

STRENGTH FOR THE STRESSES

“How Strength is Made Perfect in Weakness”

Study Number Nine – “Motivated for Service” – 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

When we looked at Paul’s concept of the ministry he said each of us are gifted with spiritual gifts to function in His body. And it is our responsibility, in functioning in that body, to discover our spiritual gift and then begin to exercise that spiritual gift to the edification of everyone else.

Now this is a total departure from the common, ordinary concept of the ministry. We’ve got the idea somehow that we hire someone who is extremely gifted and he carries on the ministry and we sort of support the troops by being there and being involved.

It’s wonderful for Christians who begin to discover that God has gifted them. They too have a ministry. They too have a function. They too can share and make a contribution for the glory of God.

Some individuals might say, “Wait a minute, I was standing behind the door when the Lord passed out the gifts and I didn’t get one. I don’t know what my gift is.”

Everyone is a tremendous candidate for the Lord's ministry because He's just waiting to find an available instrument that can't do anything so He can do something through it.

John Hunter in his book *Living the Christ-Filled Life* said:

(Living the Christ-Filled Life by John Hunter)

So much so many people play at being Christians. They dress up the part, learning the words, correcting their exits and entrances, so that as they strut on the world's stage they play their part very well. They become good actors. But when the costliness of the Christian life is considered, they shrink from the consequences.

Someone has said that concerning the Christian life, the entrance charge is nothing, but the annual subscription is everything.

(source unknown)

As we look at these verses in 2 Corinthians, our prayer is that somehow the Lord will really touch each life. First of all, with why everyone should be motivated to do what the Lord wants them to do, and then the method of doing what the Lord wants. The message which we have is a part of our ministry for the cause of Christ.

Let's now look at the verses we're going to study in 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 2:14-17

But thanks be to God, who in Christ is always leading us in triumph and who is making known through us the fragrance of the knowledge of Himself in every place. Because we are the fragrance of Christ for God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. And who is qualified for these things? For we are not as the many who are peddling the word of God but as out of pure motives but as from God we are speaking in the sight of God in Christ.

In reading about the Corinthian assembly, we know that this body of believers had a lot of problems.

Paul now comes back and writes this second epistle. He is still deeply concerned about some of these matters that he dealt with in the first letter that still seemingly have not been solved. And so he follows up this second letter dealing with related issues.

Beginning here at 2 Corinthians 2:14, clear on through to 2 Corinthians 6:10 Paul digresses to speak about the glory of the ministry that ought to be ours as Christians.

These four verses will serve as the basis for the meditation during these messages.

As a Christian, should we be motivated to really be available to serve the Lord?

The problem in Thessalonica was a problem of Christians who they came to know Christ and they thought that was all there was to it and they began to sit down and wait for the Lord to come, and there was no motivation.

What do we say to a person who is a Christian and they're content with their spiritual level? And they've sort of just gone dead in the water? They really are not super excited about what today brings. They're not thrilled about the possibilities of tomorrow and the contribution that tomorrow is going to make to their spiritual lives if the Lord doesn't choose to come

People who are content and settled and complacent are not following the biblical concept of New Testament Christianity.

If someone is happy and content, and if they're complacent and comfortable, and they've just lived another day and just did the same old deal and that's been the history of today, and that's been the history of last week, they are not living the Christian life.

The Christian life is described by the apostle Paul as every day when the starting gun goes off, we're in the blocks and ready to go. We're running a new race. We've got a new opportunity.

We're going to forget those things which are behind and we're press toward those things which are in front. (see Philippians 3:13, 14)

We're going to treat our body roughly, making it serve me, lest when I preach to others I'm going to be disqualified. (see 1 Corinthians 9:27)

I'm going to lay aside every sin and the weight which does so easily beset me and I'm going to run with patience the race that's set before me. (see Hebrews 12:1)

Jesus said, "I've got to work the works of him who sent me while it is day, for the night is coming when no man can work." (ref. John 9:4)

For every one of us, we have an appointment that is closer than this morning. And that appointment is either physical death or the rapture of the church.

Both of those are getting closer. Either one is going to interrupt our service or the other. And we're going to be held accountable for every single day we live.

The motivation that ought to be ours as a Christian is described in these verses that we're going to look at here. Let's begin with verse 14.

v. 14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ is always leading us in triumph and who is making known through us the fragrance of the knowledge of Himself in every place.

"But thanks be to God, who in Christ is always leading us in

triumph”

Now why does he speak this particular verse?

In the previous verses to this one, he shared the fact that he’s deeply burdened over the reception of the first letter that he wrote to the Corinthians. And especially what had been done with regard to this case of immorality among the congregation.

