

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 31 March 2024. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Our Triumph in Christ

Before we read our passage of Scripture, I would like to set the backdrop for this message by painting a scene for you. I am going to transport you back to a culture and a time that the Apostle Paul knew well. The place is Rome; and the time is about A.D. 60. We are standing now on both sides of the main thoroughfare of the city of Rome, and are facing the emperor's palace. Great crowds are pressing against both sides of the pathway, and are shouting and throwing flowers and garlands into the street. What is the cause of celebration? There has been a military triumph for the empire, in a far-distant land. The general who fought that battle, and executed that victory, has returned to Rome, and is now marching through the streets with his spoils of war, to present them as a prize to the emperor.

Now, I would like to point out some particular people in this procession. First, there is **the general**. He is at the head of this procession, and stands out as the object of attention. He is receiving the honour and glory on this day, for it is he who has fought this war and won this victory for Rome. Not far behind the general, there is another group of men walking along. These are the pagan **priests**. Each of them is holding an ornamented chain, at the end of which is a little perforated metal box; and inside the perforated box is burning incense. The priests are swinging these censors back and forth like pendulums, thus causing the smoke and the smell of the incense to spread throughout the area. The sweet fragrance of the incense is symbolic of the victory that has been won for Rome.

Now, behind the priests are the **prisoners of war**, being dragged along in chains. They will, in the near future, be publicly executed, as a demonstration of the power and might of Rome. Finally, behind the prisoners of war, we see **the soldiers**, marching along with their general. Many of them are carrying precious jewels; finely engraved works of metal, wood, and ivory; and costly apparel and spices. Even exotic animals from that distant land, such as peacocks and lions, are on display. These things are the spoils of war—the trophies of victory. The general, of course, is the one that executed the victory, and it is he who will receive the praise today; but the soldiers are also to be honoured and rewarded, because they faithfully fought the general's battles.

Now, please keep this scene in mind, because it will be helpful in understanding our Scripture this morning. For now, though, I would pose this question to you: **How can we who know Christ have spiritual victory in our lives?** How does *God* define spiritual victory? For many Christians, this is a vexing question, because, quite frankly, they feel defeated quite regularly. Let's face it, brethren: the battle never stops! Until Christ comes back, the unseen spiritual war will continue; and it gets tiring! Furthermore, we cannot *see* our enemy; and our weapons are not physical, or tangible. For us physical beings, who are prone to live by sight, this is *not* easy. Worst of all, sometimes it *seems* that Satan's kingdom has the upper hand! In light of all this, I ask again: **can we really have spiritual victory in our lives?** The answer to that question is: **Yes!** This victory is made possible because of what happened on Passover Day, just outside Jerusalem, in A.D. 30—followed by what happened three days later, on the

first day of the week. I refer, of course, to the vicarious death of Jesus Christ on the cross, and His resurrection from the grave! The title of this message is ***Our Triumph in Christ***.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-17.

According to these verses, there are three things that you need to have triumph in your Christian life.

I. You must trust in the power of your Advocate (v. 14).

Christian, spiritual defeat or spiritual victory hinges on one word: **faith**. The Bible says, ***“This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”*** If you are trusting in anything other than Christ, and His power, then you *will fail* in your attempt to live for God. You *will* be defeated. It was *Christ* who saved you; it is *Christ* who keeps you; and it is *Christ alone* who can give you the power to overcome your own flesh, and the temptation of the devil. The power that enables us to serve Christ is the mighty *resurrection power* of Jesus Christ—the same power that raised Him from the dead!

Read Ephesians 1:15-21.

Read Colossians 2:13-15.

Too many Christians are not trusting in the resurrection power of Jesus Christ to fight the warfare of their daily Christian lives: and as the result, they are going around defeated much of the time (if not *most* of the time). While it is fitting for us to sing special hymns of praise about Christ’s resurrection on Resurrection Sunday (as we have done this morning), merely *singing* about Christ’s resurrection, and actually *trusting* in Christ’s resurrection power, are two different things. The sad reality is that we are prone to trust in everything and everyone *except* Christ! For example, it is easy for us to trust in ***our abilities, our efforts, our plans, and our methods***.

