

JESUS IS MY SALVATION MESSAGE

SERIES PART - 8

TRIUMPHANT LIVING

This morning to understand the Master's Message, that is the Gospel that Jesus preached, the Gospel that Paul preached, and the Salvation that the people of the Bible lived out 20 centuries ago please open with me to II Corinthians 2: 14-17. As we read this awesome passage describing what Paul declared as a fact of his Christian life, we need to examine our lives and see where we are in the Triumph March!

In his mind is the picture of a Roman *Triumph* and of Christ as a universal conqueror. The highest honor victorious Roman general could ever receive was called the Roman Triumph. It was only for those who had¹ satisfied certain conditions:

1. He must have been the actual commander-in-chief in the field.
2. The campaign must have been completely finished, the region pacified and the victorious troops brought home.
3. Five thousand of the enemy at least must have fallen in one engagement.
4. A positive extension of territory must have been gained, and not merely a disaster retrieved or an attack repelled.
5. And the victory must have been won over a foreign foe and not in a civil war.

What is the image that God's Word gives us for our daily Christian life? The image² that Paul had in mind can be seen in Plutarch's description of the three-day Triumph given the Roman General Aemilius Paulus upon his return from capturing Macedonia. Great scaffolds were erected in the forum and along the boulevards of Rome for spectator seating, and all of Rome turned out, dressed in festive white.

- On the 1st day, 259 chariots displayed in procession the statues, pictures, and colossal images taken from the enemy. On the second day, innumerable wagons bore the armor of the Macedonians. As Plutarch tells it: ... all newly polished and glittering; the pieces of which were piled up and arranged purposely with the greatest art, so as to seem to be tumbled in heaps

¹ Barclay, William, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to the Corinthians (Revised Edition)*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2000, c1975.

² Adapted, paraphrased and quoted from Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Colossians and Philemon—The Supremacy of Christ*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

carelessly and by chance: helmets were thrown upon shields, coats of mail upon graves . . . with just so much looseness that they struck against one another as they were drawn along, and made a harsh and alarming noise, so that, even as spoils of a conquered enemy they would not be held without dread.

- On the 2nd day the wagons came 3,000 carrying the enemies' silver in 750 vessels, followed by more treasure.
- On the 3rd day came the captives, preceded by 120 sacrificial oxen with their horns gilded and their heads adorned with ribbons and garlands, next Macedonian gold, then the captured king's chariot, crown, and armor. Then came the king's servants, weeping, with hands outstretched, begging the crowds for mercy. Next came his children. Then King Perseus himself, clad entirely in black, followed by endless prisoners. Finally came the victorious general ... seated on the chariot magnificently adorned, dressed in a robe of purple, interwoven with gold, and holding a laurel branch in his right hand. All the army, in like manner, with boughs of laurel in their hands, divided into their bands and companies, followed the chariot of their commander; some singing verses, according to the usual custom songs of triumph and the praise of Aemilius's deeds.

That is the picture that is in Paul's mind. He sees Christ marching in triumph throughout the world, and himself in the conquering train. It is a triumph, which, Paul is certain, nothing can stop. Paul was convinced of the assurance that Jesus had overcome the world and in us would do the same. He lived, served and rested in the unconquerable majesty of Christ.

This passage teaches us the daily walk in victory that we are to live in. The picture³ in II Corinthians 2: 14–17 was familiar to every Roman but is not to twentieth-century Christians. An official "Roman Triumph" was indeed something to behold! If a commander in chief won a complete victory over the enemy on foreign soil, and if he killed at least 5,000 enemy soldiers and gained new territory for the Emperor, then that commander in chief was entitled to a Roman Triumph.

The processional would include the commander riding in a golden chariot, surrounded by his officers, and the people shouted his name and praised him. The parade would also include a display of the spoils of battle, as well as the captive enemy soldiers. The Roman priests would also be in the parade, carrying burning incense to pay tribute to the victorious army. The procession would follow a special route through the city and would end at the Circus Maximus where the helpless captives would entertain the people by fighting wild beasts. That was a "Roman Triumph." It was a very special day in Rome when the citizens were treated to a full-scale "Roman Triumph."

This parade was filled with pomp and glory, and a great deal of incense was burned in honor of the hero. In the parade soldiers and officers would enjoy glory and praise, but slaves and captives also present would end up in the arena to die fighting the wild

³ Sections following quoted variously from Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Strong, Be Decisive* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1994, and *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books) 1992.

beasts. As the victors smelled the incense, they inhaled an aroma of life and joy; but to the captives, the incense was a reminder of their coming death. In the “Christian parade” Paul describes, Jesus Christ is the Victor. Through His death on the cross, He has conquered every foe. We Christians ride in that procession with Him, sharing His victory (1 Cor. 15:57). The Christian, however, is the incense (sweet savor of Christ) in this procession as the Spirit spreads the knowledge of Christ in and through our lives. This savor, or perfume, means life to other believers, but to the unbeliever headed for eternal condemnation, it means death.

