

INTRODUCTION

We’re still near the beginning of our verse by verse study of 2 Corinthians I’m calling, “HOPE FOR CRACKED POTS.” Today, our topic is “Chained to His Chariot.”

I heard a funny story once about an elderly couple who were walking through a mall. Outside a pet store there was a parrot who had a reputation for making unkind remarks to the shoppers. As this couple approached the store, the parrot said to the man, “Do you know what?” The man said, “What?” The parrot said, “You’re ugly and your wife is fat!” The man was so angry that he went inside and complained to the pet store owner. The owner apologized and then grabbed the parrot by the neck and said, “That’s it! I’m sick and tired of your comments. If you ever say anything unkind again, you won’t be a live parrot anymore, you’ll be a stuffed parrot!” With that stern warning, the owner put that parrot back out on his perch. Not long after that, the same couple approached the parrot from the other direction. The parrot looked at the couple and said to the old man, “Do you know what?” The man said, “What?” The parrot paused and said, “You KNOW what!” When it comes to the Christian life, I think most of us know WHAT we we’re supposed to be, but we often come up short in knowing HOW to become who the Bible says we are to be in Christ.

Sometimes you hear preachers talk about “the victorious Christian Life.” That’s redundant because there is no other Christian life than the victorious Christian life. But sadly, too many Christians don’t understand HOW to live in victory.

There are two men who served as my spiritual mentors who are now in heaven. Both of them taught many times on 2 Corinthians 2:14. One of them was the great pastor and Bible teacher Ron Dunn. Years ago, I heard Ron preach a message entitled, “Chained to the Chariot.” Some messages I’ve heard affected me for a few minutes, and others for a few days, but this message has affected my entire ministry. In fact, when Ron used to send letters to me, he always signed them, “Chained to the Chariot.”

My other mentor was Ray Stedman, the pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California. Ray Stedman said that 2 Corinthians 2:14 was his favorite verse in all the Bible. So, you can see why I’m approaching this text and this message with a greater-than-normal sense of excitement about sharing God’s word with you. It’s my prayer that this amazing truth will affect you for the rest of your life.

Let’s read 2 Corinthians 2:12-14. “Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia. (Now remember our context. Paul was feeling frustrated and uncertain about where to go and what to do, but in spite of this frustration he breaks forth with this amazing statement.) But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.”

The six English words, “always leads us in triumphal procession” are the translation of one word in the Greek language. It’s a long word containing 19 letters (*pantotethriambuonti*), but it

described a particular event that would have been familiar to the people living in Corinth in the 1st Century. The word described the victory parade of a Roman General when he returned to Rome or his home city. The closest thing we have to it in our culture is a ticker tape parade in New York City. Over the duration of the Roman Empire there were 320 triumphal processions and they all followed a set custom. As soon as the battle was won, a herald would run from the battle ground to the city to proclaim the victory. Our Bible word for “preaching” is the same word used to describe the announcement of this herald. When the residents heard the good news they immediately began to make preparations for a magnificent victory celebration.

On the morning of the parade, the Roman priests would burn large amounts of a special incense, so that when the citizens woke up and sniffed the air they would say, “We’re going to have a party today! We’re going to have a victory parade!” They would start lining the streets waiting for the parade to begin.

Leading the parade would be the priests swinging the censures burning that special incense, followed by musicians - the forerunner to the marching band! They would be followed by the victorious soldiers carrying the treasures and spoils of the war. Then, the central figure would be the victorious general riding in a beautiful chariot. His chariot would often be pulled by white horses, but other animals were used too. For instance, when Pompey conquered Africa, his chariot was pulled by two elephants. And for Mark Anthony’s victorious parade, he had two lions pulling his chariot. Dionysus’ chariot was pulled by four tigers.

And then, walking behind, chained to the chariot of the victorious general, would be the leading officers of the defeated army. These enemy officers would be led into the city to demonstrate that they had been defeated. It was a humiliating experience for them. For instance, in 30 B.C., Cleopatra committed suicide to keep from having to endure the humiliation of being chained to Octavian Caesar’s chariot. These defeated officers were facing execution, but sometimes due to the mercy of the conquering general, their lives were spared and they became slaves.

When the Roman citizens saw their victorious general, and the defeated officers chained to his chariot, they would shout praises and throw flowers at the victorious general. They would sing and celebrate the great victory of their general. This is the word picture that Paul used when he wrote that God always leads us in triumphant procession in Christ.

I want to analyze this powerful verse beginning at the end and moving back toward the beginning. There are three important parts to this truth - and if you understand them and apply them, you can learn HOW to live in victory! These truths have changed my life and they can change yours.

