

VICTORY THROUGH FAITH¹

Human beings delight in victory. It is our natural desire and human nature to win. This is true in an athletic contest, in competition between nations such as warfare, in politics, in education, in business, and in most any endeavor. We are very competitive, and we like to be first. We enjoy the thrill of victory, and there is agony, humiliation, and sadness in defeat. Sometimes this obsession with winning can have negative consequences, for example, in human relations (“the battle between the sexes”). Sometimes it can cause simple every day events, like driving in a large city, to become almost unbearable. In these instances, the struggle to win can paradoxically cause us to be losers. But, all in all, this desire to be victorious is healthy. It comes from the desire we all share, that is, to be winners in life itself. Compare the images from ancient sports that the apostle Paul uses in 2 Timothy 4.7, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”

In the challenge of life itself, the believer can say with confidence, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord, Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15.57). We can confess with Paul, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4.13), because “[the one] who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3.20). This power we should not take lightly! The apostle does not exaggerate when he says in Romans 8.37, “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” In Jesus Christ, we are super-conquerors!

¹All scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (1989) unless indicated otherwise.

In the professional world, there are good and great performers. But then there are super performers who excel above and beyond all the rest. Some examples would be Bobby Jones in golf, Babe Ruth in baseball, Albert Einstein in science, and, in politics, Franklin D. Roosevelt. In the world of jet aerial combat, there is the American Captain Joseph McConnell, Jr., who had 16 kills in the Korean War. And in the arena of submarine warfare, there is the German commander Lieutenant Otto Kretschmer, who sank one destroyer and more than forty Allied merchant marine vessels during World War II. In our Christian walk, there are daily victories to be sure, but we all—each one of us, not just a few of us, but all of us—are super-conquerors through Jesus Christ our Lord. So what does this mean in practical terms?

First, we have victory over sin. We do not like to talk about “sin” anymore, but sin is a reality. It is the tragic mistake of humanity. Paul writes, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3.23). We can offer human cures for sin, for example, moral reform or rehabilitation. We may deny the reality of sin in sophisticated ways, that is, explain it away by calling it illness or sickness. Yet the bottom line is: We are sinners, and there is only one Savior from sin, the Lord Jesus Christ. And Jesus gives us victory and deliverance from the reign of sin that lives within our flesh (see Romans 8.1-4). How does he do this? He gives us an example to follow. But more than that, he paid the price for our sins by the sacrifice of himself. If we believe this, if we turn to God and are cleansed by him, then we are liberated from the bondage of sin. We are free. We have victory.

But he also gives us power to maintain this victory every day through the comfort, help, and guidance of his Holy Spirit. Temptation is also a reality, sin is a possibility, and apostasy could become the tragic end of any believer’s spiritual walk. Think about King David’s fall and

the denials of Peter. But God promises victory, so there is power to overcome. 1 Corinthians 10.13 says it like this, “No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.” There is victory over sin.

Second, we have victory over difficulties in this life. Trials and burdens, everybody has them. In this world we will have problems. We will face disappointments. We will experience sorrow. This is nothing new. “Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14.1; NKJV). Frankly, some people have more troubles than others do. Some people can have more trouble in one year, one week, maybe even one day, than others might have in a lifetime. There are so many ways we can know disappointment, sorrow, and heartache, for example, a tragic accident, an unfaithful spouse, a rebellious child, a terrible crime, an unkind neighbor, uncontrolled passion, a harsh boss or supervisor. The list is long.

But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. Too many people these days are controlled by fear, and fear produces anxiety and a lack of faith. It is similar to when the disciples of Jesus were crossing the Sea of Galilee in a small boat. Jesus was asleep, and a storm came up that rocked the boat. Have you had your boat rocked lately? Was it by a little bit of wind! You remember that Jesus, after the disciples woke him from his sleep, asked them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” (Matthew 8.26; NKJV). The reason for their fear and anxiety, and the reason for our fear and anxiety is plain—the lack of faith or trust in our Master.

If we really believe “that all things work together for good for those who love God” (Romans 8.28), how can we be overcome by the challenges of this life? There is power from the

Lord to overcome. There is victory. Yes, it is difficult to adjust to life without a close relative or without a former husband or wife. It is difficult to forgive others of violent, senseless crime, if we are a victim. These are real difficulties, and recovery often can be very painful and very slow. But the trials of this life should bring us closer to God.

The apostle Peter makes an interesting statement in one of his letters to Christians. He talks about how we in this life “for a little while” must “suffer various trials.” But he concludes that this suffering is so that “the genuineness of [our] faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1.6-7). Fire is used to purify gold. When heated, the impurities come to the top and can be removed, leaving pure gold. Involved in this process are pressure, great pressure, and much heat! Trials are like that. They can be hot, fiery, and pressure-filled. But Peter is saying that trials in life can refine us and make our faith like pure gold. And that faith is more precious than pure gold! Each one of you, if you have been put in the pressure cooker, so to speak, you have benefitted from the experience in some way. You are stronger; you are wiser; you are more experienced. And you probably would say, “Whew, I never want to go through that again!”

Often the results of going through a period of testing, whether it turns out to be a positive or negative experience, depends on our attitude. An old adage says, “The same sun that melts wax hardens clay” (cf. Hebrews 6.7-8). A believer could become bitter against God for his or her trials. But, on the other hand, we can allow God to use life’s challenges to mold and shape our character. Above all else, what we should focus on the victory that God promises. And John says, “This is the victory that conquers the world, our faith” (1 John 5.4). If we truly believe that

this world and its lusts shall pass away, and if we truly believe that the one who does the will of God shall live forever, then we shall overcome (1 John 2.17). In Jesus Christ, there is victory over the difficulties of life.

Finally, we have victory over death. Perhaps the greatest challenge in all of life is the fact that we all shall die. Death is, in a very real sense, the ultimate slap in the face. In our struggle to exist, death is the great invader. This has puzzled humans throughout all periods of human history. The patriarch Job long ago asked, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (Job 14.14; NKJV). In Jesus, the victory over death is certain and sure. The proverbial slap in the face is turned into a victory celebration. Paul expresses it like this, “For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Corinthians 15.53-54; ESV).

Here Paul quotes from Isaiah 25.8 where the prophet says, “He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from the earth, for the Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, ‘Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation’” (ESV). This statement is made a reality for each of us who are in Christ. Our victory over death is guaranteed. So with death passed and eternal life our possession, we will be able to say with the apostle, “‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 15.55-57; cf. Hosea 13.14). In Jesus, there is victory over death.