

## The Sweet Taste of Victory

by Ray C. Stedman

Out of the second letter of Paul to Corinth there comes a verse that is perhaps the most characteristically Christian verse in all the Bible. Paul says,

**Thanks be unto God who in Christ always leads us in triumph and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. {cf, 2 Cor 2:14}**

That seems to me to sum up beautifully what a Christian life is. This verse comes but a few verses after those which tell us how Paul went through a terrible experience in Asia when he was utterly, unbearably crushed so that he despaired of life itself. Out of that time of terrible pressure that came upon him, that awful sense of conflict that was his, he writes these marvelous words. The verse spotlights the truth that victory is the normal life for a believer.

We have reminded you from time to time of the definition of a Christian as one who is continually cheerful, completely fearless, and constantly in trouble. Trouble is a continual experience as the Christian goes through life, but in every time and place of conflict God's will and God's provision for us is victory. That is what the book of Esther sets before us in pictorial fashion.

This is the marvelous story of God's process of delivering his people. We have seen how Haman plots the destruction of the people of God (a picture for us of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives), and issues an edict with the authority of the king by which the kingdom will ultimately be destroyed if it is carried out. Then we saw how Mordecai moves to prevent this, and, through Esther, brings about an awareness on the part of the king of what is going on. At last the folly of Haman is exposed, and the king hangs him on the gallows that was prepared for Mordecai. Then we have the issuing of a

new edict, an edict which permits the Jews to defend themselves when the enemy comes against them. This is a beautiful picture of the seventh chapter of Romans, and the new law, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which sets us free from the law of sin and death.

Perhaps you are not familiar with this kind of pictorial presentation of theological truths, but this is what makes the Old Testament live. If you learn to read your Old Testament as a kind of visual aid to understanding the New Testament, you will discover that it is a beautiful and living book constantly teaching marvelous, delivering truth.

Chapter 9 of Esther brings us to the actual moment of victory. It may help to point out that the account of the actual victory is limited to half a chapter, but the action of the whole book is necessary to bring this about. As an iceberg hides three-quarters of its bulk beneath the surface of the waves and all that is seen is the one-quarter on the top, so the moment of victory and deliverance in your life is really a very small part of the work that God has been doing to bring you to that place.

Chapter 9 begins with a reminder of **An Appointed Time**:

**Now in the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king's command and edict were about to be executed, on the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to get the mastery over them, but which had been changed to be a day when the Jews should get the mastery over their foes, the Jews gathered in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on such as sought their hurt. {Est 9:1-2a RSV}**

The day has finally come, the day which the unchangeable law of the Medes and the Persians had established, the day on which the conflict would actually occur. These two unchangeable laws are destined to come to a head-on clash on exactly the same day, one law which permitted the enemies of the Jews to rise up against them and destroy them, and the other which permitted the Jews to rise up and destroy the enemy.

In your life this pictures the truth that God never teaches you something without having appointed a time when you will be put to the test. It is easy to come to a church service or a Bible class and open the Bible and learn marvelous truth which thrills you. I often rejoice at seeing truth break suddenly upon people's hearts and their faces light up as the truth of God comes home and they rejoice in the knowledge of it, but head knowledge is one thing, and heart experience is quite another. The wonderful thing about God's dealings with us is that he never lets us learn a thing that he doesn't test us on in our own life. In other words, he has appointed a day when what we learn out of the pages of the Word will be put to the test in the place of pressure, our daily experience.

God is forever conducting examinations. Have you discovered that? He is forever bringing us to the place of actual combat, for life is certainly more than a Boy Scout picnic. The learning of truth is not simply mental acrobatics, but is designed to be tested in the hurly-burly of life, in the mud and blood of our daily experience.

