day perhaps when God's superintentions finally touch you. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for the victory that was yours. We thank you for the ultimate fast one, if I can call it that, that you pulled over on the enemy. I just thank you for every single part of shame that he tried to place on you and the kingdom, you responded in triumph. I thank you for the victory that is Easter and I pray that you would give each of us the ability to share that victory with those who don't yet enjoy it, and I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.