

MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH CHRIST

"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."
Romans 8:37.

There is a totally different spiritual atmosphere in the seventh and eighth chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. In the seventh there is the gloom of defeat. In the eighth there is the glory of victory. In the seventh chapter there is galling spiritual bondage. In the eighth chapter there is gladsome spiritual liberty. In the former self is on the throne. In the latter Christ is on the throne. What a difference it made when Christ was rightfully enthroned! The place that Christ occupies determines the character of the life that one lives. When Christ begins to reign in the surrendered life He makes all things new. If He has His rightful place on the throne of the life, peace, joy, power, victory, and fruitfulness are assured.

It is God's will that His children shall live victorious lives in and through the power of the Holy Spirit. The foes which are arrayed against true Christians are very subtle, well-organized, capably-led, aggressive, and powerful; so much so that we cannot hope to overcome them in our own strength, but we can do so through Christ Who met them and overcame them.

Thomas Carlyle said, "The ultimate question posed by life is, wilt thou be a hero or a coward?" He was right, for the business of living correctly has always been hard, and never easy. We must master life, or be mastered by it. We are its victors, or its victims. This has ever been true of life, but it is even more true today.

No one who views life today with any discernment at all can fail to be aware of the gravity of its issues, the extent and sharpness of its conflict, the grim tragedy of its failures, or the glorious possibilities of its victories. Faithful Christians now know that this struggle is not a sham battle, but that godly living is hard. The strain of our age is proving to be too much for the weaklings, and those who do not have courage are going down in defeat. Others are sore beset with griefs and fears, discouragements and frustrations, sorrows, trials, and tribulations, and before long they will be numbered with the victims unless desperately needed help comes to them.

It is not possible for us to be victors in life by denying the harsh reality of the external conditions, or by altering them. Whatever chance we have lies in our becoming equal to the demands made upon us. As Dr. Norman Vincent Peale said: "The inner braces of a man's heart must be equal to the outer pressure of life's circumstances." The courage to deal adequately with life does not come by exhortation. Cowards are not changed into heroes by wanting to be; and weaklings do not become strong by admiring strength.

To a little band of faithful believers in Christ in the proud city of military splendor, Paul wrote "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." What a challenging claim Paul made for himself, and for all true followers of Christ! Surely, no man was ever more sorely persecuted, abused, maligned, and maltreated than Paul, but in every conflict he came out victorious. His own description of his sufferings for Christ is pathetic and impressive.

"Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by

mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (II Corinthians 11:24-27).

Speaking of the Apostle's rough road and his terrible conflicts, Dr. Jowett said: "In perils of his life in Damascus, his enemies watched by day and night to kill him; coldly suspected by his fellow-believers in Jerusalem; persecuted at Antioch; assaulted in Iconium; stoned in Lystra; beaten with many stripes in Philippi; attacked by a lewd and envious crowd in Thessalonica; pursued by callous enmity in Berea; despised in Athens; blasphemed in Corinth and dragged before the judgment seat; exposed to the fierce wrath of the Ephesians; bound with chains in Jerusalem; and finally imprisoned at Rome." Yet in all these things, Paul dared to claim that he was more than conqueror.

Was Paul's claim true, or was it mere boastfulness? During his Christian life his soul was without blemish and his life was without stain. He never went down under a petty sin. He overcame Satan, and mastered every adversity, untoward circumstance, and antagonism that confronted him. With the exception of Christ Jesus, no other person has left such an indelible impression upon the ages. Truly Paul was more than a conqueror through Christ.

I. The Scope of the Victory.

It is "in all these things" that we are to win a glorious victory. It is not outside them, or without knowing anything about them, but in the midst of them. When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Romans, he was in the midst of one of the worst struggles ever endured by man. He had been undergoing tribulation, sore distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril and sword. He lived a victorious life, but he had to pass through suffering and distress. At times it looked as though he would be defeated, but that which appeared to be a defeat turned out to be glorious victory.