Now, please don’t misunderstand: there is nothing wrong with having abilities and talents. It is God who *gives* us our abilities and talents; and He expects us to *hone* our talents, and use them for His service. However, merely *having* skills, and *exercising* those skills in some position of Christian service, does not mean that you are living a life of spiritual victory. In order to *please God* with the skills that He has given you, you must be *abiding in Him*. This means that you are drawing the *power* for your Christian service from *Christ*, and not from your own personal drive, resolve, or will power. Jesus said, ***“I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”***

Christian, let those words sink in: ***“Without me ye can do nothing.”*** The faith that it took for you to be saved in the first place was a faith that was stripped of all reliance upon your own efforts. To be saved, you had to acknowledge that you had *no power* to earn your salvation; and you had to humble yourself before God, and trust completely in *Jesus* to save you! Well, guess what? It’s the same way in your daily life, now that you are saved! The faith that it takes to be *victorious* in your daily life is a faith that stands bare before God, stripped of all reliance upon

your own strength. To be victorious, you must rely *completely* upon the power of Christ. The mere *knowledge* of Scripture cannot deliver you from temptation. You may read a book of the Bible every day, and even be able to *quote* whole books of the Bible, yet still be living a powerless Christian life. It is only when you are plugged into the *power of Jesus Christ*, through *faith*, that you are able to have victory. You may, by your own knowledge, wit, or personality, be able to do “Christian service” in a way that *appears* to be successful: but all the wit, charm, and personal magnetism in the world cannot bring you true victory in your Christian life. You may have all the talent in the world; but if you are not abiding in Christ, you are powerless.

Take Moses, for example. Moses knew, early in life, that God had appointed him to deliver the children of Israel. God had equipped him with many abilities for this very purpose. Yet, when it came time to deliver Israel (or, rather, when Moses *thought* that it was time), he acted in his own will, without consulting God about it—and failed. In presumption, he killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was beating a Hebrew slave: yet, his own people didn’t respect him for it, or appreciate what he had done. When Moses stepped in to try to settle a quarrel between two Hebrew men the day after he had killed the Egyptian, one of the men said, “***Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? Intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?***” Moses had come to forty years of age: yet, he completely bombed his test of readiness to serve the Lord! Instead of being filled with confidence that he was in God’s will, he was filled with fear (as believers who are out of God’s will *always* are); and he had to flee for his life. God had to take Moses to the back side of the desert for another forty years to teach him **humility and faith**.

Read Exodus 4:10-12.

I’m not so sure that Moses was as slow of speech as he claimed to be. The Bible says that Moses was skilled in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in “***word and deed***.” I suppose that after forty years of dealing with sheep on the back side of the desert, one might tend to lose some of the communicative edge he had had earlier in life. But regardless of whether Moses still “had it” or not, God had to teach Moses that his abilities meant *nothing*! If God can use even the blind and the dumb for His purposes, who are we to think that God *needs* us, because we’re so intelligent and skilled? If you want to be used of God, and live a victorious Christian life, you must first have the humility to acknowledge before God that “I am nothing.”

Now, abilities, efforts, plans, and methods are not the only stumbling blocks for Christians. Christians are also apt to trust in material **resources** instead of in the resurrection power of Christ. It is *very* easy for us to put our confidence in resources. Why? Because they are things that we can *see* and *touch* (unlike God, whom we *cannot* see, and whom we must therefore *trust*). Though we may thank God that we do have resources at our disposal, we must be careful not to put our trust in those things: because when we stop trusting God, we become powerless.

In an affluent society such as ours, it is easy to equate material success with spiritual success. When things are going well materially, we are prone to neglect our daily relationship with Christ. Why? Because we don’t feel our *need* of him. We have a good church, a nice family, a decent job, some money in the bank, and relatively few real problems in our lives; so we figure that

spiritually, we must “have it made.” We can easily fall into this erroneous thinking as a church, as well. As a church, we are blessed, at this point, with greater resources than we have ever had before; yet, we must be careful not to trust in our nice new chairs, or in the beautiful new unit that God has given us. We may have a beautiful meeting place; but if we fail to take time, as a church body, to pray for forgiveness and cleansing, and to ask for God’s power in our lives, and for His blessing upon our labours for Him, our beautiful building means nothing.

