

ChristianityWorks
More than Conquerors
061-3
Living in Victory

When circumstances of life counter-attack and threaten to throw us off our game, it's about taking the ground that God's given us ... taking it, hanging on to it, through thick and thin.

Take Courage

Courage is a funny thing! It's something we all want to have but never want to use. I mean think about it – do you want to be a courageous person; someone with the resolve and strength to make it through the difficult times; those dark and stormy days? Of course you do – so do I – we all do. It's just that we never ever want to travel through those difficult times. We want our lives to be pleasant and comfortable and happy.

We want everyone around us to be like us and to be kind to us ... And of course, life just isn't like that – those dark and stormy days do come. In fact, sometimes they're like seasons, they linger on – the winter that just doesn't seem to want to end. And the longer this darkness goes on, the harder it gets; the more prone we are to feeling defeated; the more we become victims of our circumstances.

No, courage is definitely something we want to have, but we never want to have to use it. Problem is, the only place where we develop our courage; where we grow our courage; where we test our courage, is in those dark and difficult places and that, my friend, is the truth of it. That's what we are going to be unpacking today on the programme – courage.

As I look back on my life, the last decade and a half that I have been walking with Jesus, instead of away from Him, there have been so many times when circumstances have wanted to overwhelm me.

Do you remember the story of the disciple Peter who saw Jesus walking towards his boat out on the Sea of Galilee? Great big storm happening and the disciples were in the boat and they thought they were going to drown. And Jesus comes out, walking on the water and they thought they had seen a ghost.

Peter jumps out of the boat, starts walking towards Jesus – I mean, it was a gutsy move. This great storm blowing; he got out of the boat in the middle of the storm – what a mighty step of faith! But

listen to what happened to him along the way – while he is walking on the water towards Jesus. Matthew chapter 14 and verse 30:

“When Peter noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”

To tell you the truth, that has happened to me so many times. You get out there, you’re doing what you think God’s called you to do, – whether in ministry or, previously I had my own business or in family or with friends – you’re believing that God is good. He’s with me, He’ll help me to do the things that He wants me to do for His glory. And then, all of a sudden, your eyes come off Him and you focus on the reality of your circumstances, like Peter and you get that sinking feeling.

Over the last few weeks and again this week on the programme, we are working our way through a series called, “More Than Conquerors.” These are the Apostle Paul’s words when he wrote to the Roman church in the New Testament. Romans chapter 8, verses 35-39:

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

See, the issue is not that every time we’re in trouble, God will come along and wave a magic wand and make it all perfect again. He doesn’t work that way. Often He lets us go through those dark seasons and they linger on and He lets us walk through the wildernesses of life.

The issue is that, while we’re in those dark places - as Paul had been many a time, as he wrote this passage we’ve just read - that the circumstances won’t crush us; that we won’t be torn apart and cast asunder by the difficulties of life. And today on the programme we are going to explore probably the most important ingredient in being a conqueror and that ... that is courage.

In the Old Testament, the first time it talks about having courage is when a man called Joshua is in an incredibly difficult place. The

twelve tribes of Israel were captive in Egypt. God brought Moses and leads them through the Red Sea and they spend forty years on the exodus in the wilderness. And they are about to cross over into the Promised Land; cross the Jordan which they would have to take after fighting battle after battle after battle with the nations that occupied the Promised Land. And their trusted and proven leader of forty years, Moses, dies.

God appoints his second in charge, Joshua, to take over at this critical, scary time. I mean, couldn't God have done this earlier? Or couldn't Moses have lasted just a bit longer to lead them through at least a couple of the battles in the Promised Land until they got their confidence up? No! Right at this point ... right on the threshold of all the battles; just before they cross over the Jordan into the Promised Land, at the least most convenient time, God takes Moses, puts Joshua in charge. Notice God's timing – so often, it's scary.

Joshua chapter 1, verses 1-9 is a powerful passage where God commissions Joshua for the onerous task of leadership ahead. I'm going to read just three verses to you. Have a listen:

"Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them." Joshua chapter 1, verse 6

"Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go." Joshua 1, verse 7

"I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." Joshua 1, verse 9

Three times God commands Joshua to be strong and courageous! Three times! Do you think that God thought it was important for Joshua to be courageous ... to have courage? Do you think?

Let's get a grip here! We want to have courage but so often when things happen at the most inconvenient possible time; when things all of a sudden turn scary in our lives, we want to go under a rock somewhere and hide. That's a natural reaction really. We all have that reaction sometimes – I certainly do because courage is counter intuitive. Courage is stepping out and doing it anyway, even though there is risk and danger and we are afraid.

