

Christianityworks
More than Conquerors
061-1
There's A Battle Going On

There's a war going on in the spiritual dimension which is as real and as powerful as anything we can see or touch or smell or taste or feel, here in the physical dimension.

Winner or Loser?

Let me begin today by asking you a question. When you look in the mirror, what do you see - a winner or a loser? Or maybe someone who's neither, in that grey mass in the middle there, with most other people - neither winning or losing; neither succeeding at life or failing? Are you someone who has been conquered by the circumstances of your life or are you someone who's turned the tables and rather than being conquered by them, you have in fact conquered those circumstances?

Interesting question! Because the way we see ourselves has a powerful impact on the life that we are going to live. The athlete who settles down in the starting blocks of a race, waiting for the starter's gun to fire, let me ask you, if that athlete, in his heart of hearts, see himself as a loser, do you think for one moment, he's going to win that race? Do you think for one moment, that he's going to throw his heart and every other part of himself into drawing ahead of the rest of the field and winning the prize? It's not likely!

So why do we imagine that our lives would be any different? Why do we imagine that if we see ourselves as being a failure, we would make a success out of our lives? Let me ask you again, when you look in the mirror, what do you see? I'm not sure if you ever thought much about that, but many a person is living their lives out as someone who's been defeated. And so many others hover in that grey no-man's-land between being conquered and having victory - never really living out their lives to the full.

I'm really excited today on the programme because we are kicking off a new four week series. It's called "More than Conquerors", because here's the thing: it doesn't matter what you or I see when we look in the mirror. What really matters is what God sees when you and I look in the mirror and what He sees when He looks at our reflection - is someone who's not a loser; someone who isn't in that large grey mass in the middle, who don't have a clue whether they're winners or losers - what He sees in us isn't even someone who's a conqueror. What God sees in you and in me is someone who's more that a conqueror!

How do I come to that conclusion? Well, the victory that God wants you and me to have in our lives is plastered all over the Old Testament and the New Testament. And when I opened my eyes to it, it truly blew me away. It's a whole different perspective, if you'll pardon the pun, God's perspective on who we are when we place our faith in Jesus Christ and what life He wants us to have; a life of victory; a life where circumstances don't conquer us but where we conquer them.

See, being more than a conqueror isn't just about not being defeated, it's about living life out so fully, so completely in the victory that Jesus Christ purchased for you and me on the cross, that His glory and His power and His love and His grace overflow out of our lives into the lives of other people. See, a conqueror sits back and surveys the battlefield and gloats in his or her victory, but someone who's more than a conqueror, takes that victory and shares it round.

My friend, listen to me. God wants for you and for me to be more than a conqueror. What I don't mean by this is that we set some selfish agenda for ourselves and then we trample all over all and sundry to get where we want to go. What I don't mean is that what we are meant to have is lots of money, live in a big house and be wealthy. There are plenty of people who will tell you that, and I'm not one of them. You want to hear that sort of thing - go listen to them!

What I mean is that come what may; whatever life hurls at us; whatever trials and wildernesses we have to walk through, that there will be something inside us - a joy, a quiet assurance, a peace; a peace that doesn't make sense, that's what I mean: joy, peace, quiet assurance that our King, God Himself, is still on the throne, that our Redeemer lives, that come what may, one day, you and I will be with Him in all His glory - come what may.

See this idea of being more than a conqueror; it's not my idea, it comes from God's Word - specifically the Apostle Paul. Now Paul poured his life out to tell people about Jesus, and yet, he faced the most awful trials. Have a listen - he was writing to the church in Corinth and he is sharing some of the things that he and his helpers had been through. He says, 'look, we've been through great afflictions and hardships and calamities and beatings and imprisonments and riots and labours and sleepless nights and hunger and yet, we've survived.' This comes from Second Corinthians chapter 6, verses 5 to 10. He says:

"We are treated as imposters and yet are true; as unknown and yet are well known; as dying and see - we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

See where he's going with this? 'The circumstances, buddy, are not going to get the better of me,' - that's what Paul's saying. Paul's had a tough gig out there, living his life for Jesus. In Second Corinthians chapter 4, verses 8 to 10 - he says:

"We are inflicted 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 made visible in our bodies."

And when he's writing to the Roman church, he picks up on this reality in his life again. And listen to the words of confidence and assurance in the face of the toughest of circumstances. Romans chapter 8, verses 35 to 39. He says:

"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 our Lord."