The Lord Jesus once took the disciples down to the coast of the Sea of Galilee and said, "Let's get into the boat and go to the other side," {cf, Mark 4:35}. It was evening time, and as the little boat made its way across the sea, a great storm suddenly engulfed the sea and waves began to rise high around the boat, and soon the ship was in great danger of sinking. We are told that Jesus was asleep in the hinder part of the boat, and finally the disciples came to him and shook him awake and said to him, "Lord, don't you care that we are perishing?" {cf, Mark 4:38b}. The Greek is very strong here. What they really said was, "Lord, don't you care that we are now in the process of sinking? We are going down!" These were men who were used to the sea and used to the storms that came on it. But this was a storm greater than

they could handle, and they knew they were in actual danger of sinking. Remember how, with majestic splendor, he arose and spoke to the waves saying, "Peace be still," {Mark 4:39}. Immediately there came a great calm and the Lord turned to the disciples and said, "Oh, ye of little faith, why did you doubt?" {cf, Mark 4:40}. What is going on here? Well, if you read the context you will discover that he had been preaching all day on the other side of the sea, and the theme of his message was *faith*. He had been teaching what faith was, and how faith operates, and what it can accomplish in life. Now they are taking the examination and the result was, they flunked! He had said to them, "Let's go over to the other side." He had not said, "Let's go out in the middle and drown." But they had no faith in what he had said, for they had forgotten who he was. The examination came suddenly upon them to test how much they had really learned of trust as they heard those marvelous words that day.

Have you found this true in your own life? As you read the words of Scripture, God speaks to your heart, and you say, "Oh, this is wonderful. I see this as I have never seen it before." Then be very sure that in a short time something will occur that will put that to the test in your life. There is an appointed day for the testing of faith, as we see here.

Following this, we read of **The Pattern of Victory**:

**And no one could make a stand against them, for the fear of them had fallen upon all peoples. All the princes of the provinces and the satraps and the governors and the royal officials also helped the Jews, for the fear of Mordecai had fallen upon them. For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful. So the Jews smote all their enemies with the sword, slaughtering, and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them. In Susa the capital itself the Jews slew and destroyed five hundred men, and also slew Parshandatha and Dalphon and Aspatha and Poratha and Adalia and Aridatha and Parmashta and Arisai and Aridai and Vai-**

**zatha, the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the enemy of the Jews; but they laid no hand on the plunder. {Est 9:2b-10 RSV}**

In these few verses we have condensed the actual story of victory, the climax towards which this book has been building all along. Notice the stages of it:

1. First, there is the fact set forth that the new edict which had come from the king has now given them *freedom to fight*.

The first edict that had come from Haman, the old prime minister, was to the effect that the enemies of the Jews were permitted by the law of the land to do whatever they like to the Jews on that day. They could kill them. They could destroy them. They could take their property. But now another edict has gone forth, written by Mordecai, which declared that on that same day the Jews are now, by law, permitted to defend themselves. Under the first law, the natural reaction of the Jews would have been to defend themselves on the day their enemies came against them, but if they had, they would have been outlaws and rebels against the law of the land. The very law of the land was against them to keep them from even defending themselves. They could do nothing in their own defense without incurring the stigma of being outlaws and rebels against the authority and law of the land. But now a new law has come into being which permits them to fight, sets them free, allows them to defend themselves with the full authority and approval of the king himself.

Do you see what this is picturing for us? What a wonderful light this throws upon that troublesome question raised in the letter to the Romans about the place of the Law in a believer's experience. What relationship does a Christian have to the Ten Commandments after he has become a Christian? There are two verses in Romans 7 that have been largely misunderstood, which are beautifully explained by this passage in Esther. In the fifth and sixth verses, Paul speaks about this matter of the Law and he says,

**While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. {Rom 7:5 RSV}**

That is what we have pictured in Esther. The first law permitted the enemies of the Jews (in fact ordered them, aroused them) to attack the Jews on this particular day, and thus bring death throughout the country. So Paul says, "While we were living in the flesh," that is, in our own struggle to be good and obey the Law, our sinful passions were aroused by that very Law. Have you not felt that? Someone tells you not to do something – how do you feel? You want to do that very thing! Your sinful passions are aroused by the prohibition of the law. So the Law works to bring forth fruit unto death. But Paul goes on to say,

**But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive [that law no longer affects us] so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit. {Rom 7:6 RSV}**

A new law has gone forth, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which has set us free from the condemnation of the old so we are free now to fight in the name of God and thus to overcome.