Brethren, I’ve known the Lord for forty years now; and in those years, I have learned that it takes very little acquisition of “stuff” for God’s people to stop trusting Him. Like little children, we are so easily allured by worthless “trinkets” of this life, and so easily forget the true, eternal riches that we have in Christ. It doesn’t *have* to be this way, if we stay close to the Lord; but when our bounty increases, the potential for forgetting to trust the Lord is strong. Let it not be said of us, as God said of the church of Laodicea, that we are ***“wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked,”*** thinking we ***“have need of nothing.”***

Do you know what our biggest problem is? Pride! It is easy for us to fall into the delusive snare of self-exaltation, and to overlook our own sinfulness! Yet, God’s Word has a way of bringing us back down to earth! In **Isaiah 40**, the LORD says, ***“To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host [the stars] by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? [In other words, “My sin is no big deal! God will overlook it.”] Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”*** Folks, do these words make you feel small? They should! We serve an all-powerful, all-wise, all-present, eternal, immutable, transcendent God; and compared to Him, we are nothing! Charles Spurgeon once wrote: “A primary qualification for serving God with any amount of success, and for doing God’s work well and triumphantly, is a sense of our own weakness. When God’s warrior marches forth to the battle, strong in his own might; when he boasts, ‘I know that I shall conquer: my own right arm and my conquering sword shall get me victory,’ defeat is not far distant. Are you mourning over your own weakness? Take courage—for there must be a consciousness of weakness before the Lord will give thee victory.”

If you are waging your warfare **by Christ’s power**, you will always triumph. This triumph is not measured by results, numbers, size, or quantity. Success is measured by one thing: complete surrender to Christ, and conformity to Him. Yet, many Christians are *not* allowing themselves to be conformed to His image, and thus are *not* waging their warfare in Christ. They are not drawing from His power: and when you get down to the heart of the matter, the reason they are not trusting in His power is that they don’t really *know* Him. I’m not talking about knowing Him as Saviour: I’m talking about knowing Him in an *intimate* way, and growing in Him day by day.

Read Philippians 3:7-10.

Why do we so often lack power in our Christian lives? Is it because the power is not available? Of course not! We have *all* power at our disposal! It is the same power that raised Christ from the dead. (*That's* power!) The power is *available*: we simply don't *avail* of it. When that proud thought, lustful thought, self-pitying thought, angry thought, hateful thought, selfish thought, or envious thought, pops into our minds, we fail to go to God immediately, and earnestly, in prayer, and ask for grace and power to overcome it. Instead, we try to fight it on our own, by filling our lives with activity, or by simply telling ourselves, "I *will* do the right thing!" Many Christians have no power because their desire is not the desire that Paul had. Rather than endeavouring to be "found in him," they are, instead, trying to "find themselves." If you desire to have victory, Christian, you *must* trust in the power of your risen Saviour, and Advocate, Jesus Christ!

II. You must obey the course of action that Christ has given you (v. 14).

(Read 2 Corinthians 2:14 again.) What is the course of action that Christ has given us? What is our mission? According to this passage, our mission is to make "***manifest the savour of his knowledge in every place.***" In short, it is the command that Jesus gave to His disciples in **Mark 16:15**: "***Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.***" Our course of action is to make manifest ("make known, or proclaim") the Gospel. And what is the Gospel? It is the message of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross for our sins, and of His resurrection. Without the Gospel, there would be no salvation from the *penalty* of our sin (which is eternity in the Lake of Fire); and without the Gospel, there would also be no victory over the *power* of sin. Jesus died and rose again so that we might be saved from both the penalty *and* the power of sin.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 20-26, 51-57.

