

Mortal Combat: Jesus Wins! Flawless Victory!

Matthew 28:1-10 (NIV)

¹ After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. ² There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. ⁴ The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. ⁵ The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." ⁸ So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

I'm not a hardcore gamer, but I am a gamer. Being a kid in the 90s with enough allowance money to buy a bargain bin game, I went out and bought the popular and controversial Mortal Kombat 3. I'm not sure if my Mom knew or approved of that purchase and me playing it, but I played it a lot. Mortal Kombat 3 showed me that I can't just button mash and win the game, like other fighting games; I actually had to learn the moves, be strategic, if I wanted to win and progress.

So, that's what I did. With one particular character, I was able to get to the final boss - Shao Kahn. I fought hard, used my special moves, won a round. But I had to win two rounds to actually beat him. I was almost there so many times, but round after round I lost. I never beat the final boss. There was a lot of yelling at the game, maybe a controller thrown once or twice, until I finally gave up. I was not good enough and wouldn't get good enough to beat Mortal Kombat 3. I lost.

The women who came to Jesus' tomb on that very first Easter Sunday with spices to anoint Jesus' dead body felt like they had lost. To them, Jesus was supposed to have been their Messiah, their Savior. He was supposed to be God Almighty, unbeatable, but now he lay dead in the tomb, so they thought. To them, the religious rulers and the chief priests had won. Death had won; they had lost. They lost their hope. Maybe there was anger mixed in with the sadness. Maybe they had an outburst equivalent to me throwing the controller in anger and frustration, yelling at God because he died and didn't win. They respected Jesus, but they gave up on him winning. They conceded to the loss.

Do you feel like you are about to lose today, that you can't keep it all together? As you look around and see people in their Easter best - suits and ties, colorful dresses - these people seem like they have it all together, but you know what, they really don't. I don't. You and me, we're trying every day to make it. We're trying to learn all the right moves in this game of life, doing all the good works that we should do: volunteering at Open Doors, helping neighbors shovel their driveway, donating to charity and church, attending worship, studying the Bible, trying to be a good friend, doing chores around the house, trying to keep the kids from wiggling and squirming and from being a distraction, but it's about to fall apart. We're about to lose, aren't we?

Something's wrong. We're not happier, not less stressed. We're frazzled both from the relentless hours and pressures from work to get things done as well as keeping the house in order to have people over for Easter. It feels like the next thing will break us, that the one more task will be too much, the one more snowfall, the one more volunteer opportunity, the one more church service, the one more ask from pastor, the one more hour of work, and we'll lose.

As it feels like we are about to lose, that everything is going to fall apart, are we also on the cusp of giving up? Are you thinking: You know, if I can't keep it all together, if I can't get everything done, if I can't win, maybe I should give up - give up on religion, on good works, on perfection, on friends, on family, on God. I'm going to lose anyway. Why not give up?

What is winning in this game of life? Is it having perfectly behaved kids? A long marriage? Outward achievements and commendations from work? Is it how many hours of volunteer work you do or how much money you donate? Is it how much you read your Bible or go to church? We can never do enough of these things. There's always more. That's why these are not the measure of whether or not we win in this life. Instead, winning is what the women experienced on that very first Easter morning.

The women came to the tomb feeling like losers. But then they meet an angel - a holy, perfect, sinless being. They're instantly struck with terror, struck with how many other ways that they didn't measure up to God. This on top of Jesus dying. The loss compounded even farther. Everything was falling apart for them.

But then the angel spoke. “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.” (verse 5)

Wait, what? He’s not dead? He’s alive? You mean, the religious rulers didn’t win? They didn’t silence my Jesus? Death couldn’t hold on to him? Death did not win? Death is actually defeated for us? So he really is the Messiah, the Savior of the world? He really is Almighty God? We have hope? We have a reason to live!

As they’re pondering what this all means, figuring out how to say this to Jesus’ disciples as their perceived inevitable loss was now being shown to be a victory, Jesus himself met the women. He greeted them with a word that literally means, “Rejoice! Be glad!” Rejoice because the battle was not lost. Be glad because here I am in the flesh. The religious leaders and death did not win. Sin did not win. We have won because Christ is risen; he is risen indeed. Alleluia.

In the Mortal Kombat games if you win both rounds of the fight without taking a single point of damage, the announcer declares, “Flawless victory.” Although Jesus did suffer and die, although he was pierced for our transgressions, these were not flaws. All of these hits were specifically taken so that he would win the flawless victory over our sin, over our death, and over our enemy: the devil. Jesus always did the will of God at all times perfectly, never once faltering, never once breaking God’s Word, never once failing to do what was needed to be done. He never gave up and actually scored the flawless victory as evidenced by his resurrection.

Over and over in the Bible, this message of a flawless victory resounds. Isaiah prophesied about the Messiah and Peter, as an eyewitness of Jesus, confirmed that Jesus committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth. The Apostle John tells us that Jesus appeared to take away our sin, and in Jesus there was no sin. The writer to the Hebrew Christians told us that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are yet he was without sin. That author also tells us that Jesus as our High Priest sacrificed his body once for all and therefore made us perfect forever. Seeing Jesus raised from the dead - restored, perfect, whole, complete - was a declaration of a flawless victory over his whole ministry for us.

Being a gamer, I married someone that I enjoy playing video games with, and we’re raising kids who also enjoy video games. Sometimes there are sections that are too hard to beat, like a timing section that you have to speedrun through or a boss who they just can’t defeat. Frustration and sadness set in with each failed attempt. This sometimes leads to me stepping in and doing the section for them because they couldn’t. Jesus did what we couldn’t do by living perfectly for us and then dying on the cross to take away not just some sins, but all sins from all people.

Through the gift of faith, through baptism, God has clothed us with Jesus, with his flawless victory. This means that we have won because Jesus has won. Our sins are taken away and removed from our record as testified by the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead, meaning that his payment for our sins was, in fact, more than sufficient. Jesus’ flawless victory is our flawless victory!

With his flawless victory, this means that we’re not about to lose. This means that we have a reason to keep going, a reason to live. This life isn’t worthless. We can’t lose when we are trusting the fact that Jesus has already won the fight against sin, death, and the devil for us. We’re not losers. We’re not failures. We are winners!

Having Jesus’ flawless victory as our victory, we have another reason to keep going, another reason to keep living. We get to tell others about this victory won for us! The angel told the women, “Go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’” (verse 7) Jesus told them the same. They had a mission. They had a purpose. They had a reason to live: to tell other that Jesus won the victory over sin, death, and the devil, this his flawless victory is our flawless victory. They had a mission to tell others that we are all winners because Christ is risen; he is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Easter Sunday is God’s victory declaration over mortal combat for us. The fight is won. We are covered with Jesus’ flawless victory, his perfection lived for us. Own it. Own that you are complete and perfect and valued because of Jesus’ flawless victory won for you. Tell others of your triumphant victory with Jesus because Christ is risen; he is risen indeed. Alleluia. Jesus wins. Flawless victory. Amen.