

An Easter Meditation: I have gotten me Christ and Christ has gotten me the victory!

In the New Testament the resurrection of Jesus is presented as a historical fact. He did rise from the grave on that first Easter morning.

The four evangelists, and Paul, carefully lay out the evidence. They record for us the details of the empty tomb, the names of those who visited it, the various appearances of the risen Jesus and how he was seen by more than five hundred witnesses. But the New Testament tells us more than that.

It tells us, not only of the power of God that raised Jesus from the grave (e.g. Romans 1:4) but also of that same power being invested in the Church. Christians are new people! We are 'made alive' in our Risen Head (Ephesians 1:1). His victory has become our victory! As Jesus promised: 'Because I live, you will also live' (John 14:19).

Until our Lord returns again, Christians will die physically but their victory over death is already guaranteed. As Paul demonstrates in 1 Corinthians 15, death is 'swallowed up in victory'! Death's sting is abolished! And so Paul proclaims our victory anthem. 'Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (vv.55-57)!

Down through two thousand years Christ's people have lived in that glorious victory. One example was Donald Cargill (1619-1681). Cargill was a Presbyterian minister and a Covenanter in the years known in Scotland's history as 'the killing times.' The Covenanters opposed all attempts by the English parliament to impose Episcopacy on Scotland. With other Covenanters Cargill strongly denounced the immorality and irreligion of the court of King Charles II. Hundreds of Covenanters were imprisoned and many were executed, both men and women.

Cargill's fearless itinerant preaching made him a marked man. He moved from place to place, preaching in cottages, fields and town squares, protected by loyal friends. Then in July 1681 he was arrested and imprisoned. The outcome of his trial was never in question. The government of the day was determined to silence this influential 'rebel.' He was sentenced for execution on July 27th that year.

On the scaffold in Edinburgh he spoke to the large crowd that had come to support him. "I climb this ladder," he declared, "with less fear than ever I entered a pulpit to preach." Then raising his eyes to a blue July sky over his beloved Scotland, he cried out: "I have gotten me Christ and Christ has gotten me the victory." The blade fell and the brave soul of Donald Cargill joined the martyrs who lived and died in the victory of the Risen Christ.

Thanks be to God indeed! That glorious victory is not only for all the brave martyrs but for all of us who belong to Christ. Death is defeated. The grave is conquered. Christ lives for ever in the power of an endless life. And we live in Him! We can all say: 'I have gotten me Christ and Christ has gotten me the victory.'

By Dr Herbert McGonigle, Senior Lecturer in Historical Theology &
Church History, Nazarene Theological College, Manchester.