

TRUE VICTORY

- A. Introduction: The Bible exhorts us not to be moved from our faith. Faith in God is more than believing in the existence and reality of God. Faith in God includes trusting God. Trust is assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something (*Webster's Dictionary*).
1. All sorts of things come at us in this fallen world that can undermine our trust in God (our assured reliance on His character, ability, strength, and truthfulness).
 - a. What we see and feel often makes it seem as though God has forgotten us or doesn't care about us. If we don't know how to deal with this contrary testimony from what we see and feel, it can shake our trust in God.
 - b. This lack of trust can influence our behavior and make it easier to disobey God. So, we're taking time to talk about how to become unmovable in the face of life's challenges.
 2. The apostle Paul is our example of a man who was unmoved by life's hardships (Acts 20:22-24). Last week we looked at the fact that he was determined to run his race and finish his course.
 - a. No matter what distractions came his way, Paul refused to be moved from this goal. And, at the end of his life, he was able to declare: I've fought a good fight, I've finished my course, I've kept the faith (II Tim 4:7). Paul stayed faithful to Christ. He won the victory.
 - b. One of the themes we see in the New Testament is that believers are conquerors. Believers are overcomers who are victorious. Rom 8:37; I Cor 15:57; I John 5:4,5; etc.
 1. We have a lot of wrong ideas about what it means to be victorious, in part because twentieth century principles of success and prosperity have been incorporated into many of the popular teachings in the church.
 2. Therefore, we mistakenly think that victory means no problems. Overcoming means being happy and carefree. And conquering means a quick end to any trouble that comes our way.
 - c. None of those things are Christian victory. For a Christian, victory is staying faithful to Jesus. Conquerors recognize the distractions that can take their focus off Jesus and aren't stopped by them. Overcomers run their race and finish their course.
 3. In this lesson, as part of our discussion on becoming unmovable, we're going to talk more about what true victory is and why we can be assured that true victory is ours.
- B. One of our key verses in this series has been I Cor 15:58. Paul wrote to believers that we are to be steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord.
1. Note that the verse begins with the word "therefore" which connects Paul's thought to what he just said: We can be unmovable because God has given us victory through Jesus Christ. v57
 - a. Paul had just finished a lengthy passage on resurrection of the dead. The church at Corinth had some misconceptions about resurrection of the dead and Paul wrote to correct them.
 - b. Before we make our point about the victory that Jesus has provided, we need to make a few brief comments about resurrection of the dead.
 1. All human beings have an inward and an outward part (II Cor 4:16). The outward part is the physical body. The inward part is the immaterial portion, made up of spirit (capable of direct communion with God) and soul (mental and emotional faculties).
 2. At death, the inward portion and outward portion separate. The body returns to dust and the inward portion passes into either Heaven or Hell.
 3. God did not create our bodies to die or us to be separated from our bodies. Both death and disembodiment occur because of Adam's sin. Gen 2:17; Rom 5:12
 - c. Resurrection of the dead is the reuniting of the inward and outward portions separated at death.
 1. It has been promised to men since the earliest days of earth's history. It's part of the salvation God has provided through Jesus.
 2. Job 19:25,26; Isa 26:19; Ezek 37:12; Dan 12:2), Hosea 13:14--I will deliver them from death

(Lamsa); I, death's mortal enemy, I, corruption's undoing (Knox).

