

God Is Greater

by Mark Jarvinen

In your minds eye, try to identify a time when you felt helpless or unable to bring your circumstances under control. In middle school, I remember being lost in the woods after dark with little hope of finding my way out. Most of us can identify with feelings of helplessness – a sudden drop in altitude aboard an airplane, doing 360's in a car on glare ice, or even worse, experiencing a dire diagnosis or a major illness, a severe financial reversal, or the loss of a loved one. The Apostle Paul recounts a frightful episode from his life in **Acts 27** in which he was caught in a storm at sea while sailing toward Rome. Shipwreck seemed inevitable. The captain and his crew were sure they would all drown. Paul, however, brought a note of calm reassurance to the situation. He had received a word from the Lord. Paul shared with his fellow travelers that although the ship would be lost, there would be no loss of life. He suggested they calm their fears. Take a break – have something to eat. How could Paul remain so calm in the face of impending disaster? He had learned from experience what Jesus had taught his disciples – **God Is greater than any of life's trials and temptations.** God is greater than our sin. God is greater than any power of evil.

I draw your attention to Jesus' words in **John 10:27-29** –

²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

God is greater. That's the thought for the day. God is not a captain who abandons ship in a storm at sea, leaving us to fend for ourselves. Our text pictures God as a shepherd who cares for us and protects us from our enemies. Life is unpredictable. Circumstances threaten us. But the Father's power is greater than any enemy. We, his sheep, are completely secure in His hands.

I'm reminded of Paul's words in **Romans 8:38-39** –

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There are numerous areas in which God is greater- let's consider just three this morning.

I. GOD IS GREATER THAN ANY TEMPTATION.

James 1:13 says, ***“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;”*** Temptation to commit evil doesn't come from God, that's Satan's specialty. He looks for a weakness of the flesh, a chink in our armor, and goes to work to exploit it.

Author, **Neil Anderson**, in his book, **Victory Over Darkness**, recounts a scenario from the comic strip **“Cathy,”** which, by the way, ended almost a decade ago, after a 34 year run, after appearing in over 1,400 newspapers daily at its peak. In this particular strip, Cathy struggles with her weight. See if this progression sounds familiar:

Frame 1: I will take a drive, but won't go near the grocery store.

Frame 2: I will drive by the grocery store, but will not go in.

Frame 3: I will go in the grocery store, but I won't walk down the candy aisle.
Frame 4: I will look at the candy, but not pick it up.
Frame 5: I will pick it up, but not buy it.
Frame 6: I will buy it, but not open it.
Frame 7: I will open it, but not smell it.
Frame 8: I will smell it, but not taste it.
Frame 9: I will taste it, but not eat it.
Frame 10: Eat, eat, eat, eat, eat!

Cathy Guisewite, the creator of this comic strip, wrote most of her comic strips around the **four main guilt groups** for women – **food, love, mom, and work**. Later, after adopting a daughter, she added **children** to her list of guilt groups. One thing is clear, Ms. Guisewite understood human nature and our tendency to rationalize. So does Satan. Just remember, God is greater! There is a way of escape. As we learn from **I Corinthians 10:13** –

“.... And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”

Remember the classic incident of **Joseph's encounter with Potiphar's wife**, recorded in **Genesis 39**? Joseph had become the very successful manager of the Egyptian official Potiphar's household. When Potiphar's wife propositioned Joseph to commit an immoral act with her, Joseph's response demonstrated his character of integrity and allegiance to God. In **Genesis 39:9**, Joseph said to Potiphar's wife: **“How could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?”** And even though Potiphar's wife continued to pursue him, each time he refused her. God was greater than temptation in the life of Joseph as he relied on God's strength to see him through. There is a way of escape that God provides as we face temptation.

But what happens when in our weakness, we succumb to the dictates of the flesh, when our old nature gets the better of us and we cave in to sin? The good news is still true – God is greater.

