

"CONQUERING THROUGH CHRIST"

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

When we pass from the seventh to the eighth chapter of Romans we are in a totally different spiritual atmosphere. In the former there is the gloom of defeat. In the latter there is the glory of victory. In the former there is galling spiritual bondage. In the latter there is gladsome spiritual liberty. In the first self is on the throne. In the other Christ is on the throne. The place that the enthroned Christ occupies in the redeemed life determines the character of the life one lives. He makes all things new when He begins to reign in the surrendered life. If He has His rightful place on the throne of the life, victory, peace, joy, power and fruitfulness are assured.

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

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 has always been hard, never easy. We must master it, or be mastered by it. We are its victors, or its victims.

If this has ever been true of life, it is even more true now. Today no one who views it 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. We know now that this struggle is no sham battle; that life is very real and hard. So the strain of our age is proving too much for the weaklings; those who have no courage are going down. Others are sore beset with griefs and fears, discouragements and frustrations, sorrows, trials and tribulations, and soon will be numbered with the victims unless from somewhere desperately needed help can come.

It is not possible for us to be victors in life by altering the external conditions of it, or by denying the harsh reality of them. Whatever chance we have lies in our becoming equal to the demands made upon us. As Norman Vincent Peale has 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; weaklings do not become strong by admiring strength.

What a challenging claim Paul makes for himself, and all true followers of Christ! Is this claim valid? Let us test this claim in Paul's life. No man was ever more sorely persecuted, abused, maligned, maltreated than the Apostle Paul, but in every conflict he came out victorious. His own description of his sufferings for Christ is one of the most pathetic pictures in human history.

"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 terrible conflict, Dr. Jowett said, "In peril 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, he dares to claim himself more than conqueror.

I. The Scope of the Victory.

It is "in all these things" that we win a glorious victory. It is not outside them, or without knowing anything about them, but in the midst of them. When Paul wrote this epistle he was in the midst of one of the worst struggles ever endured by man. He had been undergoing tribulation, 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 were defeated. However, what appeared to be a defeat turned out to be a 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 our Lord said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." The word which is translated "tribulation" suggests pressure from without. It is used in the case of a person who is bearing heavy burdens. In the Latin, the word signifies threshing, and God's people are often cast upon the threshing-floor to be beaten with the heavy flail of trouble. They are more than conquerors, since they lost nothing but the straw and chaff, and the pure wheat is separated from that which is of no value to it.

Between our justification and our glorification there is the pathway of suffering, but in the suffering there can be victory. It takes a world with trouble in it to produce some of the finest qualities in life. If there were no suffering, would there 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.

"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" does not refer to anything external, but rather to mental grief. The word means dire calamity or sore affliction. The Christian suffers from external circumstances, but this is perhaps a smaller affliction than internal woe. Paul had his misrepresentations, disappointments, distresses and afflictions, but he won a marvelous victory over them through Christ.

3. In persecution.

Christ said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Do we really believe that there is blessedness for being persecuted for doing what is right for the sake of Christ? Let us be sure that it is for Christ's sake that we suffer and not for some fad of our own. Our Lord was persecuted, and He said, "If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you." The servant need not expect to be different from his Lord. Even in persecution we can conquer through Christ. Persecution can be overruled for the welfare of God's people. 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 He loved us with an unconquerable love is undeniable. All the forces of earth and hell were arrayed against Him, and on the cross it seemed that they had overcome Him, but His resurrection from the dead 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 way of victory is through faith in the triumphant and reigning Christ Who is riding forth conquering and to conquer. The risen Christ is our victory as well as our salvation. Our salvation is the gift of God through Christ Jesus. Salvation is not a human attainment but it is the gift of God. You don't struggle for a gift. You simply take it and thank the giver. Our victory is the gift of God through Christ Jesus. "But thanks be to God, which 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.

In the battle of the Nile, one of Nelson's officers, describing the way the ships were placed, said that by all the rules of naval warfare, we ought to have been beaten. 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 ought 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, 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 have also set us an example in this respect. Look at that wonderful picture of the veteran John G. Paton standing on the hillside of Aneityum, the whole cannibal crowd on the beach below brandishing their clubs ready to put him to death. The old man bowing his head, closing his eyes, nestling his chin in his silvery beard on his breast, committing his soul to God, praying for his enemies, opening his eyes to discover that the whole cannibal crowd had not only been cowed but were at peace with him in answer to prayer.

Ever remember that the victorious Christ is the source of our strength and the secret of our victory. The word which is translated "we are more than conquerors" does not appear elsewhere in the New Testament. It means we gain a surpassing victory, or we are super-conquerors, through Christ. We win an overwhelming victory through Him Who loved us. The Christ-centered and Christ-mastered life is the victorious one.