2. Notice also that "all the princes of the provinces and the satraps and the governors and the royal officials" *help the Jews*. This is remarkable, isn't it? The very people who, if there had not been a second law, would have been opposed to them and would have been against them, are now fighting on their side, helping them by pointing out their enemies and showing them the ones they were to attack. This unexpected help is a result, of course, of the new edict.

We have the revelation here that even those circumstances that seemed to be against us, that we thought were holding us in bondage, have now become our helpers in this battle.

I think of the experience of Joseph, when his brethren sold him into slavery, and, years later, he had risen to the highest seat in the

kingdom short of Pharaoh himself. His brethren come, and he reveals himself to them, and they are afraid and trembling for their lives. Then he says these wonderful words, “You meant all these things for evil, but God meant them for good,” {cf, Gen 50:20}. The very circumstances that we think are defeating us and bringing us into bondage through our own passions within, are oftentimes the very things that are used of God to bring us into the light and help us along the way.

I have often wondered, when I read the book of Acts, what those Christians at Damascus must have thought when someone came leading into the city by the hand that poor, blinded Saul of Tarsus who had come there breathing out threatenings and slaughter against them and from whom they were now hiding in fear of their lives. But now he comes to be on their side. God has arrested the arrester and brought him a captive to them. Of course, they were afraid and couldn't trust him at first, but gradually they saw that, by the might of glory and grace, God had transformed their greatest enemy into their greatest defender. What a picture this is of what happens in the life of one who understands the victory that God has planned.

3. There is another thing revealed here in Verse 4: Not only did they have freedom to fight, but they have *power to fight*: “For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai grew more and more powerful.” They were fighting now in the consciousness that the man of power was on their side, that right up to the very throne itself they had not only the authority to fight, but they fought in dependence on his power. Throughout this book, Mordecai is a picture of the Holy Spirit at work in your life and mine.

Not long ago I saw in a magazine a picture of a straw that had been picked up by a tornado and driven through a telephone pole. Also, there was a picture of an iron fire hydrant that had been pierced with several slivers of wood. How could this happen? If I gave you a straw and said to you, “Would you kindly go out and drive this through a telephone pole,” you would

say it is impossible. But here is a picture of it! How did it happen? The only answer is that the straw, weak as it is, has been caught up in the power of the tornado, and in the power of that mighty wind it is able to do that which it could never do itself. It is rather remarkable, isn't it, that throughout the Scriptures the Spirit of God is referred to as the wind, the breath of God. This is a continual figure of his ministry in our midst.

As we realize that God has now set us free from the Law by a new life within, the life of Jesus Christ, we learn that in the power of that new life, ministered to us continually by the Holy Spirit, it is quite possible to do everything that needs to be done. It won't always be to put straws through telephone poles. The Holy Spirit will never be like a tornado if all you need is a gentle breeze, but if you need a tornado, that is what he is. He can

- move mountains,
- change circumstances,
- set aside kingdoms, or
- overthrow thrones if necessary,

for whatever is necessary, the man of power has power to do it. That is what we see here.

So they fought in the realization that the man behind the throne is the one from whom power comes.

1. Not only did they have freedom to fight and power to fight, but the point is, *they actually fought!* We read here,

**So the Jews smote all their enemies with the sword, slaughtering, and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them. {Est 9:5 RSV}.**

Right here is one of the areas where there is much failure in the application of truth to experience. I know people who ask, “Well, what are we to do when we come right up to the actual time of temptation?”

- Perhaps the spirit of impatience is throbbing away wanting to break out again,

- or we feel pressured to break out in resentment or jealousy against another,
- or ambition comes rushing up, setting our blood on fire and urging us to lay hold of some circumstance to gain a position of prominence or favor.

What do we do then? Is it enough to say, “Just look to the Lord and go on”? No, I don’t think so.

I know there are those who say that all one need do is “Let go and let God do it.” But God does it through us! – engaging our total personality in the process. There is an actual battle involved – as here, and in many other accounts throughout Scripture. The battle is not aggressive action so much as simply standing on the promise God has given, and a refusal to be moved from that position.