Let me tell you something: there can be no victory in those places unless we take courage; unless we decide to listen to God's command to get out there and do it anyway, even when we're afraid, because we know that the Lord our God is with us wherever we go.

My friend, you and I, we live on a battlefield and if we want to win the battle we need to get on a war footing; we need to take courage and be courageous. We are going to be exploring that some more later because it's easier said than done.

But let me say this: God wants you and me to be more than conquerors; He wants us to experience His victory in every part of our lives BUT - and here's the 'But' with a capital B - if we are to lay hold of that victory, we need to obey His command:

"I hereby command you," says the Lord our God, "be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

Stand Firm

Today on the programme we are looking at living in victory. Earlier we saw that we need to have courage, but courage to do what? Let's take a look. For ten years, between 1977 and 1987, I served in the Australian Army. One of the things that they taught us while I was at the Officer Training Academy at Duntroon was the role of every corps in the Army. We had to memorise these roles, word for word, and I can tell you that the role of the Infantry Corps is to seek out and close with the enemy; to kill or capture him; to seize and hold ground; to repel attack by day or by night, regardless of season, weather or terrain.

At the end of the day, fighting the battle is about seizing a piece of ground, capturing it and holding onto it. You win if you beat the other force that you are fighting against, take the ground and hang onto it, even when they counter attack.

That's what winning is in war and strangely enough, that's exactly what victory is when we are fighting the battles of life. When the devil comes after us with a pick axe; when the circumstances of life counterattack and threaten to throw us off our game, it's about taking the ground that God's given us; the parcel that He's allotted to us in life - whatever that is - taking it, hanging onto it, through thick and thin. God wants us to be victorious! He wants us to be more than conquerors.

And on the programme today we are going to discover how! Have a listen to what the Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 6, beginning at verse 10:

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against rulers, against authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm."

See, the devil comes to attack. Paul's telling us to be strong in the strength of God's power, not in our own strength, "so that we may be able to withstand on that evil day and having done everything, to stand firm." It's exactly what we talked about just before.

Now please, when I talk about being victorious and grabbing onto what God's given us in life and hanging onto it, I'm not talking about some selfish, 'blab it and grab' it kind of faith where it's all about 'me' – where it's about having a bigger house and a nicer car and finer clothes. All those things – well, they're nice - but in the scheme of things, they're rubbish compared to the real thing.

Here's what God has planned for us: His peace, His joy, His power to live our lives in obedience to Him, His love that we can share with a lost and a hurting world. God has such riches planned for you and me but they are not the riches of this world, in fact, they're the exact opposite. Jesus put it this way: Matthew chapter 13, verse 44. He said:

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."

Jesus is saying God's riches are so good that we would trade everything we have for God's riches – the Kingdom of God. And I have to tell you, for me, that's so true. I have a joy and a peace and a quiet confidence in God today that I wouldn't give up for all the tea in China – no way!! The world ... the world wants to rob us of those things; the devil wants to rob us of all those things.

He (the devil) doesn't want us to have peace and joy and so in the circumstances of life, along comes someone who's nasty and unfair

and talks behind our backs and threatens our jobs and our security. Happens, doesn't it? So many things and people and devils are out there that want to rob us of that which Jesus purchased for you and me at the price of His own life on that cross at Calvary.

We live on a battlefield and in a battle you can't have a victory without courage. Courage is about standing and fighting when every fibre in your being is screaming at you to run and hide. See, it takes courage to stand secure when someone is being nasty and undermining us and threatening us. It takes courage to love them and turn the other cheek when what we really want to do is run and hide in our old sinful ways, where we give them back the same rubbish that they are dishing up to us.

So the question is: how? I want to share with you a single passage – just two short verses from the Bible – it's so powerful, I believe this passage is going to breathe a mighty courage into your spirit. Are you ready? If you have a Bible, open it up at First Corinthians chapter 16, verses 13 and 14. It says:

"Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love."

The Apostle Paul, at the end of a pretty stern letter to his friends in the church in Corinth, is writing these words. Now, I want to unpack them, just briefly, because there is such power in them. The Bible is, after all, God's Word and God's Word, when the Spirit takes it and writes it on our hearts, is the power to change.

'Keep alert'! Open your eyes. You see, we expect life to be rosy, peaches and cream, comfortable and warm and pleasant. It's not like that all the time - tough things happen. And Paul's saying just keep alert; keep your eyes open; expect them to happen; be ready for them. This is powerful stuff because instead of being surprised when something bad happens, we're ready. One of the greatest weapons of any enemy is the element of surprise. He attacks when we least expect him to but if we're ready and alert, it has far less impact on us.