In summarizing the evils with which we must fight, our scripture lesson indicates the realms in which we are to be "more than conquerors."

1. In tribulation.

To His disciples Christ said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." The Word "tribulation" means pressure from without. It is used in the case of a person who is bearing heavy burdens. In the Latin the word "tribulation" signifies threshing, and God's people are often cast upon the threshing-floor to be beaten with the heavy flail of trouble. Inasmuch as they lose nothing but the straw and chaff, and the pure wheat is separated from that which is of no value to it, they are truly "more than conquerors."

Between our justification and our glorification there is the pathway of suffering, but in that one can win the victory. Some of the finest qualities in life are produced in and through trouble. If there were no risk and danger in life, where would chivalry and bravery be? If there were no suffering, there would not be any compassion. If there were no discipline and hardship, would we ever learn patience and endurance? Suffering initiates the soul into secrets which the mere

onlooker can never know. People make wonderful discoveries through their sufferings. As one of the poets expressed it,

"I walked a mile with Pleasure.
She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.

I walked a mile with Sorrow,
And ne'er a word said she;
But, oh, the things I learned from her,
When Sorrow walked with me!"

2. In distress.

The Greek word which is translated "distress" refers to mental grief. It means dire calamity or sore affliction. The Christian suffers from external circumstances, but this is perhaps a smaller affliction than internal woes. Paul was subjected to numerous misrepresentations, disappointments, distresses and afflictions, but he won a marvelous victory over them through Christ.

3. In persecution.

Our Lord was persecuted, and He said to His followers: "If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you." The servant need not expect better treatment than his Lord received. Persecution purifies the soul, purges out the dross of the old life, and welds true believers together in love and service.

II. The Source of the Victory.

"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." That Christ loved us is undeniable. All the forces of earth and hell were arrayed against Christ, and when He was hanging on the cross it seemed that they had overcome Him, but His resurrection from the tomb turned the black darkness of seeming defeat into the bright dawn of unparalleled victory. He fought and won for us, and now through Him we are more than conquerors. The only way of victory is through faith in the true triumphant and reigning Christ. Our salvation is the gift of God through Christ Jesus. Salvation is never a human attainment, but is always a fine gift from God. You don't struggle for a gift. You simply take it, and then thank the giver. Our victory is a gift from God through Christ. Paul said, "But thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15:57).

Satan and his cohorts are great in number, mighty in power, crafty in their tactics, and ruthless in the execution of their plans, but the glorious fact is that we can overcome them through Christ.

One of Nelson's officers, in describing the way the ships were placed in the battle of the Nile, said that by all the rules of naval warfare, we ought to have been beaten. He then added, "Why then were we not beaten? Because Nelson was there!" And by all the rules of the campaign between us and the powers that oppose us --

the world, the flesh, and the devil — , we weak creatures might expect to be beaten. Why, then, are we not defeated? Because Jesus Christ is there. "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us." "Through Him that loved us" is the secret of the victorious life. Fanny J. Crosby, the blind hymn writer, who was such a wonderful Christian, knew that secret and wrote:

"Thou, my everlasting portion,
More than friend or life to me;
All along my pilgrim journey,
Saviour, let me walk with Thee."

Others also have set us a splendid example in this respect. Look at that wonderful picture of the veteran John G. Paton standing on the hillside of Anaitum, the whole cannibal crowd on the beach below brandishing their clubs and ready to put him to death. The old man bowed his head, closed his eyes, nestled his chin in his silvery beard on his breast, committed his soul to God, prayed earnestly for his enemies, and then opened his eyes to discover that the whole crowd of cannibals had not only been cowed, but they were at peace with him in answer to prayer. God's child can be more than a conqueror through Christ on any and every occasion.

Ever remember that the victorious Christ is the only source of strength and the only secret of victory for us. Through Him we can win a surpassing victory, or be super-conquerors. The Christ-centered and Christ-mastered life is victorious.