

ChristianityWorks
More than Conquerors
061-4
The Spoils of Victory

We just don't somehow scrape by with a victory but we have an abundance of victory and joy and peace in our lives to share around with people who don't have enough.

God's Consolation

I wonder have you ever been in a place in your life where you feel like ... like you are so utterly and unbearably crushed; that life, as you know it, is going to come to an end? You know, when the darkness is so dark; when the pain is so bad, when nothing that anybody says or does to help makes even the slightest bit of difference.

I often receive emails from people who have listened to one of these programmes and they say to me, 'Berni, how can you tell me that God is good? How can you believe that God wants me to be more than a conqueror – He wants me to have victory? And that's because people have been living in defeat for so long, they can't even begin to imagine what victory looks like.

And that's not always their fault. I spoke with a woman who's been caring for her mother who's had dementia for years now and it's become utterly unbearable for her. She is suffering so much; physically, mentally and spiritually that she's completely lost sight of God.

When things are that brutal and dark and lonely like that, we get to thinking and imagining that there's no way out; that there's no solution; no way. Today on the programme I want to share something with you from God's Word that tells us the complete opposite. And my prayer is that as you receive God's Word, His Spirit will breathe a courage into your heart, that you never thought possible. God means for us to live in victory and there are some amazing rewards that come with that victory.

The first of those is the comfort of God. Let me share with you something that comes from the Apostle Paul. Now it's easy to get the idea that because he's got the title 'Apostle' with a capital 'A' that this guy was somehow super-human. That somehow because God had him write almost half the books of the New Testament and plant most of the churches in the known world in the first century AD, that somehow Paul was immune from the trials and tribulations that you and I face. So let me read to you a short passage from the beginning of the second letter to the church in Corinth; it comes from Second Corinthians chapter 1, verses 8-11:

"We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had

received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again, as you also join in helping us by your prayers, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.”

It's pretty grim stuff! He says, “*We were utterly, unbearably crushed.*” The picture there in the original Greek words that Paul uses, is of like grapes being crushed in a wine press, having the life; the juice squeezed completely out of them. That's what he's talking about here. And a little bit later in the same letter he goes on to explain a bit more of what was going on and how they felt when they had to go through these trials. Picking up in Second Corinthians chapter 4, verses 8 to 10. He said:

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be visible in our bodies.”

Now if you have ever been in such a dark and difficult place you will surely relate to what Paul is saying here – I certainly do! As I hear his words and close my eyes, I can remember the pain of some of the darkest days of my life. And in those dark days there were times when I despaired for life itself. There were times when I wondered whether I should end it all. There were times when I couldn't possibly see how I could make it through until tomorrow. The darkness was so dark I had forgotten completely what light was like except for a small candlelight that shone in my heart. Second Corinthians chapter 4, verse 6:

“For it is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

But in this letter to his friends in Corinth, Paul explains the source of his power. Paul explains why it is that he hasn't been crushed; why it is that he hasn't been driven to despair; why it is that he hasn't been forsaken or destroyed. And here is the nub of what I want to share with you right now; is the most beautiful and wondrous thing. Listen! Second Corinthians chapter 1, verse 3:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves were consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.”

Paul's talking here about the fact that God consoles him in his affliction. Other translations talk about God bringing comfort. And so, what I did is I went back

to look at the original Greek meaning of this word that's been variously translated as 'comfort' and 'console' here in these few short verses and blow me down, if it isn't the very same word that Jesus uses for the Holy Spirit in John chapter 14, verses 16-18. He says:

"I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, to be with you. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; for I am coming to you."

Now, bring these two passages together, what Paul says in Second Corinthians chapter 1, verses 3-5 and what Jesus is saying in John chapter 14, verses 16-18 and this is what God is saying to us through His Word today. When we are so utterly and unbearably crushed that we despair of life itself, then our place of comfort is God Himself. The Spirit of God who is a Comforter, just like Jesus, who dwells in us.

That's the light that shines in the darkness; that's the peace and the joy; that's the place that our courage comes from and where our hope comes from. God pours His Spirit in our hearts and He brings hope in the middle of despair. That's why elsewhere; in Romans chapter 5, verses 3-5, Paul writes this:

".....that we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

My friend, listen to me – no matter how dark it gets; no matter how difficult it gets amidst the very affliction that would seem to squeeze all the life out of us; unbearable and impossible though it may seem, God's Word says that right in the middle of that, we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us. Do you get it? The One who loves us, is right here in our darkness with us and if we will only get still before Him and stop and listen and look with the eyes of our soul, we will see that the light shines in the darkness. We will experience this Comforter, just like Jesus, the Holy Spirit; God Himself who dwells in us - the One who will encourage us; comfort us and build us up.