That is what Paul says in Ephesians: “We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principality, and powers and rulers of the world’s darkness,” {Eph 6:12a KJV}. And what are we to do? “Having done all, stand!” {cf, Eph 6:13b}. Take the place of victory that God has given us in Jesus Christ. If you question this thesis, I suggest you read again the Gospel accounts of our Lord in the agony of Gethsemane’s garden. There was a battle going on, and it wasn’t simply a matter of looking to the Lord and immediately there came release and freedom from struggle. There was a struggle. There was a terrible conflict. There was a dark pressure that caused drops of blood to be pressed out through his veins in the anguish of that moment, but he would not budge, he would not move back, he would not forsake the place he had taken in faith, so the enemy was defeated.

James says to us,

**Submit yourself unto God and resist the devil and he will flee. {cf, Jas 4:7 RSV}**

Both are necessary! There are those who submit themselves unto God, but they don’t bother to resist the devil, and sooner or later defeat comes. And there are those who try to resist the devil, but they have never submitted themselves unto God, and defeat comes. Both

are necessary. Though we have all the power and all the authority to do all that needs to be done to defeat these passions within that keep us in bondage, we will never win the day until we take our stand and fight in the strength of God, refusing to budge or retreat or go back from our position of faith.

This intensely personal character of victory is pictured clearly in the fact that the ten sons of Haman were put to death, I found that in the Hebrew the names of the ten sons are given in a very peculiar fashion: To each one of these names the Hebrew word *self* is attached. The names are written in a parallel column and on the opposite column the word *self* is repeated after each name. I tried to discover the meaning of these names – for this is always worthwhile with Hebrew names – and I was able to find eight of them, though two of them I could never trace down fully. But let me give you the names of the eight, in relationship to this word *self*:

- *Parshandatha* means “curious-self,” that is nosiness, a desire to pry into other people’s matters.
- *Dalphon* means “weeping-self,” self-pity, in other words.
- *Aspatha* I could not find.
- *Poratha* means “generous-self,” or, in the bad sense intended here, “spend-thriftiness.”
- *Adalia* I could not find.
- *Aridatha* means “strong-self,” i.e. assertiveness.
- *Parmashta* means “preeminent-self,” ambition.
- *Arisai* means “bold-self,” which would be impudence.
- *Aridai* is “dignified-self,” that is pride. And
- *Vaizatha* means “pure-self,” pure while everyone else is polluted.

Now in this interesting account all these were put to death, or, in terms of Romans 7, they were put in the place of death. Victory meant that all these manifestations of self-turned-awry, distorted, were put in the place where God puts them, the place of death and refused any right to live. Anything less than this is defeat!

Immediately following the pattern of victory we find **The Marks of Genuine Victory:**

There is a great temptation to imitate victory.

- We screw on a smile and pretend we are living in triumph over our circumstances,
- or we repress our impatience
  - and act as though we are very patient
  - when inwardly we are seething with impatience.
- Or, perhaps, we talk about our humility,
  - and our lack of desire for preeminence
  - when all the time ambition surges within us,
  - and we are desperately proud.

Now this is a sham, a facade, an attempt to imitate victory.

But there are certain signs of genuine victory which cannot be imitated and which invariably indicate God's victory manifest in the life. These signs are set forth in Verses 11-16:

**That very day the number of those slain in Susa the capital was reported to the king. And the king said to Queen Esther, "In Susa the capital the Jews have slain five hundred men and also the ten sons of Haman. What then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your petition? It shall be granted you. And what further is your request? It shall be fulfilled. And Esther said, "If it please the king, let the Jews who are in Susa be allowed tomorrow also to be according to this day's edict. And let the ten sons of Haman be hanged on the gallows." So the king commanded this to be done; a decree was issued in Susa and the ten sons of Haman were hanged. The Jews who were in Susa gathered also on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar and they slew three hundred**

**men in Susa; but they laid no hands on the plunder. {Est 9:11-15 RSV}**

There are three things here that mark a genuine victory:

1. First, there was a double victory in the capital city. The day of victory was extended in the capital to cover another day.

