

Victory

by A.B. Simpson

The apostle Paul's testimony concerning his victory in the conflicts of life, and how we can have victory over sorrow, our own hearts, our enemies, Satan, and even when men perish.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 2:14

Topics: "Victory in Christ", "Overcoming Adversity"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the theme of victory in Christ, drawing from Paul's testimony in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16. He highlights that believers can triumph over sorrow, personal struggles, and adversaries through God's grace, encouraging them to maintain faith even in difficult circumstances. Simpson illustrates that true victory involves self-conquest and forgiveness, and that our trials can lead to greater spiritual maturity and usefulness. Ultimately, he calls Christians to embody the sweet fragrance of Christ, representing His love and compassion to the world, even when faced with rejection or failure.

Transcript

"Now thanks be unto God which always causes us to triumph in Christ and makes manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place, for we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish. To the one we are the savor of death unto death, and unto the other the savor of life unto life." 2 Cor. 2: 14-16.

This is Paul's testimony concerning his victory in the conflicts of life and especially in the severe ordeal through which he was then passing. In the pronoun "us" he takes us into partnership with his victory and reminds us that we may go forth into every battle with the prestige of assured triumph and the victorious battle cry, "Thanks be unto God that always causes us to triumph."

I. Victory Over Sorrow

He had a great sorrow. It was so severe that it unfitted him for his work. "When I came to Troas," he says, "to preach Christ's Gospel and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit." Speaking of the same experience again, in chapter 7: 5, he tells us that even after he left Troas and came into Macedonia, he was still utterly discouraged and distracted, "Our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side, without were fightings and within were fears."

His trouble was caused by others and most of it by the sins of others. How many of our troubles come from the same source. How many fathers, mothers and wives are brokenhearted because of the wrongdoing of loved ones. But there is victory even for this. The apostle could say, "Thanks be unto God which always causes us to triumph." We must not give way to discouragement even when everything and every person may seem to fail us. How often we hear people say, "I am utterly discouraged, I do not care to live, I do not feel like trying any more." Someone has died, or someone has failed you, and all the light and hope have gone from life. This is cowardly and wrong; God still lives and reigns. Take heart and trust in Him, and out of this dark cloud will come, by and by, perhaps the brightest blessings of your life. Let us never give way to circumstances. The most unfavorable conditions often are God's very way of developing some higher quality in us.

It is said that a gentleman stood watching a lot of young athletes at a game of baseball. He himself was crippled and almost helpless, and as he watched their free and agile movements his face mantled with a look of grim and bitter agony. A friend tapped him on the shoulder and quietly said, "I suppose you were thinking just now that you would like to be as those young fellows, free and strong, and that you were realizing how different it all was." "Yes," said he, "that was just what I was thinking." "Well," said his friend, "my brother, I was just thinking that God had let all this trouble come to you to do you good and make a man out of you." It was a new thought, and as he went away, it clung to him. Was there, then, some higher purpose in this terrible disappointment? And as he thought, he began to cultivate and develop the other qualities of mind and character, until his life began to develop in new directions and new purposes and plans were formed, and soon the man, whose life had seemed to be a failure, became not only successful but wonderfully useful in inventing and developing new methods for the relief of the suffering, and for the restoration of the crippled and infirm, and it did indeed become true that the trouble which seemed at one time to crush him really became in the hands of God the means of lifting him to a new manhood and usefulness.

Christ has redeemed us from sorrow as well as sin and we must not let our trials conquer us, rather let them challenge us to higher manhood and more victorious faith.

II. Victory Over His Own Heart

Before we can have victory over circumstances we must be ourselves subdued. The verb employed here is susceptible of two translations. It means either in a passive sense, "Thanks be unto God who always leads us in triumph," or in an active sense, "Thanks be unto God who always causes us to triumph."

The first sense is supported by very high authority and undoubtedly is included with the other. There seems no good reason why we should not take both. God first leads us in triumph Himself and then "He causes us to triumph." But no man can be victor over others until he has been a self-conqueror. "He that rules his spirit is greater than he that takes a city."

The apostle tells us in this chapter of his glorious victory over himself. He had been wronged and grieved by the conduct of the Corinthians; some of them had grossly sinned and even gloried in it and defied his authority and discipline, and others had supported them in it. But instead of the least resentment we find nothing in the apostle's spirit but the sweetest gentleness, self-restraint and forgiveness. He tells them about his grief and his tears; there is no resentment but only sorrow. There is no weakness in condoning evil; he has dealt with the sin with utmost faithfulness, and now he is ready to deal with the sinner with equal tenderness. It is most touching to see his anxiety lest the erring one should be unduly discouraged

and "swallowed up with over much sorrow," and so he begs them to confirm their love unto him and offer him the forgiveness of Paul as well as the Savior's.