And do you know what happens when we rely on Him, above all others in our darkest afflictions? We discover that indeed we are more than conquerors; we can overcome anything and everything through Him who loves us; through Him who dwells in us; through Him who will never leave us or forsake us. This is the promise of God Himself, for just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us so also our consolation is abundant through Christ.

Double for Your Trouble

Have you ever lost something that you've worked hard for? It happens a lot; more than we would think. Person who's worked hard at their career,

sacrificed so much for their employer, finds themselves retrenched in an economic slump. A couple that saved for their retirement, sees their savings evaporate when the stock market crashes. The house you have turned into a home – lovely memories, happy times and sad – consumed by fire or destroyed by flood. In fact, it happens a whole bunch more often than we would imagine.

Take a look around the world – twenty five to thirty thousand children dying every day from poverty, that's, gee, that's a hundred or two hundred since we started talking together today. They may have mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters who've lost a child. So many lose so much in this world and when we value what we have lost: a loved one, a career, a home – when the value is high because we have invested so much of ourselves into that thing which is now lost, it is devastating.

And that devastation can leave us reeling - the loss of one whom we've loved; the loss of that for which we have worked so hard for. The greater the investment, the greater the value and the greater the value, the greater the loss. And somehow we want to mourn that loss, over and over and over again.

You may have heard me say this before but there are so many people who allow the past to spoil their present and rob them of their future. And even when we're still right in the middle of losing whatever it is that we've lost, yet it feels as though nothing can ever replace it. That's an untruth that many, many people hang on to. It's a lie that the devil uses to suck the life out of many a person, even a person who believes in Jesus with all their hearts.

Today we are looking at the rewards of victory that Jesus promised. And one of the greatest rewards of all is the way in which God restores things to us. In fact, God has an amazing track record of giving us much better and much more than we had to start with. He is after all, a God of grace and mercy and love. First step though, is letting go of the past. If it's lost, it's lost – you can't change that, you can't undo that, you can't fix anything that you may have done or failed to do which led to or contributed to the loss. The past is the past, we can't change it.

That's why God said to His people Israel - who deserted Him and so He punished them by having the Babylonians take them into captivity for seventy years – He says in Isaiah chapter 43, verse 18:

“Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old.”

He tells them this right when He is about to restore their fortunes and take them out of their slavery and exile and return them back to the Promised Land. He can't do that if they're still wallowing around in the past. Now I know it can be difficult to imagine, when you have lost a loved one – a wife or a husband – when you have lost a job, when you've lost everything; possessions, family, wealth, children, everything – it can be difficult to imagine

that it can ever get better. And you keep asking God, “Why? I haven’t done anything wrong.”

There’s a great, powerful story about this in the Book of Job, in the Old Testament. God takes away everything that Job has, but after all the calamity and the loss and the pain, have a listen to what God does - Job chapter 42, verse 10. He says:

“And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he had prayed for his friends; and the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.”

In fact, this isn’t the only time that someone gets double for their trouble. Again, this promise from God comes to God’s people after a whole big calamity on them – Zechariah chapter 9, verse 12:

“Return to your stronghold, O prisoners of hope; today I declare that I will restore to you double.”

And the same thing again through the prophet Isaiah – Isaiah chapter 61, verse 7:

“Because their shame was double,” (this is God’s people) “Because their shame was double, and dishonour was proclaimed as their lot, therefore they shall possess (wait for it!) a double portion; everlasting joy shall be theirs.”

My friend, God is a God of great blessing and sometimes even double isn’t enough to describe what He has in store for us when we lose something we love, or we lose something that we valued highly. We can live the rest of our lives in defeat, but in Christ we are more than conquerors. And I want to encourage you, if you’ve lost someone you love or something you valued highly, it’s time to let go of the past and set your hope on the future – the goodness that God will bring.

Well, it may be entirely different to what you have lost; it may not be what you would have chosen for yourself but here are some words from the late, great eighteenth century preacher S.D. Gordon – he said:

“If God were to say to me, “I want to give you something; a special love gift, as an extra because I love you, what would you like to have?” Do you know what I thought I would have said to God? “Dear God, You choose. I choose what You choose.” He is thinking about me, He knows what I am thinking of and what I would most enjoy and He is such a lover God, that He would choose something a bit finer than I would think. I might think of a dollar but He’s likely thinking of double. I thinking of blackberries; big, juicy blackberries but really I don’t know what blackberries are beside the sort He knows and He would choose for me.” That is our God!

Let me encourage you. No matter what you may have lost, you have lost nothing at all because in Christ you have it all. You and I, we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us.

Our Reward in Heaven

You know something? In the heat of battle it's so easy to lose sight of the victory that God has planned for us. I mean with everything that's going on we can become so distracted with just dealing with the day to day that we completely lose sight of the fact that victory is possible and what victory might look like.