2. Let's go back up to I Cor 15:54,55 to get the thought. It begins: When this corruptible and mortal shall have put on incorruption and immortality. That's resurrection of the dead. Our bodies will be raised from the grave and made immortal and incorruptible.
 - a. Paul wrote that when this happens, it will be fulfillment of a prophesy recorded by Isaiah: God will swallow up death in victory. Isa 25:8
 - b. Look at Isa 25:7. There is a covering or veil over the face of all men, but God will destroy it. Destroy (v7) and swallow up (v8) are the same Hebrew word. It means to swallow or engulf.
 1. In that time and culture, a covering was put over the face of those condemned to death. The whole human race is guilty of sin before a holy God and condemned to death.
 2. v7--On this mountain he (God) will remove the mourning veil covering all peoples, and the shroud enwrapping all nations; he will destroy Death forever. (Jerusalem)
3. All human beings are under the dominion of death because of Adam's sin. And, we have committed our own sin and become guilty before God, deserving of death. Jesus came to abolish (break the power, annul) death and bring eternal life to all who put faith in Him. II Tim 1:9,10
 - a. I Cor 15:56--The sting of death is sin. Sting (in the Greek) means a goad or a dagger. Death is present in creation only because of sin. Death has power because men are guilty of sin and under its dominion. No one escapes death. It's only a question of when and how we die.
 - b. At the Cross, Jesus paid for our sin so that we could be released from the guilt and penalty of sin which is death in all its forms (lessons for another day). Jesus came to deliver men from bondage to the fear of death. Heb 2:14,15
 1. When we put faith in Christ and His sacrifice, we are freed from the dominion of death. This means (among other things) we no longer need to fear it. We have victory over it. I Cor 15:7
 - A. When a Christian dies, he (the inward man) is temporarily separated from his body and goes to be with the Lord in Heaven.
 - B. At the resurrection of the death (which will occur in connection with the Second Coming of Jesus) he will be reunited with his body raised from the grave and made incorruptible and immortal (no longer subject to corruption and death).
 3. When our bodies are raised from the grave and made alive with eternal life (becoming incorruptible and immortal), death will be swallowed up by life, fulfilling Isaiah's prophesy.
 - c. The devil's biggest gun, our worst fear, the one irreversible condition common to all human beings has been defeated through the Cross and resurrection. Life's biggest threat is gone.
 1. Not only is there life after death, death has been reversed through the recovery and restoration of the body at the resurrection of the dead.
 2. We have victory over our biggest problem through the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul said, whatever you have to do to, stay faithful so that you don't miss out on death being swallowed up by life. I Cor 15:58
4. This is why Paul was unmoved even in the face of death. He knew that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. And he knew that separation from the body is a temporary condition that will be rectified through resurrection of the dead. Consider these statements Paul made.
 - a. Phil 1:20,21--While in prison facing possible execution, his concern was not: Get me out of here! His desire was that God be glorified in him, whether through his life or his death.
 - b. I Cor 15:29-32--He told the Corinthians: If the dead don't rise, why would I expose myself to such danger and daily face death through persecution, as I did when I was in Ephesus (II Cor 1:8).
 - c. II Cor 5:1-4--In the context of facing death by persecution, Paul wrote: For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that

what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. (ESV).

1. People misinterpret this passage to mean we get a different body in Heaven. But when we read everything Paul wrote about resurrection of the dead, it's clear that Paul meant that Jesus will change our body, not replace it with a new one. Phil 3:20,21; I Cor 15:51-53; etc.
2. Tent is a reference to his mortal, corruptible body. He knew that a heavenly body awaited him — not a different body, but his body restored to life and made immortal and incorruptible through resurrection of the dead.
3. Our immortal and incorruptible body is referred to as a heavenly body because it is part of the salvation reserved for us in Heaven, ready to be revealed at the return of Jesus to this world (I Pet 1:3-5), and because it is the power from Heaven that will raise and transform our bodies.

C. Rev 12:11 is a well known verse about Christians who are overcomers. We preach this to mean that Christians can overcome life's trials because of the blood and because of their testimony. Although there is truth to that idea, to fully appreciate what this verse says, we must read the entire verse in context.

1. This verse refers to those who were killed through persecutions inspired by Satan. Their overcoming is tied to their death and not to victory over their problems in this life. They overcame because they stayed faithful to Christ even in the face of death. That is the true victory.

a. In Rev 2:10 Jesus told believers to be faithful unto death (or run their race and finish their course).

And, He made eight specific promises in the Book of Revelation to those who overcome. All of them pertain, not to this life, but to the life to come. Consider two examples.

1. In Rev 2:11 Jesus said that overcomers will not be hurt by the second death. The second death is a name given to the fate of all who refuse Christ as Savior and Lord. They will be eternally separated from God who is Life (Rev 21:8; Rev 20:6; lessons for another day).

2. In Rev 21:7 Almighty God said: He who is victorious (or overcomes) shall inherit all these things, and I will be God to him and he shall be My son (Amp). "All these things", in context, is unending life with the Lord, in resurrected bodies, on this earth made new.

b. When Rev 12:11 is quoted, the last portion of the verse is often overlooked: They loved not their lives their lives unto the death.