Folks, there is no other way to Heaven! There is no other gospel! There is "***none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,***" than the name of Jesus. Merely *knowing* about Jesus, or intellectually accepting certain Bible teachings about Him, is not enough. You must *personally* repent of your sin, and place your trust in Jesus' death on the cross for your sins, and surrender your heart and life to Him. If you have *not* made this choice, then you are still under the condemnation of your sin.

Is this an easy message to proclaim? No, it isn't. Will people welcome you with open arms because you're there to tell them that if they don't trust Christ, they will miss Heaven, and go to hell? No, they won't. To the natural man, this message is like an offensive, repugnant odor. That's exactly how Paul described it! Remember the scene that Paul painted for us in **2 Corinthians 2**? Remember the smoke, and the smell of burning incense that was disseminated throughout the crowd, as a symbol of victory? How do you think the people responded to that smell? To the soldiers who had fought for their general, it was a good smell. As it entered into their nostrils, they were reminded of the victory that their general had won. However, to the

prisoners who were in chains, and who were about to die, the incense was an offensive smell. Why? Because it reminded them of their execution, which was soon to come.

Do you see the picture now? To the unsaved (who are still condemned in their sins), the Gospel is the ***“savour of death unto death.”*** It is odious, repugnant, and offensive to them. It is like the whiff of sulfur from a freshly-struck match. Since their eyes are spiritually blinded, all they see in the Gospel is a message of guilt, judgment, death, and hell. They don’t understand “the good news”: and they don’t *want* to understand it. To them, the Gospel is the savour of “death unto death.” It convicts them of their sin, and pronounces them to be guilty before God; and they would rather die than admit their sinfulness. What’s more, *Christians themselves* are an offense and a reproach to the lost. Did you notice what Paul said in **verse 15**? He said that ***“we”*** are the savour of death unto death. The ***“we”*** that Paul is talking about are Spirit-filled Christians. A Christian who is walking in the Spirit, and is filled with zeal for the Gospel, is like a sweet-smelling incense. His whole life exudes the sweet fragrance of the Gospel. Even when he is not actually speaking about the Gospel with his lips, his Spirit-filled actions and Christ-like spirit are a constant reminder of the new life that the Gospel produces: and the lost people around him do *not* like it! To them, a Christian’s testimony for Jesus is the ***“savour of death unto death.”***

On the other hand, to those of us who are saved, the Gospel is *pleasant* to hear. We know that through the vicarious death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, we have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. To us, it is the ***“savour of life unto life.”*** It is the savour of victory. Because of the Gospel—because the Captain of our Salvation has conquered death—we have victory over death!

Read Luke 24:1-10; 25-49.

The three days that Jesus lay in the tomb were the darkest in human history. (Or, so it *seemed* to the disciples.) Satan thought he had won. Little did he know that on the third day, Christ would walk out of the tomb, and thereby conquer death—and that because of His victory over death, all who would place their trust in Him would *also* have victory over death! **Hebrews 12:2** says, ***“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*** As our risen Lord sits on His throne in Heaven, He is interceding to the Father for us who are saved; and one day, He will receive us to Himself, to be with Him forever. Death is a welcome portal to those who know the Lord! To Christians, death has no sting, and the grave has no victory. To the Christian, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Furthermore, someday, we who are saved will stand before God in resurrected, immortal, glorified, sinless bodies. Truly, the savour of Christ is the savour of ***“life unto life”***!

Brethren, we have been given a wonderful, unshakeable hope. Yet, with that hope, God has also entrusted us with a great and weighty responsibility: to bear the Gospel to others, so that they, too, might pass from death unto life—so that they, too, may know the sweet savour of ***“life unto life.”*** Christ has given us the gargantuan task of taking the Gospel to the uttermost part of the earth: and for that reason, Paul asks a rhetorical question: ***“And who is sufficient for these***

things?” Who of us have the wit, the genius, the strength, or power to do this job? None of us do! Who of us can change even one person’s heart? None of us can. Yet, Jesus *can*! *He* gives us the power and wisdom to present His Word to others; and *He* does the work of convicting men of their sin, and saving them. However, though it is Christ who works in and through us, there is something you must realise: **this work will cost you something**. It will cost your time; your money; or perhaps your life’s ambition. It may cost you someone whom you love. It may even cost you your life! However, even if it should cost you your very *life*, it is worth it! Jesus said, ***“He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”***