He left an open door of ministry in Troas to go toward Macedonia. He’s hoping that on the way he might meet Titus and that Titus could give him a report on how things are going in Corinth.

It’s just like things get so dark before the sun begins to shine and it seems like everything’s just going against us. And then all of a sudden, BOOM! the Lord just opens up fantastic things for us.

Ever had that experience in life? When it just seems like the bottom’s just dropping out and everything’s hopeless and then all of a sudden, the Lord opens up something beautiful and fantastic?

We’ve all had those experiences. This is what the apostle Paul had. He’d written this letter, he loved these people, he wept over them, he was concerned for them. They were carnal, living in the flesh, childish. Deeply burdened by all the harassment and the problems and the fact that they couldn’t

care less about spiritual things. They were going along with the immorality of the day and everything else and he'd done all this.

He just had the feeling that Corinth was going to be the one exception where the Lord wasn't going to get the victory. Ever feel like that? Just maybe because of the impossible circumstances in life, we're going to be the first child of God that's been forsaken. The first candidate of somebody who's really gotten blown out of the tub. We're the exception. And all of a sudden BOOM! the Lord moves in and makes us realize how ridiculous those thoughts even were in the first place.

Well that's exactly how Paul felt. And then he gets this report from Titus. He's just super excited because the Lord's been faithful again.

He had the same experience in Thessalonica. Here he got cut off from these Christians and he had to head toward the south in his ministry. His ministry had been interrupted and he was so shaken up and concerned for these Thessalonian Christians who were suffering.

He finally gets down to Athens. He went to Berea and had a good ministry there and moved on into Athens. He says, "I just cannot stand it any longer. I've got to know what's going on with those Thessalonian saints."

He says, "Timothy, get on your horse and get up there. Let's find out what's going on. I can't go but you can. Now get up

there and find out.”

Of course he’s walking around wringing his hands and thinking the worst while he’s all alone there in Athens. Plenty of time to be anxious and concerned for them, and then finally Timothy comes trucking in and he says, “Man those saints up there are more turned on than when we were there. There are more saints than there were when we were there. The persecution has caused more to come to Christ. Fabulous things are happening.” He writes this beautiful letter of 1 Thessalonians just to let them know how great it is to see that God’s been faithful and there’s been a victory.

Sometimes in our lives as Christians we go through these deep doldrums when it seems like everything is going to fall apart and we might as well be practical atheists. As far as we’re concerned it just seems like everything’s all over.

Low and behold the Lord blows in with some fabulous new opportunity or ramification we’ve never seen before. Opens some brand-new doors that are just beautiful.

We miss so much when we fail to wait and to trust God. Let Him lead, let Him open up doors and show us what He can do to lead in triumph.

The whole tenor of the passage changes. It is, “Thanks be to God, who in Christ is always leading us in triumph.”

This is His whole motivation for service. We should each take

that phrase and pin it on our bathroom mirror. So when things fall apart, when we read “Thanks be to God, who in Christ is always leading us in triumph,” we will be amazed at the tremendous surge of difference in attitude. We will realize that we’re just going through a storm but it’s going to be pretty fabulous on the other side because the Lord is going to win.

The Lord allows difficult times so that He can show us how He can get the victory. And we shouldn’t look on those difficult times as intruders. We shouldn’t look on those difficult times with anxiety that everything’s not going to come out alright, because that would be a failure to trust Him.

We shouldn’t look at those difficult times and think, “I wonder if the Lord’s going to come through on this occasion?”

Our human reaction is just exactly like the disciples in the boat, right? “There you are asleep Lord, not doing a pickin’ thing and the water’s coming in and we’re drowning.” And then in just that moment, all He’s got to do is say, “Peace be still,” and man the whole scene is changed.

Here the Lord wants, through the apostle, to show us the fact that He hasn’t lost one yet.

None of His children have ever begged bread. He’s always been adequate to meet every need. And what the apostle says is that “Christ is always leading in triumph.”

The picture that the apostle has in his mind here is a picture of a Roman triumph.

When a Roman general was victorious and he was coming back to the city of Rome, the Senate voted for a parade. And this was really a big deal. And this parade would be led by this victorious Roman general. And his chariot would have a whole bunch of people chained to the front of it and a whole bunch of people chained to the back of it.

Now, all of them were carrying little vials of incense as they were walking in the parade. Shattered spears and bloody swords and broken shields all manifested the fact that there had been a bloody conflict, but Rome again had been the victor.

Now all the people in the front their fragrance of perfume was a fragrance of life unto life, because when the parade was over, they were going to be released.