I don't know about you, but Paul has something here that I want. My point today is this: let me come back to it – when you look in the mirror, what do you see – a winner or a loser? Because there's nothing about living our lives as losers in the Bible; there's nothing in God's will that wants us wallowing around in self-pity or fear or grief all our lives. He promises us that we will have pressures; that we will travel through persecutions and trials and losses and all of those things, but in those things, His will is for us not to be defeated. Not just for us to have victory but for us to have the sort of victory where we have more than enough to share around with others in need; the sort of victory where we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us.

The question is are we ready for that sort of life? Are we ready to be more than conquerors? Well, are we?

Life in a War Zone

If you've seen that movie "Forest Gump", you'll know that great line from the movie where Forest says, 'My Momma says, "Life is like a box of chocolates – you never know what you're gonna get." And it's true! Sometimes our lives feel like a war zone; like everything's going wrong. It's tough when someone you love is really sick, or when you lose someone who you love; or when we're sick; it's tough when there's not enough money to put food on the table; it's tough when people lose their homes and their livelihoods; it's tough when we set out to do the right thing, to live our lives for God, to honour Him and yet people misunderstand us – they turn against us... you get the drift!

And you know something? Even sometimes when it feels as though life is going along pretty well, there's still a war raging. We get lulled into this false sense of security and we start to drift along in comfort, but get this – this is the reality: life is a war zone, 24 x 7; we are living on a battlefield because our enemy the devil is roaming around like a lion, looking for someone to devour.

Now I'm blessed – I live in a safe country; a safe part of the world, by any standard. The city where I live is affluent. Yeah, there are some bad things that happen but by and large it's safe, it's free, there's enough to go around and so in my neck of the woods it's so easy to be lulled into a false sense of security. This idea that, ah, it's all ok, but you see, tomorrow I could be diagnosed with cancer; tomorrow I could find myself in some sort of trouble. Listen to me – that's life and I know, doing what I do, that my enemy the devil, is roaming around looking for someone to devour. Me!

The Apostle Paul wanted you and me to understand that we live in a battlefield; in a war zone. Have a listen: Ephesians chapter 6, beginning at verse 10. He says:

"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 flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the 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."

And see then, just to make the point, he talks about the armour of God, using the picture; the metaphor of the armour worn by the Roman soldier of the day. He says:

"Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints."

See, Paul's saying here to his friends in Ephesus and God's saying here to you and me through this letter in the New Testament, that we need to live our lives on a war footing. We are in a battle and you know something, it's not just the circumstances of life on their own, as if those some days aren't bad enough, but the devil is a reality – there's a war going on in the spiritual dimension, which is as real and as powerful as anything we can see or touch or smell or taste or feel, here in the physical dimension.

Listen to it again – Ephesians chapter 6, verse 12:

"Our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

But the point of this battle that we live in is that we are meant to have victory. We already have victory if we put our faith in Jesus Christ and now God... God wants us to live that victory out in reality. Can I tell you something? We all have days when we feel like we are defeated – I do, you do. And so often they sneak in under your guard after some great victory. You know, something goes really well and you think, 'God, You are so good, thank You for that,' and the very next day, you feel so low and you wonder, 'What's it all about and why am I living my life anyway?'

The tragedy is - many people live their whole lives like that. Some people walk around like zombies; the living dead - physically they're alive but spiritually and emotionally they are dead inside. There's a reason for that: because we live on a spiritual battlefield that is so real and so powerful that, that through Paul, God is telling us that actually, that's what it's all about – that's where the action really is and we ignore that at our peril.

But even when we feel defeated, even when victory is the furthest thing from our minds, God wants us to know that victory is already ours; that we don't have to live our lives in defeat and misery and self pity – God's perspective is so different to ours. Let me share with you what the Apostle John has to say on this whole victory thing - it's a powerful passage. I believe it's something God wants to write on your heart today. It comes from 1 John chapter 5, verses 1 to 5:

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

In other words, it doesn't matter what the world wants to throw at you and me. If that's all we have, then you know something? It doesn't seem that much in the face of cancer or loss or grief or temptation or whatever else may befall us on this battlefield called 'life' but it turns out that in God's eyes, it's everything.