III. You must have the right attitude and motive (v. 17)

Every Christian should be obeying the Great Commission: yet, what is the attitude that we should have as we carry out the commission? Paul answers this question by telling us what the right attitude is *not*, and then what it *is*. First, let’s see what it is *not*. **(Read 2 Corinthians 2:17.)**

How can you know that you have the right attitude toward the Great Commission? According to Paul, the evidence that you have the right attitude is that you are not, in any way, “corrupting” the Word of God. This word ***“corrupt”*** is translated from the Greek word *kapeleuo*, which means “to retail, or make a trade of.” Paul is saying that the Word of God is “corrupted” when someone uses it for his own personal gain, and not for God’s glory.

Now, when we think of using the Word of God for personal gain, we often think of the greedy priests, or the phony T.V. evangelists, or other religious charlatans, who use the Word of God to make piles of money for themselves. Yet, can **we** use the Word of God for personal gain? We certainly can! In fact, we are guilty of it far more often than we care to admit. The litmus test for your motive is very simple: **why do you do what you do?** If your motive for service be anything other than to bring glory to God, what *are* you doing it for? Perhaps it is for the praise and recognition of men, in some ever-so-subtle way. Maybe it is for some kind of personal benefit down the road. Maybe your acts of service are, in reality, a sort of “bribe” to “appease” God, because there is some other area of your life in which you are living a lie. Folks, a sincere desire to serve God, and a desire to serve yourself, cannot be mixed. If there be even a *little* ulterior motive in your service, it is corrupt; and you will receive no reward in Heaven for it.

John Wesley once compiled “A Daily Test for Self-Examination.” The questions that Wesley asked himself daily were these: “Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am a better man than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite? Am I honest in all my acts or words, or do I exaggerate? Do I confidentially pass on to another what was told to me in confidence? Can I be trusted? Am I a slave to dress, friends, work, or habits? Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying? Did the Bible live in me today? Do I give the Bible time to speak to me every day? Am I enjoying prayer? When did I last speak to somebody else with the object of trying to win that person for Christ? Am I making contacts with other people and using them for the Master’s glory? Do I pray about the money I spend? Do I disobey God in anything? Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy? Am I

defeated in any part of my life? Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy, or distrustful? How do I spend my spare time? Am I proud? Do I thank God that I am not as other people, especially as the Pharisee that despised the publican? Is there anybody whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold resentment toward, or disregard? If so, what am I doing about it?"

Anything that "corrupts" God's Word is the wrong attitude. What, then, is the *right* attitude to have as we carry out Christ's commission? Paul couldn't have said it simpler: it is "**sincerity**." Folks, it is very possible to speak the truth, yet do it with an insincere motive. Should your service be stained with insincerity, today is the day to get right with God, surrender fully to Him, and begin living your life victoriously, in the "power of His resurrection." This is the whole reason Jesus died on that cross, and rose again the third day—that He might save you, and be the *Lord* of your life, and accomplish His will through you. **Romans 14:9** says, "***For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.***"

Conclusion: How can we have triumph in our spiritual warfare? I believe the Word of God has answered that question for us! You must trust in the *resurrection power* of your Advocate, Jesus Christ. You must obey your course of action—to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And, you must bear that message with the right attitude—the attitude of sincerity in the sight of God.

Perhaps there are some of you have *heard* about Jesus all your life, and you *know* lots of things about Him: but you have never sensed any connection to Him, because *you have never been saved*. Merely knowing *about* Jesus cannot save you: you *must* be "born again." This means that you must humble yourself before Him; place your *personal* faith in His saving work for you on the cross; and, by faith, *ask* Him to save you, come into your life, so that He can change you, and make you what *He* wants you to be. You must repent, in your heart, of your sin, and surrender your life to Him. If you have never received this wonderful gift of salvation, *please* answer the call of the risen Jesus! Jesus said, "***All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.***"