But all these people chained to the chariot dragging behind, theirs was a fragrance of death unto death because they were all going to be fed to the lions when they got to the end of the parade. That's the picture he has in his mind as he writes these verses.

First of all, notice:

1. Victory is in CHRIST.

Notice the first phrase:

“But thanks be to God, who in Christ...”

Our victory is in the PERSON of the Lord Jesus.

Our victory is in a PERSON, not a place.

Our victory is in a PERSON, not in a circumstance.

Our victory is in a PERSON, not in us as individuals.

Now here are some verses along this line:

1 Corinthians 15:57

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:37

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him, the Lord Jesus Christ, that loved us.

Romans 8:31

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

Our victory is in Christ. And if we're His child, we can plan on

the fact that because we're His child we are on victory ground.

The apostle Paul says we are "in Christ Jesus." That's our sphere and our dwelling place, if we're a part of His family and we've experienced the new birth. We are "in Christ."

There is a victory in Jesus Christ. And if we're a Christian, we're in Him, we are on victory ground.

2. Victory is ASSURED.

Look at the promise of God. Put the next phrase to it:

"But thanks be to God, who in Christ is always..."

Let's stop there for a minute.

What does the word "always" mean?

"I love you always and forever." He's saying, "I'll always love you. I'll always be there."

When we use the word "always" we say that's forever.

"thanks be to God, who in Christ is always..."

When we are doing the Lord's will, we're playing for a winning team. The Lord never loses.

A person has a tough time losing when they know the plays of

the opponents before they even line up. The Lord's team never loses. We have to play some pretty rough ballgames and we get clobbered, but He's always going to win because the battle is the Lord's.

The Old Testament has an amazing number of serious confrontations that the children of Israel have with their enemies. And there's only one time that they're defeated. And that is when there is some sin or disobedience in the camp, right?

As we look at those battles, the times when they're defeated is when they presume to go up against the Lord and they weren't sent. They were disobedient.

Or when Achan stole something and put it in the floor of the tent, there was sin and disobedience. So at Ai they got wiped out.

And when the Philistines were triumphant all over the place, and whipping them and stealing the Ark, what was the deal? They were disobedient. They were not living on victory ground.

Now, "in Christ," our victory is assured when we are submissive and obedient to God's plan for our life. And if we're getting nailed for a loss in our Christian life, and we're having a rough time and we feel like we're fighting a losing battle, perhaps we better stop and ask the Lord to show us the area where we're bucking His authority or show us the sin in our

life that is causing this difficulty to take place. Because it is the Lord's intention that when a child of God is walking in His will, he's going to be victorious.

Now that doesn't mean we're going to be happy and comfortable. Suffering is part of that plan to conform us to the image of His Son.

God is sovereign. He's all powerful and all-knowing and He cares for His own.

Now here's what the apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:

2 Corinthians 4:8, 9

We are handicapped on all sides, but we are never frustrated; we are puzzled, but never in despair. We are persecuted, but we never have to stand it alone; we may be knocked down but we're never knocked out.

2 Corinthians 2:4, 11

For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears, that no advantage may be gained over us by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

We can count on the fact that victory is in Christ and victory is assured.

We might say, "Well, it sure does look like I'm losing right

now.” The battle isn’t over yet.

Joshua 1:9

Have not I commanded thee be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee wherever so thou goest.

2 Kings 6:15-17

And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, a host compassed the city, both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master what shall we do? And he answered, Fear not; for they that are with us are more than they that are with them. And Elisha prayed and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

2 Chronicles 32:7, 8

Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the King of Assyria, nor for all the multitude of the host with them; for there are more with us than with them. With him is an arm of the flesh, but with us is the Lord, our God, to help us and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the word of Hezekiah, king of Judea.

1. Victory is in Christ

2. Victory is Assured—because the Lord always wins.

Now take a picture, for instance, of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Just prior to His death on the cross, Christ said, “Tetelestai, it is finished.”

That is the picture of VICTORY. That is the cry of an Olympic runner who has just broken the tape and won first place.

It’s hard to believe that the cross of Jesus Christ, which seems to the eyes of the world as the greatest moment of defeat could be victory. But we know that it was part of the plan of God, and that was victory because our redemption was bought at that particular point. When He was made sin for us upon the cross, it made possible a holy and just God to be the justifier of a sinner, because the price of our sin was paid.

We can see that from this side of Calvary. And not only that, the cross was just one victory to the next great victory, which was the resurrection. Because He lives, we too shall live.