How does this piece of history⁴ apply to the burdened believer today?

1. **Jesus Christ, our Victorious General**, and great Commander in chief, came to foreign soil (**this earth**) and completely defeated the enemy (**Satan**), crying, “**It is Finished.**”
2. Instead of killing 5,000 persons, **He gave life to more than 5,000 persons**—to 3,000 plus at Pentecost and to another 2,000 plus shortly after Pentecost (Acts 2:41; 4:4), and has taken them and all since **safely to their Heavenly Home**.
3. Jesus Christ claimed the spoils of battle—ruined lives and **lost souls who had been in bondage to sin and Satan** (Luke 11:14–22; Eph. 4:8; Col. 2:15). What a splendid victory!
4. The victorious general’s sons would walk behind their father’s chariot, sharing in his victory; and **that is where believers are today**—following in Christ’s triumph. We do not fight *for* victory; we fight *from* victory. All through Paul’s ministry as he was persecuted, the situation did not look like victory to Paul, but he believed God—and God turned defeat into victory.
5. As the Roman priests burned the incense in the parade, that odor affected different people in different ways. To the triumphant soldiers, it meant life and victory; but to the conquered enemy, it meant defeat and death. They were on their way to be killed by the beasts. Using this image of the incense, Paul pictured the Christian ministry. He saw believers as incense, giving forth the fragrance of Jesus Christ in their lives and labors. To God, believers are the very fragrance of Jesus Christ. To other believers, we are the fragrance of life; but to unbelievers, we are the fragrance of death. In other words, the Christian life and ministry are matters of life and death. **The way we live and work can mean life or death to a lost world around us.**
6. As the people and soldiers of Rome were shouting victory all along the parade route, so **we should be proclaiming** “If God be for us, who can be against us? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Rom. 8:31, 37).

Twenty-three times in all we find our Lord’s meaningful “I AM” (, Gr.) in the Greek text of this gospel (4:26; 6:20,35,41,48,51; 8:12,18,24,28,58; 10:7,9,11,14; 11:25; 13:19; 14:6; 15:1,5; 18:5,6,8). In several of these, He joins His “I AM” with seven tremendous metaphors, which are expressive of His saving relationship toward the world.

⁴ Wiersbe, Warren W., *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books) 1997.

"I AM the Bread of life" (6:35,41,48,51).
"I AM the Light of the world" (8:12).
"I AM the Door of the sheep" (10:7,9).
"I AM the Good Shepherd" (10:11,14).
"I AM the Resurrection and the Life" (11:25).
"I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (14:6).
"I AM the true Vine" (15:1,5).

The perfection of Christ our God is seen in the seven "I AM'S" in John's record of Christ's life and ministry. Christ has given His own eternal life (John 17:2), but He has also given them the revelation of the Father's name (John 17:6). The Old Testament Jew knew his God as "Jehovah," the great I AM (Ex. 3:11-14). Jesus took this sacred name "I AM" and made it meaningful to His disciples: "I am the Bread of Life" (John 6:35); "I am the Light of the world" (John 8:12); "I am the Good Shepherd" (John 10:11); etc. In other words, Jesus revealed the Father's gracious name by showing His disciples that He was everything they needed. 5

1. **I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE** (6:35) - He FEEDS OUR STARVING SOULS, but apart from Him is only unsatisfied hunger. The internal gnawing pain that hunger brings is the illustration of our condition apart from Christ. He alone feeds our soul and satisfies our hungers, all else is emptiness, hopelessness and empty mirages.
2. **I AM THE LIGHT OF WORLD** (8:12) - He LIGHTS OUR DARKENED SOULS, but apart from Him is only impenetrable darkness.
3. **I AM THE DOOR OF LIFE TO MY SHEEP** (10:7,9) - He INVITES us lost sheep back into God's Family, but apart from Him is only hopeless exclusion. In the ancient world there were sheepfolds built of stones or made from caves, dotting the hills and valleys of Israel. The door was made so that the shepherd himself would lie down at night and become the door so that no sheep could wander out without stumbling over him and no predator could slip in without stirring him. So Jesus says I keep you safe from harm and secure from wandering away from my salvation!
4. **I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD** (10:11) - He LEADS US HOME, but apart from Him is only aimless wandering.
5. **I AM THE RESURRECTION AND LIFE** (11:25) - He pours upon US endless LIFE, but apart from Him is only endless dying.
6. **I AM THE WAY, TRUTH & LIFE** (14:6) - He secures us in the way of endless life, but apart from Him is only endless lost ness.
7. **I AM THE TRUE VINE** (15:1) - He NURTURES us through life, apart from Him is only continual withering. If the vine speaks of all of life as one growing season, then we should get more fruit filled the older we get (ala Psalm 92), if it is many seasons then life is a succession of growing/pruning/bearing/resting and then growing/pruning...