And then Paul says, *"Stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong."* See, that's what having courage means – that's where courage comes from – not from self-confidence or self-reliance or relying on our bank balance or our position or status or experience but in trusting God. In standing firm when the devil comes after us with a meat cleaver; when the circumstances we face in life are so profoundly overwhelming; stand firm, believing in God. He hasn't

fallen off His twig, you know. He's not surprised, He's not shocked, He's not frightened – stand firm and believe in Him.

Joshua chapter 1, verse 9 – we looked at it earlier:

"I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."

That's why we can stand firm because God is in that place with us, no matter what anyone hurls at us. And finally, he says there in First Corinthians chapter 16, verse 14:

"Let all that you do be done in love."

See, this is the important bit. We're not fighting battles and winning victories for our own selfish ends; we are winning the victory of faith knowing that we can overcome; knowing that when we're walking through the fire, God is in that furnace with us. First John chapter 5, verse 4:

"For whatever is born of God, conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith."

See, the thing that wins, isn't us; it's not our selfishness but whatever is born of God is what conquers the world. All that is born of God is born in love, in self-sacrifice, in putting others before us – that's what victory is all about. We conquer the world through our faith in this loving God. I want to encourage you today, God means for us to be more than conquerors – much more – He means for us to have victory; His victory in life.

And I don't care what it is that you are facing right now; what affliction, what toil, what rejection, what fear, what loss, what insecurity – whatever it is, God's plan - right smack bang in the middle of that calamity - is for you and for me to be more than conquerors in Him who loves us. That's the plan; that's the victory; that's the power. So here it is:

"Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love."

Victory – for me and for you

For many, many people, this notion that we can have victory - actually live in the victory that God purchased for us at the cross - is a huge shift. I know a man, a godly man, a minister of the Gospel

who has a well developed theology of defeat. For him failure is a sign that he is living out God's call on his life. I'm not sure what that's all about.

At the beginning of the programme, I shared with you that powerful passage from the Apostle Paul – Romans chapter 8, 35-39. I'm toying with the idea – nah, I'm not toying – we're going to do it. I'm going to read it again because, buried in this beautiful passage is the crux of what God means by 'victory'. Because what I'm talking about living out, isn't the world's notion of victory, but God's. Come on, let's dive in and have another look – let's dig deeper to discover the treasure that God has buried here in His Word for us today. Romans chapter 8, verses 35 to 39. This is what Paul writes:

"Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor present things, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus."

Remember how over the last few weeks we've seen how Paul travels through some incredibly difficult spots; life threatening on many occasions. There were afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labours, sleepless nights, hunger and it would have been so easy for him to wallow in the injustice of it all; to complain, to whinge, to give up: 'God, You called me to this and now look at the rubbish that's happening to me!' See, that's where defeat lies – not in our circumstances but in **how we respond** to our circumstances.

You know something? Difficult circumstances are going to come and go. Some people have more than others – I can't explain that. They're as much a part of our lives as the air that we breathe. There are seasons in our lives that come and go and the world wants us to believe that victory ... victory is in removing the source of pain; victory is having the cancer healed every time; victory is God magically coming up with the cash when we are broke.

Now, God actually does do those things from time to time. I have seen more miracles of His provision and grace in the last decade and a half than I ever could have dreamed up for myself. But the real victory comes when, in the midst of those tough circumstances,

we don't give up our hope in Him; when we don't give up the call He's placed on our lives; when we stand firm, no matter what the world throws at us. But Paul lists out all his adversities and then proclaims this over them – he says:

“But in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loves us.”

Why? Because he honestly, with every fibre of his being, believes that none of these things - nothing that he can experience, nothing he can imagine, nothing that the world throw at him - can separate him from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And that's why he can proclaim victory over his adversity, that's why he can say 'I am more than a conqueror'.

And that's exactly the kind of victory that Jesus purchased for us on the cross. That is exactly the kind of victory He calls us to live out, right here and right now, in the middle of the rubbish that people are going through. That means having courage.

You know, I often pray for courage. I often ask the Lord to give me the courage that I need in my heart to stand firm today, when through the gates of Hades the devil throws everything in his armoury at me. I don't have the courage – I have enough courage, maybe, to do little things but you know, some days, there is a spiritual battle going on and I don't have the courage ... the courage comes from God.

Lord, give me courage. I believe in the victory that You have purchased for me on the cross. I believe that the day of jubilee is coming. I believe that Your love and Your grace and Your Holy Spirit are all that I need to stand firm; to persevere; to endure until the day that I stand before You.

Are you with me? See, the world wants us to believe that it's ending our difficult circumstances that equal victory, but God tells us, 'No!' Victory is something that we can have right here, in the middle of the worst thing that we could ever imagine.

Take courage, stand firm!