We shouldn’t make the mistake of counting our victories by the fact that everything’s going super great for us. Just realize and trust this verse that “thanks be to God, who...always” leads in triumph. He never loses. And although it’s going rough right now, the Lord’s going to get the victory if we’re submissive and obedient to His perfect will and He’s going to

lead us in ultimate victory.

Finally notice:

3. Victory is led by Jesus Christ

It's IN CHRIST, it's ASSURED, and it's LED by Him.

“thanks be to God, who in Christ is always leading us in triumph”

Satan in the flesh—leads us to defeat.

Christ is leading us to triumph.

When He ascended into heaven, Ephesians says, “He led captivity captive.” (see Ephesians 4:8) He triumphed over Satan and all of his forces.

Colossians 2:15

And having spoiled all principalities and powers he made a show of them openly triumphing over them in it.

We can see triumph all the way through the plan of God for the person of Jesus Christ.

John 1 says: “in creation that all things were made by him and for him and without him was not anything made that was made.” (see John 1:3)

When we move down to the cross of Calvary we hear Him say, “It is finished. Tetelestai.” He’s accomplished His task.

Soon we’re going to hear that fabulous triumph call of God and the Lord’s going to descend from heaven with a shout, and there’s victory again. We’re all going to be with Him.

We’re going to sing the psalm of victory for the King of kings and Lord of lords.

“thanks be unto God, who...is always leading us in triumph”

Thanks be to God, who in His victory over us, gives us the victory.

When we’re a chained captive to the Son of God, at that point we become victorious.

It’s a strange paradox of the Christian life. There is triumph through captivity. There’s liberty in bondage. There is freedom through slavery.

The picture described here is a victory which presumes that a battle has taken place.

“thanks be unto God, who...always leads us in triumph”—here He goes! And we are chained captives to the wheels of His chariot. And yet the victory comes because He’s leading us in victory and in triumph.

We see a progression in the lives of individuals, a process which leads a man to the end of himself. And at that point God gets the victory and he meets the Lord Jesus.

“thanks be unto God, who...always leads us in triumph”

When He has victory over us, then He's ready to lead us in victory.

Now that happens to a person when they come to the Lord Jesus. But the longer we live and the more we experience the Christian life, we see Him gaining a progressive victory over us. And the more victory He gains over us, the more victory we share in prosperity and blessing from His hand.

We see this in the life of Jacob in Genesis 32. That wily retch, scheming egotistical character, wheedling his way through the pages of the Old Testament. Finally there comes the time of tremendous triumph when he wrestled with the Lord all night. God drastically changed that man and made him a blessing. Gave him a fabulous blessing, because God finally got the victory over him as an individual.

It is the Lord's deep desire that we learn what it is to be dependent upon Him. The more we learn to be dependent upon Him and submissive and obedient to His authority and will in our lives, that's Him getting the victory over us.

After James describes the person who is a Christian, he says,

“Go too now you who will say today and tomorrow we’ll go to such and such a city and we’ll do business and we’ll make money. Then we’ll get transferred by the company to another city and we’ll do the same thing.” (see James 4:13)

He said, “Rather you should be saying, if the Lord wills, because your life is like a vapor that appears for a little time and then it passes away.” (see James 4:15)

If we’re really a Christian, we’re learning to be increasingly submissive to His plan for our life. And the more He gets the victory in these areas, the more He’s able to bless us as individuals.

But that last verse in James 4 is the hook, “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not to him it is sin.” (see James 4:17)

Whenever there’s a “therefore” we know what it’s there for. It points back to just what He said. And when we know what to do, and that is to be submissive and obedient to Him, and we don’t do it—that is sin.

If we fail to appropriate the victory that is ours in Jesus Christ, thank Him for what He’s going to do, and allow Him to have the victory over us as an individual so that He can increasingly bless and prosper us—for us to fail to implement that is going to be sin in our life, according to what James is saying.

The principle is:

Before we triumph He must triumph over us!

Paul was a trophy of Christ's victory, isn't he? Here he is on the road of Damascus, going to kill every Christian he can find. The Lord gets the victory there.

And then in Philippians 3 we see the Lord getting fabulous victory when he says, "I count everything but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ." (see Philippians 3:8)

He chunked the whole deal, went totally submissive to the Lord.

What about Peter? Here he comes along, going through life with the Lord Jesus, handling everything beautifully. And then he blows it at the denial.

And finally, the victory on the shores of Galilee when he says, "I love you more than these." (see John 21:15)

At that point the Lord, with the victory over Peter, is ready to give him the victory in the book of Acts.

And before we can experience triumph, He must triumph over us. Ours is broken submission. His is the victory and the blessing.

That's what the Lord wants to do in our lives, but why isn't it

true? There are THREE REASONS and they're the DIRTY D's that keep us from being triumphant in Christ.