1. WE ARE ALREADY VICTORIOUS IN CHRIST

Notice the last two words, “.. triumphal procession IN CHRIST...” In this word picture, we’re not the one riding in the Chariot - Jesus is the conquering general. He’s the King of Kings and the Captain of our salvation. It’s not OUR victory that is being celebrated, it’s HIS. The chariot is a one-seater! This verse doesn’t say, “God makes US triumphant.” Instead it says that He leads us in the triumph of Jesus. When you realize that you are in Christ and that Christ is in you, then

you understand that you are living in victory. Not YOUR victory, but His!

You see, the responsibility for victory in the Christian life is not mine, it's His. Sometimes we think of the Christian life as a football game and we psyche ourselves up by saying, “I've got to go out today and win one for the Gipper...I mean, the Lord.” We think it's our job to go out there and “fight for the victory.” We think, “I've got to win the victory over temptation. I've got to win the victory over the devil. I've got to win the victory over discouragement and worry.” When we fail, it just makes us more frustrated, so we grit our teeth and say, “I'm going to do better today! I'm going to go out there and win the victory if it kills me!” And it usually does! The responsibility for victory in the Christian life doesn't depend on us. It's not our victory, it's God's victory *in Christ*.

The Bible teaches that Jesus won the victory when He died on the cross. “Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's Cross. He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets.” (Colossians 2:14-15 *The Message*) Jesus won the victory on the cross, so there is no need for us to try to win - we've already won in Christ! To put it another way, we aren't fighting FOR victory, we're fighting FROM victory.

The Key: The battle isn't ours; it's the Lord's!

Let me give you an important key to the victorious Christian life: The battle isn't ours; it's the Lord's! This truth is illustrated in the story of David and Goliath found in 1 Samuel 17. Wars were fought in funny ways back then. One day David's daddy said, “here's lunch, take it to your brothers at the battle front.” So little David walked to the battle lines and said to his brothers, “I've brought your lunch.” As he was delivering the food, David saw a 9 foot tall Philistine soldier mocking the Israelites and blaspheming the name of the God of Israel. I can just hear David telling one of his brothers, “I want you to do something about that guy.” His brothers probably said, “You don't know anything about war, you're just the pizza delivery guy. Go back home and play your harp and write your poetry, this is a job for real men!”

David said, “Well, you aren't doing a very good job of taking care of him now. I can deal with him.” After they finished laughing they said, “If you want to commit suicide go ahead!” They tried to put Saul's armor on David, but it was too big.” David said, “I don't need any armor, I've got my slingshot and five smooth stones.” I can just hear the brothers saying, “Good bye little brother, it's been nice knowing you.”

But do you remember what happened? Little David approached the giant and stopped and looking him right in the knee caps and said, “I'm about to kill you, cut off your head, and serve up your body and the bodies of your Philistine buddies to the crows and coyotes. The whole earth will know that there's an extraordinary God in Israel. And everyone gathered here will learn that God doesn't save by means of sword or spear. The battle belongs to God—he's handing you to us on a platter!” (1 Samuel 17:47 *The Message*)

David began swinging his sling and he hurled a rock that nailed Goliath right between the eyes. Goliath collapsed like a sack of potatoes, and David took Goliath's sword and decapitated him to

show everyone that he was someone who knew how to get a head. You see, the battle wasn't David's, and it wasn't the Israelites'. It was the Lord's battle.

We need to stand up against the Goliath's who stand in our way and say, “The battle is the Lord's!” What obstacle or threat are you facing right now? Repeat these words after me: The battle is the Lord's! And He's never lost a battle! The battle is the Lord's! And He's never lost a battle.

2. WE SECURE OUR VICTORY WHEN WE SURRENDER

As we move from the end of the verse to the middle, the next truth we see is found in the words “... WHO LEADS US in triumphal procession in Christ...” Now, in this picture of a triumphal procession, Jesus is the conquering general, but where are we? We're not in the crowd cheering, and we're not part of the victorious army, instead, we are the ones being LED by the victorious general. We're the conquered officers chained to the chariot because we have surrendered to the victor.

Remember who wrote these words. At one time, Paul had been the enemy of Jesus Christ. There were ongoing hostilities between God and Paul. We read in Acts 9 that one day, Jesus appeared to Paul on the road to Damascus and the battle was over. Jesus said, “Saul, Saul, why are you fighting me?” Paul was temporarily blinded and said, “Who are you, Lord?” Jesus said, “I am Jesus, the one you're hunting down.” On that day, Paul surrendered and said, “Lord what would you have me do?” From that moment onward, he was chained to the chariot of Jesus. Whenever he wrote a letter, he identified himself as a slave of Jesus.