Over these last few weeks on the programme we have been trying to get a handle on the fact that according to God we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us – not just conquerors but more than conquerors. That means we don't just somehow scrape by with a victory but we have an abundance of victory and joy and peace in our lives to share around with people who don't have enough – an overflow of victorious blessing, if you like.

And yet we ourselves - those who should be living in victory; those who should be overcoming and winning in the struggles of life – if someone came up to us and said, 'You know, I've been reading the Bible, this thing that you believe in, and I've noticed it talks a lot about having victory. I want you to tell me something – what is that victory like in your life? What does it look like? I wouldn't know, because well, I want to decide if that's the life that I want for me.' Um! If someone came and asked you that sort of question, what would you tell them?

I don't know if you have been able to join me on some or even all of the programmes over these last few weeks in this series called "More than Conquerors", but we have been looking a lot at the fact that in God's eyes no matter what's going on in our lives, He wants us to have more than enough victory in our lives to share around.

You can pick up again on Romans chapter 8, verses 35-39. 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 things present, 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."*

And notice that conquering is not necessarily about changing the negative circumstances. We've seen on the programme today the Apostle Paul had more than his fair share of negative circumstances. In fact, Paul doesn't talk about changing circumstances – conquering for him, is having faith in this

amazing God, knowing that whatever happens; whatever the world throws at us; whatever the devil throws at us, at the end of the day, his reward is in God; his reward is in heaven.

Most of what we have talked about on the programme over these last few weeks has been about the rewards we receive here on earth and we take courage and put our trust in God. Let me say those rewards are numerous; they are about having peace and joy and confidence amidst the worst of the worst that can ever happen to us. They are about walking quietly and confidently through every wilderness and every trial and every temptation. They are about God blessing us in new ways and abundant ways when we've lost someone we love or lost something we treasure.

When we lay a hold of the truth that we are meant to victory here on earth, then we are more than conquerors here on earth. The rewards are indeed abundant, but whatever reward we may have here on earth in this life, it is nothing ... nothing compared to the rewards that we will have; the prize that we will win for all eternity, if we just keep trusting in Jesus.

Here's why! This passage comes from the New Testament; from the Book of Hebrews – it's called that because it was written to the Hebrew community in the first century AD. Have a listen to what the writer says – he's talking about the life to come. This comes from Hebrews chapter 10, beginning at verse 31:

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward. For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay; but my righteous one will live by faith".

The writer here is writing to people who have been persecuted; people who have been persecuted and abused for their faith. People who had their possessions plundered because they were Christians. Real stuff, yet he talks about the fact that they accepted all of these things cheerfully. That's the sort of topsy turvy victory that God talks about here on earth, because they knew that they themselves possessed something much better and more lasting.

You know what? Truly, that's what victory looks like in my life. Things come and go. Once upon a time I was a consultant in the I.T. industry and earned much more money than I am earning now. I could buy whatever I wanted, pretty much. Today I am a minister of the Gospel – Umm – I don't have quite the same buying power with my salary. But truly, it is no loss at all. I'm much happier - I'm much more fulfilled in what I'm doing now; in what I have now which is a dynamic, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ - than I ever could have been back then, earning all that I earned.

There's simply no comparison! And it's not just that I have it now – that's a shadow of what's to come. Let me tell you, one day you and I will stand before God and be judged and as the writer of Hebrews said there, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*" But...."*The righteous shall live by faith.*" What that means is that when we stand before God; before the judgement seat of God, on that great and terrible day, well, I am simply going to plead this: 'Lord God, I have sinned against You. I did rebel against You – I deserve eternal separation from You – that thing that You call hell but when Jesus came to me and spoke to me and called me, I put my trust in Him.'

I believe that I have life eternal through faith in Him and my reward will be in heaven. It doesn't matter what trials I've gone through; it doesn't matter that I've made some blunders along the way, the great reward is the eternal reward; being with Jesus for all eternity, to serve Him and to worship Him and to delight in Him.

That's the reward, my friend, and it's an eternal reward. Listen to Revelations chapter 21 – the second last chapter in the Bible:

*"The home of God will be among mortals.
He will dwell with us as our God.
We will be his peoples and God himself will be with us;
he will wipe every tear from our eyes.
Death will be no more:
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for those first things have passed away."*

Sometimes we don't get all the rewards here on earth that, somehow, we think we are entitled to. Sometimes we don't get to see the fruit of the things that we have laboured for in God's name. Sometimes things aren't completely resolved; aren't completely healed; aren't completely set right on this earth in our lifetime, but this one thing ... this one thing I know, that no matter what happens here, if we persevere and keep believing in Jesus, our reward in heaven will indeed be great.

Nothing can separate us from His love. We are more than conquerors through Him who loves us.