

Victory through Captivity

2 Corinthians 1:23-2:17

The human race was never meant for defeat. God's intention in creating man was that man should be master over all creation. Genesis 1:26 says, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." Genesis 1:29 tells us that God's order to Adam was "...Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it..." But Satan entered the scene and deceived mankind and introduced defeat in all of mankind's efforts.

But Galatians 4:4-5 tells us that "But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." And remember our text says, "God...always causes us to triumph in Christ" **So everything is fine and we've got nothing to worry about...right?** Not exactly. There can be no winner without a fight. The fact that God always causes us to triumph should tell us that there is still a conflict raging. Satan is still in the business of deceiving lost souls and condemning them.

Whatever the experiences through which Paul has passed, somehow he would not let us think anything else than that from beginning to end it has been a glorious victory. Therefore, he says, "...thank be unto God, who always causes us to triumph in Christ..." This passage is made much more clear in the New Living Translation, "But thanks be to God, who made us his captives and leads us along in Christ's triumphal procession."

Paul is using a very graphic word picture that the people of his day would very easily understand, especially the Corinthian Christians. It is the picture of a victorious Roman general returning

from battle in his chariot, indeed with a whole procession of chariots and soldiers. A large crowd would gather to acclaim the victory in the battle, and the most significant thing everyone would notice would be the prisoners chained to the chariot wheels and dragged along the ground to their complete degradation. As the general rode by in his chariot, followed by soldiers in other chariots dragging more prisoners, bound and chained, the crowd would break out in a loud roar as they rejoiced in the victory.

Some of those slaves would be brought back to be “saved,” which meant that they would be allowed to live as servants. After this group would come the conquered enemies that were being brought back to face execution and death.

Both groups of slaves were given incense to carry into the city. As they walked along the odor of the incense would arise from their vessels and slowly drift over the crowd. The smell of victory for the Romans would bring a shout of triumph but it meant something far different for those who carried it. The first group was referred to as “them that carry the savor of life unto life,” even if it was as a slave. The second group was referred to as “them that carried the savor of death unto death.”

Such is Paul’s picture in these verses, “But thanks be to God, who made us his captives and leads us along in Christ’s triumphal procession. Now wherever we go he uses us to tell others about the Lord and to spread the Good News like a sweet perfume. Our lives are a fragrance presented by Christ to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those being saved and by those perishing. To those who are perishing we are a fearful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved we are a life-giving perfume. And who is adequate for such a task as this? You see, we are not like those hucksters—and there are many of them—who preach just to make money. We preach God’s message with sincerity and with Christ’s authority. And we know that the God who sent us is watching us.” When Jesus came to this world and gave his life

on the cross, as a sacrifice for you and me, it was the mightiest display of power of a Sovereign God that mankind would ever see.

At the Cross of Christ there is a great division that takes place in the sea of humanity that inhabits this world. There are only two categories of people who leave that cross.

One of those categories is the people who walk away with the sweet smelling savor of life unto life. Those who have chosen to surrender their lives unto the Lord Jesus Christ as slaves of love for as long as they live. They have been given a new lease on life in this present world, and they are bound for eternal life in Heaven. Aren't you glad to be a part of that crowd!

The other category is the people who walk away from the cross carrying their own brand of incense that marks them as slaves unto sin and identifies them as those who are going from death unto death. They are dead in trespass and sin, dead to the things of the Spirit of God, and destined for eternal death.

Paul, in his letter to the Corinthian church, gives forth a message of triumph and praise to those who have chosen to walk with the incense of life unto life!

In 2 Corinthians 2:14 he says, "Now thanks be unto God, who always causes us to triumph in Christ, and makes manifest the smell of his knowledge by us in every place."

Jesus is the one who has conquered us by his grace, and made us useful for the work of His kingdom. He uses each of us for the conversion of sinners. His sharp sword of the Word of the Lord has penetrated deep into our hearts and brought under subjection of his lordship. It is Jesus who has *chosen* us, it is Jesus who had *called* us, and it is Jesus that *empowers* us to work for him.