Colossians 1:21 says that at one time we were all “alienated from God and were His enemies in our minds.” In order to become a Christian, you must do what Paul did and surrender to Jesus. A few years ago I preached an entire series called “Surrender to Win.” The only way to experience victory in life is to surrender to Jesus. We've all seen pictures of soldiers who have surrendered. They walk forward with their hands held high. This is the universal sign of surrender. When a former enemy holds his hands up, he is showing that he isn't hiding a weapon. When we truly surrender to Jesus Christ, we come empty handed. A verse in the song “Rock of Ages” says, “Nothing in my hands I bring; Simply to thy cross I cling.” (Augustus Toplady, 1776)

When we surrender to Jesus, we haven't lost, we've won! Our victory is assured when we surrender completely to the rule and reign of Jesus Christ in our lives. The Bible says, “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.” Some people stop here and think that since faith is the victory, that if I want more victory I must have more faith. Not at all, keep reading: Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” (1 John 5:5-6) It's not FAITH alone that gives victory. It is faith in Jesus Christ as God's son that gives us victory. So, let me ask, “How many of you believe that Jesus is the Son of God?” Please raise your right hand, keep it up. “How many of you have surrendered to Jesus as your Lord?” Raise your left hand. Say this: “Jesus, I surrender! All I am and all I have is Yours!” Now, that's what's we mean when we sing, “Victory in Jesus!”

Principle: I want to be a conqueror, I must first be conquered

In surrendering to Jesus there’s a principle that can be understood: If I want to be a conqueror, I must first be conquered. There are many paradoxes in the Christian life. A paradox isn’t a couple of pediatricians, it’s a statement that on the surface appears to be contradictory, but is actually true. Jesus said that if we would save our lives, we have to lose it. That sounds paradoxical. Jesus said, “Give and it will be given unto you.” That doesn’t make human sense, but it’s true. And the only way to be victorious in the Christian life, is to surrender to Jesus.

Most people don’t like the idea of being chained to the Chariot of Jesus. They have what I call a negative chain reaction! My friend, Ron Dunn, preached this message, “Chained to the Chariot” hundreds of times during his ministry. I heard him tell the story about what happened in a church in Florida after he preached this message. A man came up to him and said, “That was a pretty good message.” Ron said, “Thanks.” The man went on to say, “there was only part of it I didn’t like. I didn’t like that part about being chained to the chariot. If you take that part out, it would be a really good message.” Ron smiled and said, “Brother, that’s not PART of the message, it IS the message! If I take that out, there’s nothing left!” The man said, “Well, it just seems to be degrading and humiliating to be chained to a chariot.”

Ron said, “Absolutely! None of us like submitting ourselves and becoming like a slave.” I agree with Ron, the image of being chained to a chariot isn’t very inviting. You know what I want to do? I want to ride up front with the Lord, I don’t want to be chained back there. After all, we think the Lord needs our help. “Lord, why are we going so slow, everybody is passing us, can’t you put the pedal to the metal, here?” Or other times I want to say, “Lord, are you sure we’re on the right road? There are speed bumps and potholes in this road, and right over there is a superhighway.” Sometimes I get tired and say, “Lord, why don’t we pull over and stop for awhile and have a picnic?” I’ve even tried several times to take the reins from the Lord’s hands. I like to be up front, in control, don’t you? But the only way we can have victory is when we surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Then we can live in His victory.

3. WE CAN EXPERIENCE VICTORY IN EVERY SITUATION OF LIFE

As we now come to the beginning of the verse we read, “But thanks be to God, who ALWAYS leads us in triumphal procession...and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.”

There are two important words to notice: “always,” that’s time. God always leads us in triumphal procession. The next word is “everywhere,” that’s space. God spreads the fragrance of knowledge of him everywhere. We’re creatures of time and space. So let me paraphrase that verse again, “Thanks be to God who anytime, every time, all the time, leads me in His triumph in Christ. And every place, any place, all places, you name the place, He spreads the fragrance of the knowledge about God.”

Another important word is the little word, “but.” It’s a conjunction that expresses a change of thought or direction. Remember our context. Paul was dealing with frustration, fatigue, failure, and loneliness. He had arrived in one place and expected to find Titus, and he said, that he didn’t have any peace of mind. It would be like him saying, “I thought I was a loser, a failure, a

defeated servant, BUT thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession...”

So, this victory isn't something that is only experienced when you're feeling great and everything is working in proper order. It's a victory that is available in ANY and EVERY situation of life. This truth of victory in every situation is reinforced in these great words, “In all these things we are more than conquerors (*hyper-nike*) through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37) When we speak of someone being “hyper” we mean that their extremely agitated or active. And yes, it's the same word, *nike* that is the name of the athletic company. “Nike” in the Greek language means “victor” or “conqueror.” And the Bible says that we are hyper-nike in Jesus Christ!