The empire is a picture for us of the circle of our influence but the capital city is our own life, our own body, and in the capital there was a double victory. That is, more happens in your own life in terms of deliverance than the public ever finds out about and it means at least twice as much to you as it does to anyone else.

Many of you have begun already to experience release from jealousy, impatience, and other manifestations of the flesh, and the result is you are much easier to live with. You are nicer to have around. But you well know that nice as it is for them, it is much more wonderful to you! You realize far more of the place of release and victory than is ever manifest outside the capital city of your own heart.

2. Secondly, Esther requested that the ten sons of Haman, who had been killed the day before, now be publicly hanged, impaled upon a gallows, nailed up for all to see. Here is another unmistakable sign of victory, a believer sharing in some public way the victory God has given him.

At a men's conference recently a number of us gathered informally to talk about God's work in our lives, and one man after another began to tell about their experience. One man opened his heart and told about his struggle with impatience and how God had brought him to victory over this. Another told how ambition had been the passion of his life and how, at last, he was set free from this strange fire. Another spoke of jealousy and lust, and others told of other things. They were publicly hanging the dead sons of Haman, as an encouragement to others. This is always a sign of true victory.

3. The third and last mark is three times mentioned in this account. "They slew their ene-

mies, but laid no hand on the plunder.” That is, they did not enrich themselves by this; there was no attempt to gain self-advancement.

This is always an unmistakable mark of genuine spiritual victory. There are always some who want to be set free from certain driving passions in their life simply because it will mean a better chance for advancement in employment, or it would solve a difficult problem in their home, or perhaps they hope to get along better with their mother-in-law. They seek to overcome their bad disposition because essentially they want to get a share of the plunder. They are looking for some advantage to themselves. But the mark of genuine victory is that you don’t care a whit what happens to you. You don’t care whether you are advanced by this at all. You want victory simply because this is God’s desire for you. You want to be free so that you may fulfill all the desire of his heart in you. When I see this attitude I know the Holy Spirit has genuinely done a work of grace in that person’s life.

In the Billy Graham magazine, *Decision*, Marie Lochner wrote, “Such a short time ago I was afraid of doing wrong because it might hurt me. Now I am beginning to feel that it is more important not to hurt my Father.” This is victory for Christ’s sake.

I remember the story of a young man from Mexico, who told how it was not until his little girl became sick, and was lying at the point of death, that he finally woke up to what God wanted of his life. In moving tones, he told how he struggled until he came to the place where he was ready to face the claims of Christ in his life. I was struck by the way he put it: “I did not say to the Lord, ‘If you will make my little girl well, I will serve you.’ I didn’t say that,” he said. “I said to him, ‘Regardless of whether you make her well or not, I will serve

you.’” That is real victory. That is a mark of genuineness.

Have you been there?

Have you found this?

Has God set you free, at last, from those things that have enslaved and bound you all your Christian experience? – those manifestations of the flesh such as bitterness, resentment, jealousy, pride, lust and all the rest? Well, the signs of it will be that you do not care about gaining advantage for yourself, and it will mean far more to you than will ever be visible to anybody else, and you will be willing to make known what has been before a private secret of your own, a skeleton that you have kept hidden in a closet.

I close this message with the verse with which we began. Remember it was not written in some quiet academic moment when the Apostle Paul was seated in a garden enjoying the beauty of the scene and writing out of the pleasure of the moment. It comes to us out of the grind and tussle and bustle of life, out of the pressures and confusions and tensions and frustrations of daily living. Out of that moment the apostle says,

**Thanks be unto God who in Christ always leads us in triumph and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. {cf, 2 Cor 2:14 RSV}**

#### **Prayer:**

Our Father, we simply ask that these words may be translated into experience, that we do not look at this as some academic study, some lesson that we mentally appropriate, but that these may prove to be words which, striking, cutting deeply into the very center of our being, set us free from the law of sin and death. Make it real in our experience. We pray in Christ’s name, Amen.

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