It is a great blessing to be able to forgive and forget. Unforgiveness is one of the unpardonable sins, and when the enemy succeeds in causing someone to do you wrong, the sting which he inserts in your heart, in your hate and vindictiveness, is far more poisonous than the outward blow by which he sought to do you wrong.

There is no heart battle harder than a battle with our sensitiveness and our sense of wrong. Many of us have found it the very turning point of life. Some cruel wrong, some injury that the natural heart could never forgive, has rankled there until we felt we should lose our souls if we did not gain the victory. But mere human effort is unavailing here, and the heart gives up the struggle with a sense of utter helplessness and despair. But this is just where His grace overcomes and where the love of Jesus in us can accomplish what our love and our self-control never could. God has sometimes to let such tests come to us to show us our helplessness and bring us to His feet.

There is no picture more sublime than that of a strong nature breaking down and acknowledging its fault and rising superior to its sensitiveness and pride in the spirit of true forgiveness and love. It is said of Professor Blackie, of Edinburgh, that on one occasion he ordered his students to put up their right hands with their exercise books. One young man put up his left hand; the professor repeated the order in a stern voice, addressing him, but still he held up his left hand. Then, calling him by name, he once more repeated his demand in tones of anger. Then the lad slowly lifted up the stump of an amputated arm and meekly said, "Sir, I have no right hand." A storm of hisses burst from the students which even the authority of the professor could not restrain. But suddenly they all beheld his dignified form swiftly passing down the aisle and bending over the Scotch lad, and then his arm was around his neck and in tender tones said, "Forgive me, lad, I was over rough; forgive me, I did not know," and then there burst from those students a storm of cheers just as emphatic as the former expression of their displeasure. Never was their teacher more noble than in that attitude of humility and self-abnegation.

III. Victory Over His Enemies

"When a man's ways please the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." God's providence in external things keeps pace with the provision of His Holy Spirit in our interior life. The apostle, having himself taken the right position toward his enemies, the Lord now undertakes for him and makes all things right respecting his own interests and authority. The offending one is brought to repentance and the church to harmony and loyalty. The best way to reach our adversaries is by way of the throne. Vainly we may struggle to make things right; let us but be right ourselves, and then the hand of God will move upon all others and subdue all things unto Himself.

The writer once knew a brother minister who had been unkindly treated by some members of his flock and had fallen into a spirit of deep resentment. His own heart became clouded and separated from God, and he fell into a spirit of bitterness that almost threatened the salvation of his soul. Much prayer was offered for him. At length the answer came in a most remarkable way. First, there fell upon him a spirit of prayer for his bitter enemies, and he found himself irresistibly pouring out his heart to God for them, and then, prompted by a deep desire to return to his people, whom he had left for a time under a sense of injury. As he finished his morning service, the first persons to greet him were the two brethren that had so grievously wronged him. To his surprise they hastened forward with the most cordial welcome, and the reconciliation

that followed was deep and lasting and evident to all concerned as the work of the Holy Spirit. The moment his own heart had got right, God had made all other things right.

It is ever so. As it is the Lamb in the midst of the throne that is victorious over all His enemies, so it is the Spirit of the Lamb in us that conquers Satan and all his emissaries. Let us be less concerned about people and things, and only seek to be right ourselves, and then we can safely trust our interests, our reputation, our enemies with Him who has said, "I have loved you, therefore will I give men for you and people for your life."

IV. Victory Over the Erring One

The most beautiful thing about the apostle's spirit had been his deep concern for the offender, and now his joy was complete in his repentance and restoration, and he hastened in the most tender spirit to beseech them to restore him and confirm their love to him lest in the reaction his distress of mind might become extreme and Satan take advantage of his depression to drive him to despair.

There is no finer triumph over those that wrong us than to be made a blessing to them. There is no more touching picture in the apostolic story than that suggested by the opening verse of the first Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians compared with the story of his visit to Corinth, as given in the Acts of the Apostles. A wicked Jewish mob had brought accusations against him and dragged him before the Roman magistrate, Gallio. The leader of this mob was Sosthenes, described as "the ruler of the synagogue." The attack failed because Gallio refused to entertain the charges and dismissed them as a petty case of Jewish spite. Then the crowd waiting outside fell upon Sosthenes and his people and abused and beat them. No doubt, Paul looked on with deep sympathy and sorrow, but the striking part of it is that in the first verse of the first Epistle to the Corinthians Paul associates Sosthenes with him as a fellow worker, speaking of him in somewhat emphatic terms as "the brother." It looks as if Sosthenes had been meanwhile converted and become one of the apostle's fellow laborers. And now Paul had the glorious revenge of blessing and saving the man that had been his bitterest foe and uniting him himself in his first message to this very church in Corinth.