The Roaring Lion

In my younger years, I spent ten years in the Australian Army – four years in the officer training academy and then six years as a junior officer. One of the things that really struck me about the way the Army trained was not only that it trained specifically for war, I mean, that's obvious for an army, but in all of that training we trained against a notional enemy. Funny thing that! They had full blown manuals – hundreds of pages – describing the capabilities and tactics of this notional enemy. Whenever we went out on an exercise, they would have an enemy that we fought against who behaved exactly like the enemy described in those manuals.

And when you think about it, that makes sense. To prepare a soldier and a platoon and a battalion and a brigade for battle, you need to train them to engage with, fight with and defeat the enemy. And that intensive training made our Army one of the finest fighting forces in the world. I can't image what a sloppy outfit we'd have been if we hadn't got a handle on who the enemy is and what he's like and how he behaved and how to defeat him. In fact, when you sit back and think about it, as a citizen of any country, wouldn't that be exactly what you would expect your Army to be able to do, in order to defend us and protect us? To defeat the enemy.

So far today on the programme we've been talking around a theme, using the words of the Apostle Paul to describe it - that we are more than conquerors. And as well as just the circumstances of our lives, there's something else that can rob us of victory that Jesus has planned here for us on earth – or should I say 'someone else'? C.S. Lewis, that great children's author who wrote "Narnia", was also a great theologian. He once had this to say about our spiritual enemy, the devil. He said, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils: one is to disbelieve in their existence, the other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail the materialist or the magician with the same delight."

In other words, ignore the fact that the devil is real and alive and has an impact on us, is as dangerous as partnering with him in his evil plans and desires. So easy for us to live our lives with our eyes closed, pretending that there isn't a spiritual dimension; pretending that there isn't a battle going on for our souls in the heavenly places.

As we saw earlier, God's Word clearly... clearly tells us that there is in fact, such a battle raging. Ephesians chapter 6, verse 12:

"Our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

Why am I bringing this up again? Well, here it is: because we have victory over the devil. Jesus said that this thief, the devil, comes only to steal, kill and destroy, to rob us of life but that He, Jesus, came so that we could have live in all of its abundance. There's a clear choice there – which one do you want? We are going to spend our whole lives being plundered by the devil or have the victory over him that Jesus came to give us.

Well? But like any army, we have to understand our enemy and learn to fight against him and for us it's much easier because Jesus has already defeated him through His death and His resurrection. Colossians chapter 2, verse 15 says that Jesus disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it. The battle's been won – we have victory! We are more than conquerors and to live that out, two things have to happen – just two.

The first one is we need to be alert; we need to be aware and have our eyes open to the reality that the enemy, the devil, wants to bring us down. First Peter chapter 5, verse 8:

"Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour."

Just like any army, get a grip on the enemy, be prepared, be alert, understand the reality.

And the second... the second is to train against him, so that we actually live out that victory. James chapter 4, verse 7:

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

See, some people try and take the devil on, head on; to fight him at his own game, but he's been at this game much longer than you and I have. He has strengths and powers that we ourselves can't match. And the answer is not – let me say that again – 'not' in fighting him.

The answer, instead, is living in God's camp; the answer is in having an intimate, close relationship with Jesus and just day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, living out the love we have for Him and the tremendous love He has for us. That's what it means to submit ourselves to God. It's a positive act, whereas trying to grapple with the enemy is a negative one. And here's what happens when we do that: when we submit ourselves to God and the devil comes along, we just say, 'No thanks', we resist him. And there... there is the victory!

First, submit yourselves to God then, resist the devil and he will flee from you. This is not rocket science! The enemy is a reality – he's here, prowling around looking for someone to devour, you and me, but we already have victory over him; he has already been defeated. His bravado and his powers are a sham; they were disarmed at the cross; made a spectacle of – Jesus won!

That's why we have victory here and now. One of the most encouraging things that Jesus ever said to His disciples, just before the authorities arrested Him and took Him away to be crucified, this miracle-working Jesus – the disciples lived with Him for three and a half years. They put all their hope and faith in Him and saw the amazing things that He did. They heard the amazing things that He said and He's about to be snatched from them, nailed to a cross and He says to them – John 16, verse 33:

"I have said all these things to you, so that in me you may have peace. For in this world, you will face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!"

My friend, Jesus has won and when we put our faith in this Jesus, we have that same victory; the very same victory that Jesus won for us over sin and death on the cross and through the empty tomb.

That victory, you and I have, here and now. We are more than conquerors.