

There's a saying that been bandied about for a couple centuries or so that seems so savvy and so true and so insightful that it often leaves people nodding in agreement. Here's that saying: history is written by the victors. Yeah...get it? At least in battles between nations, the winners get to tell the story because they are in charge after all the battles are won—ostentatiously in charge of the citizens and the overarching communications and the public narrative. And that's often true in lesser organizations, too.

But here's the thing. History and its veracity and reliability for us is not what many think it is. You see, there's a pursuit to create an overarching approach to the study and practice of documenting history called *historiography*. Notice I said the word documenting...of course, history is often most commonly thought of as requiring writing, as in a book.

In fact, when I just now queried Merriam-Webster dictionary online, here's the primary definition of *historiography* it returned: "noun, the writing of history, especially the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particulars from the authentic materials, and the synthesis of particulars into a narrative that will stand the test of critical methods."

Now, how about that saying...*history is written by the victors*. Is that true? This quote kind of popped up in the 1800s in Europe...no wonder, since there had been so many conflicts there. But the man who made it truly famous was Hermann Göring, one of the very top leaders of the Nazi regime before and throughout the Nazis' tenure in Germany. After the Allies' defeat of Germany and having been sentenced to death, Göring committed suicide by ingesting poison. Before that fateful event happened, here's the English translation of what Göring is credited as saying: "The victor will always be the judge, and the vanquished the accused." Let me repeat that: "*The victor will always be the judge, and the vanquished the accused.*"

Enter the widely-acclaimed statesman and most eloquent speaker of the 20th century, the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill—a primary victor over the Germans in World War II. And it's worth noting here that Churchill is one of the most prolific of historians ever, writing many millions of words, including the multi-volume *History of the English-Speaking Peoples* along with a number of other influential books.

Now here's something very interesting...a short sentence Churchill said in a speech in the British House of Commons a few short years after Göring committed suicide: "For my part, I consider that it will be found much better by all parties to leave the past to history, especially as I propose to write that history myself." And so he did exactly that, publishing a six-volume history titled *The Second World War* from the time of that speech in 1948 to 1953. Then he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature for that effort in 1953.

With Hitler and Göring dead, it indeed appears that, in this case, Churchill the victor wrote a highly lauded historical record—nearly an autobiography—of one of the signature events in world history. But was it accurate...or at least as accurate as it could be or should be? One thing is for certain, the living are in a better position to create a record than the dead and often have what is seemingly the last word!

But how many words, how many movies, how many remembrances large and small have fed into learning about the Second World War? Take *Saving Private Ryan*, a profoundly impactful movie of historical fiction trying to capture a small slice of that war, D-Day. ...Take soldiers long-suffering afterward with PTSD. ...Take the countless Jews impacted by particularly despicable human actions intertwined with that war.

Right off the bat, you likely see the irony of the current era: nowadays, in a place like America, many avid readers with carefully cultivated libraries would like to think that people's understanding of history comes from the written word like Churchill's great works, yes, from heavyweight books that researchers spent years writing. But the reality is, people in the modern era are getting "history," quote-unquote, from social media and movies and TV and journalists and biased accusers, some of whom pretend and vociferously assert that they are unbiased, as pure as the driven snow...you know, just relaying the facts.

This jumbled-together cacophony of voices competes for supremacy of just *what the history really is* that's being created this very day...and oftentimes their relaying of information is strained beyond belief. Hey, a

viewer commonly sees and hears people and their actions on TV or streaming video, then a commentator follows up by saying something that sends this not-so-subtle message: *don't believe what your eyes just saw and your ears just heard—what I'm telling you now is what really happened!*

This “filtering out” and “adding to” in the current era is stunningly pervasive. People receiving this daily “news” have often just given up—there’s now little expectation of true reporting, so folks often just simply tune in to the sources where they liked the biases. You know, like liberals do! And like conservatives do!

Now that dizzying dailyness of highly-questionable personal remembrances and biased interpretations of history as it supposedly happens? And that stuff gets crowded into aggressive worldviews, ideologies as to how and why things happened in such-and-such time and place. That feeds the current culture wars.

Wait a minute: imagine when all historical accounts are actually done accurately! What, a perfectly true, accurate, and worthy summary of the history of each nation, even each person? “Impossible,” you say? No, a very real reality! Consider the role of Christ! ...Let’s take a step back. The signature event in human history is the Cross of Christ, where the finished work of Jesus changed the eternal destiny of billions of people who would respond to the good news of the gospel of grace (Acts 20:24). This magnificent, sacrificial event is recorded in God’s Word as the final victory over sin and death. Yes, Jesus was the victor!

But the historical record of mere men saw just another convicted, hapless man go to a lonely death on a lonely hill at the instigation of religious leaders and enforced by a powerful government just going through the motions of keeping order in its empire. Indeed, the Pharisees surely believed they had secured their victory over that pesky rebel from Galilee...and Rome simply didn’t care.

And Christian life in the Kingdom of God ever since the Cross continues to quite often define victory very, very differently than the kingdoms of this world. Victory in Christian perspective is a widow giving her offering...a centurion exercising his faith...a blind man being healed...and, not least, thousands added to the Book of Life through faith. Yet failures abound, like the rich young ruler walking away from true wealth.

And we mustn’t forget, for believers and unbelievers alike, the Son of God will exercise judgment that is righteous and true as to each and every person (Revelation 19:2, Psalm 19:9), yes, as to every detail of every human life. For believers, that includes both the burning up of unfruitful actions and the rewards for building on the foundation of Christ (1 Corinthians 3:9-16). All of that is Christ’s revealing of the right interpretations of every action taken, the true history of every person. Of course, there will be no self-styled conservatives or self-styled liberals proclaiming ideological victories—all pretenses burned up.

Now, some of this perfectly-accurate history is already here through the Holy Spirit breathing God’s Word, including prophecies through Daniel and John the Revelator and others, too. Such words in Scripture are true history, that history that is accurately foretold by God and received by people of faith in Christ for the last 2,000 years. Jesus, of course, stands athwart history itself, the Ultimate Victor who flawlessly fulfills His role in all chapters of human history. Yes, the victorious Christ put all enemies under His feet.

So, the question we started this podcast with is this: *is history always written by the victors?* Well, it turns out, the only truly true history is written by only one Victor, yes, those accounts that only Christ can flawlessly judge to be accurate. Some of this history is already recorded in the Word of God, some prophesied there as well, and much to be revealed elsewhere in the fullness of time.

Every other piece of history should be tested in comparison to that. And much of that history can be very helpful. But much of that supposed history is patently false and misleading and is often replacing God with mere humanity as the victor at the center of puny narratives. But glory be to God, a straightforward reading of the Bible gives us a truly reliable understanding of history. And, we can wait patiently through all the fake news and the culture wars—devoting ourselves to the history that really matters: the making of disciples. All of our unrecorded devotion to Jesus’s Kingdom will one day be revealed! Simply amazing.

A&A: Application & Action

1. Do you believe history is always written by the victors? Discuss.
2. Do you work to practice the Christian truth that our victories can be daily in Christ, like the widow giving her mite or the centurion operating in faith, thus adding to our personal history to be judged by Him? Discuss.
3. Do you believe Christ is the only righteous and true scribe of personal and corporate histories? Discuss.