If we could only see over the heads of our enemies and accusers the wicked one urging them on and controlling their actions, our resentment would give place to deep compassion and earnest prayer that God would save them from his power and from the sad and fearful fate awaiting them when they wake to find that they have been led captive by him at his will.

V. Victory Over Satan

"Lest Satan should gain an advantage over us, for we are not ignorant of his devices." The apostle only saw two forces, the power of the devil on the one hand and the person and honor of the Lord Jesus on the other, and, in comparison with these two opposing forces, the injustice of his enemies and his own personal wrongs all sank into insignificance.

It is Satan that inspires every case of spiritual declension, every separation of friends and flocks, every ecclesiastical controversy, every mutual injury and resentment, and when we yield to vindictiveness or impatience, we are but pleasing him and playing into his hands. His deep design was to destroy the soul that he had led astray, and his most powerful weapon was discouragement and despair. If he could only lead this man to give up hope and to consider himself rejected and lost, then his point would have been gained. The apostle therefore was deeply concerned lest "such an one should be swallowed up of

over-much sorrow," and thus Satan gain the advantage over him.

The great adversary loves to hide his hand and work in disguise. He tries to make people prominent in our thoughts and judgments, so that in their misconduct we shall overlook the greater plotter who simply uses them as pawns on the great chessboard. Let us recognize him and we shall always find that he cannot bear the light of exposure, and the moment we see his hand our victory is assured.

VI. Victory for God

This triumph was not a selfish one. He was representing his Lord, and the spirit that he was manifesting to others was just an exhibition and revelation to the world of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Therefore he says, "We are a sweet savor of Christ." His love, his patience, his gentleness, his forgiveness were just making the spirit of his Master more real to men. That is why God has placed us here to represent our Lord. And just as Christ's gentleness and sweetness were revealed by the anguish of the garden and the cross, so God has to bruise us in order to bring forth from our lives the holy fragrance of divine love and patience. It has been forcibly said that all things must be crushed before they can give out their highest qualities. The most exquisite violins are not whole violins but instruments that have been broken and then repaired, and the fracture has left a fine touch of sweetness and sadness in the tone that could not otherwise have been brought out. This has been finely suggested by these exquisite lines:

"They tell us we must bruise

The rose's leaf,

Ere we can keep and use

Its fragrance brief.

"They tell us we must break

The skylark's heart,

Ere her caged song will make

The silence start.

"And it is always so

With precious things;

They must be bruised and go

With broken wings."

This, then, dear Christian reader, is the explanation of the trials of your life. Are you getting out of them the sweetness and fragrance which God meant them to breathe for Him to men?

VII. Victory Even When Men Perish

"We are a sweet savor of Christ unto them that are saved and unto them that perish."

A good deed is not lost even when it fails to benefit the person intended. Its sweet fragrance comes back to God, and its memory will linger with the erring one even though it failed to save. God wants us to leave upon the minds of men the sweet eternal recollection of divine love. Not in fiery anger will He at last condemn them, but doubtless with a look of pity and a word of compassion will He bid them depart and feel, as they do, that the fault was all their own; that God was never anything but love to them, and that their sin and fault were without excuse. Therefore, God would have us represent Him in the spirit of sweetness and tenderness even to those whom we fail to save.

VIII. The Prestige of Victory

The apostle's advantage implies not merely that he has won a triumph in his present trial, but that God is always causing him to triumph, and that he is going into every conflict with the confidence of victory. There is a strange power in prestige. There are armies that never look for defeat; there are trumpeters that never learn to sound a retreat; there are soldiers that always expect to overcome. Such soldiers, Christians should ever be. Our blessed Lord has overcome for us, and He has promised us that we shall be more than conquerors, too. His victory assures ours, and He bids us to go into every trial expecting to come off victorious. Are we doing so? Is our life one of victory or are we letting circumstances, discouragements, people and things bear us down and rob us of our immortal crown? This is very foolish and very sinful.

If any one who reads these lines has been yielding to discouragement, may God bid you rise and put on the garments of praise and take up the shout of victory.

It is said that Norman McLeod when a lad was greatly discouraged one day, and said to his mother that he wished he had never been born. He had the good fortune to have a Scotch mother, who had little sympathy to spare for such people, and she quietly turned to him and said, "Why, Norman, you are born, and it seems to me the thing for you to do is to find out why you were born and get to work as soon as you can to accomplish the purpose for which God brought you into existence." The rebuke went home, and the discouraged boy rose up and went forth to live a life of glorious manhood and world-wide blessing to his fellow men.

Shall we do likewise? Christ has purchased our triumph at great cost. Let us go forth in His strength to meet every adversary as a conquered foe, and to shout our watchword all the way to the gates of glory, "Thanks be to God which always causes us to triumph in Christ Jesus."

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