1. DECEPTION

Like Ananias and Sapphira—playing games with God. Keeping back part of it for themselves.

2. DESIRE

Desires for material things. That clobbered Demas, it clobbered David with his moral desires, and it clobbered the rich young ruler.

3. DISOBEDIENCE

Remember Saul in 1 Samuel 15? Samuel says, “You go in there and wipe out those Amalekites. Every animal, everything that happens, you clean that place out.”

When Samuel comes down to check on his obedience to the deal, what's the first thing Samuel hears? He hears a cow mooing, hears a sheep bah. Coming in there, what's the first thing Saul says? “Man, we did everything the Lord told us to do! We wiped them all out! We just saved the king alive!”

“What about these animals?”

“Well, those animals, yeah, we saved those for the Lord. They're the best ones. We're going to sacrifice them to Him.

Praise the Lord! We've got something we're going to give to the Lord here!"

How many times are our lives filled with well-intentioned disobediences? Things which we think we're justified in doing, but it's a disobedience to the Lord's will and His way and His word? And these keep us from experiencing being led in triumph.

The deception, the desire, and disobedience.

Dr. Edman, as he was writing on 2 Corinthians 2:14 said:

I came to the second paragraph, beginning at verse 14 and I read, "Now thanks be unto God who always leads us in triumph in Christ." The words staggered me: "always leads us in triumph." I read them over slowly several times. Thoughtfully a word at a time.

Then I turned to another translation. It read, "Wherever I go, thank God He makes my life a constant pageant of triumph in Christ." The contrast between this verse and my life complete.

My way seemed impenetrably obscure. Possibly a door was closing before us. Physical strength was ebbing away so that life itself might soon be done. Yet to Paul, life was "a constant pageant of triumph in Christ."

My heart therefore went out in prayer: "Dear Lord, be pleased to make my life that constant pageant of triumph, always to be led in triumph in Thee!"

The answer to that prayer was startling. By the still small

voice of the Holy Spirit, there came the question, “Are you willing to go anywhere for Me?” Anywhere? Possibly, I thought, the Lord of the Harvest was asking me to relinquish the new little Bible school and go to some unreached area of Ecuador.

After a moment or two, I said slowly, “Yes, Lord, anywhere in Ecuador that You may say.”

“I did not say in Ecuador,” came the answer. “I said anywhere.”

Not necessarily in Ecuador? Possibly not in Latin America. Even possibly not on the mission field. Just anywhere at all?

The questions tumbled over themselves in my mind. For a long time I looked across the wide wastes of the Pacific, conscious that the Lord Himself stood by me, awaiting my answer. Then quietly, with utter sincerity came the choice: “Yes, Lord, anywhere Thou sayest, I will go. Only that my life may be a constant and always triumphant pageant of triumph in Thee.”

(source unknown)

Let's pray together.

Our heavenly Father, we thank You for Your precious word. Thank You for the fact that You long to triumph over us. And thank You that in Your triumph over us, You give us the victory. Thank You Lord that while we walk here in the victory which is ours in the Lord Jesus, we can be assured of the fact that when the going gets difficult, You are continuing to triumph in these difficult circumstances, and You are also

giving us grace adequate to meet every demand that comes our way. Lord, we pray that You'll encourage us with the fact that You long to have victory over us. Not only in coming to the end of our resources and receiving Jesus Christ, but in coming to the end of our natural resources and allowing the Spirit of God to have a full and complete, one hundred percent triumph over us in the spiritual area of our lives. In the Savior's name we do pray. Amen.

STRENGTH FOR THE STRESSES

“How Strength is Made Perfect in Weakness”

Study Number Nine – “Motivated for Service” – 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

Notes

v. 14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ is always leading us in triumph and who is making known through us the fragrance of the knowledge of Himself in every place.

v. 15 Because we are the fragrance of Christ for God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

v. 16 To the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. And who is qualified for these things?

v. 17 For we are not as the many who are peddling the Word of God but as out of pure motives, but as from God, we are speaking in the sight of God in Christ.

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

LESSON #1: Our victory is in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not in a place, not in a circumstance, and not in us as individuals.

LESSON #2: Victory is in Christ, it is assured, and it is led by Jesus Christ.

LESSON #3: In the Christian life there is triumph through captivity, liberty in bondage, and freedom through slavery.

LESSON #4: When He has victory over us, then He's ready to lead us in victory.

LESSON #5: Before we triumph, He must triumph over us.

LESSON #6: There are three reasons that keep us from being triumphant in Christ: (1) deception; (2) desire; and (3) disobedience.