1. Note this translation: Their victory was due to the Blood of the Lamb, and to the Message to which they bore their testimony (20th Cent), and not by loving their own lives: they were willing to die (Norlie).

2. This is exactly what Paul said in Acts 20:24 when he faced possible death: But even the sacrifice of my life I count as nothing (Weymouth) as long as I stay faithful to Christ, run my race, and finish my course.

3. Neither of these statements mean that these people didn't love their lives. Everyone wants to live. It means that they had the proper perspective. This life is not all there is. If we gain everything this world has to offer, but lose eternal life, it's all for naught. Matt 16:26

c. Death is to be feared if you are guilty of sin before a holy God. However, because of the blood of the Lamb which paid the price for our sin, death holds no fear for Christians. Through His blood, Jesus paid the price for our sins, freeing us from the dominion of death.

2. Col 1:20-22--Paul wrote that God the Father was pleased to make peace between Himself and sinful men through the Cross. He did this so that we could stand before Him "holy and without blemish and unchargeable before His searching and penetrating gaze" (v22, Wuest).

a. Note that, immediately following this statement, Paul wrote: v23--But you must continue in the faith, grounded and settled, and not be moved away from the hope of the gospel.

b. Paul spelled out clearly what he meant when he referred to the gospel in I Cor 15:1-4. He also reminded the Corinthians that they needed to keep in memory (hold fast and keep firmly) what he had preached to them. (Remember, Paul was directly taught by Jesus Himself. Gal 1:11,12)

1. This is the gospel (or good news) according to Paul (and Jesus): Jesus died for our sins, He

was buried and raised up again on the third day, all according to the scriptures.

2. Why is this good news? Because we are all guilty of sin before a holy God and deserving of eternal separation from Him. But, as was promised, Jesus died for our sins and then rose from the dead when the price was paid. His resurrection is proof that Divine Justice has been satisfied in regard to our sin. Rom 4:25; I Cor 15:17
3. When we bow our knee to Jesus as Savior and Lord, we are justified (acquitted, declared not guilty, all charges against us dropped) and we have peace with God. Rom 5:1
 - c. Col 1:5--Paul told the Colossians that through the good news (the gospel) they knew that they had a hope laid up for them in Heaven. That hope includes entry into Heaven when we leave our body at death, as well as the power of Heaven to raise our bodies from the grave and reunite us with them in connection with the Second Coming of Jesus. This is true victory.
3. The night before Jesus went to the Cross He told His followers: In the world you will have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration, but be of good cheer — take courage, be confident, certain, undaunted — for I have overcome the world. — I have deprived it of power to harm you, have conquered it for you (John 16:33, Amp). There is much in His statement that we aren't going to discuss now, but consider several thoughts.
 - a. Trials and troubles are part of life in a fallen, sin damaged world. However, we are only passing through this life (I Pet 2:11; 1:17). And, "this world in its present form is passing away" (I Cor 7:31, NIV). The glory of what is to come far outshines the challenges of this life (Rom 8:18).
 1. Jesus didn't die to give us a problem free life in this life or to make this life the highlight of our existence. He died to deliver us from this present evil world (Gal 1:4) and to insure that we have a life beyond this life (I Pet 3:18).
 2. By paying for our sin at the Cross and overcoming death through His resurrection victory, Jesus has made it possible for us to overcome this world as well. The worst thing this life can bring our way (death) cannot harm us if we stay faithful to Him. He has made us overcomers.
 - b. In Rom 8:35-39 Paul recounted the many challenges that he and Jesus' first followers faced. But his testimony was: IN (as opposed to out of) all these things we are conquerors (v 37). This word is a form of the word translated overcomer and victor in the verses we've referred to in this lesson.
 1. Paul knew that being a conqueror did not mean "no more problems". It meant staying faithful to Jesus no matter what came his way. This attitude made him a conqueror: If I stay faithful to Christ, I win. He has conquered death for me. That is ultimate victory, true victory.
 2. He knew that whatever life brought his way, it wasn't bigger than God and that God would preserve him unto His heavenly kingdom.

D. Conclusion: Challenges will come against us that can move us off our faith and trust in Jesus. Note that Jesus said: Be of good cheer or encourage yourself with the reasons you have hope. If you will adopt this practice, it will keep you from being moved. That's the testimony that overcomes. More next week!