Jesus gives us power to triumph over men and devils, over the world, persecutions, and over every attack that Satan can muster. In the midst of Spiritual Warfare, we are given the power to overcome and lead many souls to the Lord. Everywhere we go, people hear about Jesus.

Paul continues in 2 Corinthians 2:15, "For we are unto God a sweet smell of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish."

As we walk through this life carrying our incense, the sweet odor of forgiveness, overcoming power, and eternal life goes forth to minister to those who pass by. Our job is to wave the incense. It is the job of the Holy Spirit to reach down into the hearts of everyone we see and to draw them in.

Some will accept what you have to offer but most won't! For those who are saved through your ministry, Jesus is truly a sweet savor. The taste of his freedom and his cleansing power is without equal. They are truly blessed and anointed with the incense of Heaven.

Some will not accept Christ but even so, the odor of the incense that you send forth to them in your time of witnessing is still the sweetest thing that will ever touch their lives. They may not accept it, they may not want it and they may even drive you away. That doesn't change the power of the message that you send. It's still the greatest message on earth and the only message that can save the eternal soul of man.

We are not called to force others to take what we have to offer. We are only called to carry the incense or spread the odor; to be the messengers of God's mercy, love and grace.

He continues in 2 Corinthians 2:16, "To the one we are the smell of death unto death; and to the other the smell of life unto life. And who

is sufficient for these things?" Those who will hear and refuse are like the slaves who are given the incense to carry that announces to the whole city that they are destined for execution.

The people who refuse to bow at the foot of the cross will walk away, refusing to be changed, but they will never forget the word that came to them. They will carry the message of the gospel with them forever and it will be a condemning word for them. They will be carrying the incense of death unto death and the smell of that refusal will haunt them for eternity to come.

Those who will hear *your* words that go forth as incense from your cup and will bow before Christ in submission, will go forth from that place carrying *their own* incense that is forever mingled with *yours* so that you will forever have a part in what fruit is produced in their lives. They go forth, adding their number to those who are already marching on, carrying their incense of life unto life everlasting and the message grows on and on, never losing its power to change the lives of those who will hear.

Notice the question, "Who is sufficient for these?" We want to produce the fruit but we can only plant the seed. We want to have the power to force people to come to Christ but that power is reserved for each one we talk to so that they must make up their own mind.

None of us are able to know the reason of the different influence of the Gospel ministry upon the souls of men. It is beyond our power to know which hearts are ripe for the gospel and which are not. Our job is to wave the incense and then allow those who hear to make their own choices.

Who among us thinks that he is all-sufficient for the preaching of the Gospel? Who is sufficient to give success to the Gospel when it goes forth? My job is to preach the Word. Your job is to preach the

word. We may not do it in the same fashion, in the same place or to the same people, but we all have that job to do. But let us never forget what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:6, "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase."

He continues in 2 Corinthians 2:17, "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ."

Thank God that we are captured and serve as the slaves to Jesus Christ. Every man must serve a master for we are not the Master of our destiny, no matter what men may say. Your destiny is determined by the fact that you carry the incense of life unto life. **We are made over comers by the Blood of Jesus and the Word of our Testimony!** Let your testimony go forth as a sweet incense to bring life to a lost and dying world.

The church is not heading for destruction! You were not saved only to be lost in the end! You are saved as the church triumphant! You are saved to carry forth the incense of life unto life!

Keep waving your incense. Keep on telling people about Jesus! One day soon we shall all go marching into Heaven, walking down those streets of gold, with Jesus Christ our Commander at the lead, and every one of us will be carrying the incense of a slave of love, waving it for all of Heaven to see that we have been conquered by Christ and we carrying life unto life!

What a great day that will be when my Jesus I shall see! When he leads me through the Promised Land as an heir and joint heir with him, forever to live with him eternally! That is going to be ultimate moment of triumph for the church and for each of you!

Won't it be a wonderful day when we lay aside everything that keeps us back? Won't it be a great day when we reach Glory?