II. GOD IS GREATER THAN ANY SIN.

The OT is better than any TV reality series. Joseph fled temptation, ultimately leaving Potiphar's wife clutching his cloak. She then turned the situation against Joseph and he was thrown in prison. But even then, God worked for Joseph's good. Joseph fled temptation and did what was right, but then Scripture tells us of **King David**, called "*a man after God's own heart*," who nevertheless, initiated an adulterous affair with the beautiful **Bathsheba**, the wife of one of his soldiers. That wasn't all, Bathsheba became pregnant with David's baby, and he attempted to cover his tracks by having Bathsheba's husband killed in battle. David had become vulnerable spiritually, but thankfully, God's prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin and David repented and found forgiveness. At the end of his life, David, having been forgiven and restored, was still regarded by God as a man after His own heart.

God is greater than any sin. Some years ago, my friend, **Dr. Richard Erickson**, of the Seattle area, visited a prison in Columbia, South America, called the **Carcel Bellavista**, and wrote about his experience in the *Faith & Fellowship*. According to Rich, this prison was filled with desperate criminals, and was widely known as one of the most treacherous and violent institutions of its kind on earth. Fifty to sixty inmates were brutally butchered each month. Heads of the victims were sometimes used as soccer balls and mutilated bodies

were often left for days before guards would come to dispose of them. On visitors' days, women were often gang-raped right before the eyes of their outraged, but helpless husbands. Drug trafficking was rampant. Weapons were regularly smuggled in from the outside. But according to Rich, about two years before his visit, the killing in the prison had miraculously stopped. When Rich visited, he heard singing. Instead of graffiti on the walls, there were Bible verses. Rich preached to the inmates at a chapel service and listened to their shouts of praise, "**Christo Vive,**" Christ lives! One man, who had committed over 100 murders, sang praises to God. A former drug cartel member, convicted of kidnapping, gave his testimony. Faces once marked by hatred, now glowed with the joy of the Lord. The change began when one man, a former inmate, was saved while using the Bible to teach himself to read. Through great hostility and threats on his life, this new convert continued to share Christ to the inmates. When Rich visited, over 300 prisoners, 30 guards, and the warden himself had been saved. The results aren't always this dramatic, but God was undeniably at work in this prison, transforming lives. God is greater than any sin. And finally, ...

III. GOD IS GREATER THAN ANY OF SIN'S SCARS.

Sin often wounds deeply, leaving its scars in our lives. When we are sinned against, we are faced with a choice – to become bitter or better. Paul speaks to this issue in **Ephesians 4:30-32** –

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³² Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

The implication is that there is healing for us as we forgive those who have wronged us. God is greater than our scars.

Many of you have heard of **Elisabeth Elliot**, who died in 2015, after a career as a missionary, author and speaker. Her first husband, Jim Elliot, in January of 1956, at the age of 28, was found dead in a river in Ecuador, speared by members of the violent and murderous Auca tribe that was native to that area. Jim and four other young men were martyred for Christ while seeking to evangelize this unreached tribe. Many thought the deaths of Jim and his friends were a tragic waste of human lives. But Elisabeth, Jim's young widow, refused to become bitter and asked God to use her husband's death redemptively. To make a long story short, a few years later, **Elisabeth Elliot and Marge Saint**, another young widow from the same incident, each with their young daughters, walked back among the Aucas to live with the very people who had killed their husbands. Were they crazy, or courageous? They weren't killed; they were accepted. The tribe was amazed by their forgiving love. Elisabeth and Marge worked among them and eventually translated the Bible into their language, leading many to Christ in the process. Several years later, the 15 year old daughter of Marge Saint, was baptized in the same river in which Jim Elliot and her father, Nate Saint, had been killed, by the very individual who had slain the two missionaries. Amazingly, that man was now the pastor of the church that had been started among the Aucas. What's the lesson here? God will use our scars redemptively if we'll let Him. Even if our wounds have turned into scars, it's never too late to turn them over to God. The forgiveness that Christ has bestowed upon us, based on the wounds He endured on the cross, is

the same forgiveness we can bestow on others who have wronged us to the glory of God. Forgiving our enemies is not in us to do by nature. It's God's doing. God is greater than our scars.

CONCLUSION

As I close, may I remind you of the passage from **John 10** that we read earlier, in which Jesus calls Himself our shepherd, and says that no one is able to snatch us out of the Father's hand. God is greater than any threat to our spiritual well-being – any temptation, any sin, any scar. Rest in that reassurance today. **A-men.**