The Bible pictures a Christian as someone who is more than a conqueror! Do you resemble that picture? A few years ago, I flying to another city for a speaking engagement and was being met at the airport by a pastor I'd never met. He had a picture of me, so I thought he would identify himself when he saw me. When nobody approached me I called him on my cell phone, and to my surprise, a guy just across the hallway answered the phone. He apologized and said, “You don't look much like your picture.” I said, “Don't worry about it. That picture was taken when I was much older...” I don't think he got it either. Have you ever had someone say, “You don't look much like your picture? The Bible describes a Christian as not just being a conqueror, but being a super-conqueror. We aren't just winners, we're hyper-winners! We aren't just victors, we're mega-victors. But sadly, it seems that too many Christians are living in defeat. They don't look very victorious.

The Secret: To live victoriously, I only have to stay chained to His chariot!

The most important principle of the Christian life is that when I surrender totally to Jesus, then I cannot lose! Job #1 for a Christian is NOT to try to work for Jesus. Our first priority is to stay chained to the chariot.

CONCLUSION

Several months ago, I was being interviewed by a seminary student who was doing an article on so-called “successful pastors.” I'm not sure how he got my name, but as he sat in my office he asked me, “What is the SINGLE most important thing you do as a pastor?” I thought before answering and could have said, “Preparing to teach God's word,” “or keeping a vision before our congregation.” But instead, I said, “the most important thing I can do as Pastor of Green Acres is to make sure that I am constantly abiding in Christ and surrendered to His Lordship so He can fill me with His Holy Spirit.” You see, if I don't have a personal intimate relationship with God, then nothing else I do really matters. Jesus said, “Without me, you can do nothing.”

I didn't always understand this. When I started off being a pastor over 30 years ago, I was pretty frustrated because I thought that I was responsible for the growth and success of the church I pastored. If we didn't have more in attendance on this Sunday than the same Sunday a year ago, I felt like a failure, so I just decided to work harder. I went to conferences and read books on all the tricks of the trade to make a church grow, and I came to believe that if I simply practiced thirty or forty success principles then I could grow a great church. I was in my mid 20's and was

so frustrated that I was really considering leaving the pastorate and going to into some other profession. It was then that I heard Ron Dunn preach a message on being “chained to the chariot.” He said the most important thing any Christian can do is to simply stay chained to the chariot of Jesus Christ.

That summer I took a few days off for a personal prayer and planning retreat and went to a cabin on a lake. The only things I took were some drinking water and my Bible. While I was there I was reading Matthew 16 and read where Jesus said, “On this rock I will build my church.” For the first time I noticed that Jesus said, “I will build MY church.” I said, “Lord, do you mean to tell me that this is YOUR church?” He said, “Yep. Always has been, always will be.” I said, “Lord, I’ve been thinking it was MY church and I had to build it to please you. But if it’s YOUR church, then YOU’RE responsible for building it, right?” He seemed to say, “Bingo.”

From that point on, the weight was lifted off my shoulders. I no longer felt responsible for building my church. It was His church and He was building it. This was truth that set me free. I don’t know of anything that has liberated me more than that understanding. You see, it’s not my job to get people to walk down the aisle and join the church, it’s the LORD who adds daily to the church those who are being saved. It’s not my responsibility to get people to give or to pray or to serve, that’s God’s job. If I can talk you into giving your money then someone else can talk you out of it, but when God puts it in a person’s heart to give, they give.” I now understand that my main job as a pastor is to simply stay chained to the chariot so I can follow along in the victory of Jesus Christ.

That’s what it means to live the victorious Christian life. Just stay chained to His chariot!

OUTLINE

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"...triumphal procession IN CHRIST..."

"Think of it! All sins forgiven, the slate wiped clean, that old arrest warrant canceled and nailed to Christ's Cross. He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the Cross and marched them naked through the streets." *Colossians 2:14-15 The Message*

The Key: The battle isn't ours; it's the Lord's!

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"...WHO LEADS US in triumphal procession in Christ..."

"This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." *1 John 5:5-6*

Principle: I want to be a conqueror, I must first be conquered

3. WE CAN EXPERIENCE VICTORY IN EVERY SITUATION OF LIFE

"But thanks be to God, who ALWAYS leads us in triumphal procession...and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him."

"In all these things we are more than conquerors (*hyper-nike*) through him who loved us." *Romans 8:37*

The Secret: To live victoriously, I only have to stay chained to His chariot!



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes