

2 TIMOTHY 4:9-18

BATTLES TO THE VERY END

“Do your best to come to me soon. For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense, no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me, the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”¹

The final scene of the film, “We Were Soldiers,” shows the aftermath of battle as the West Point Cadet Choir sings a beautiful hymn. This particular hymn was sung at the funeral of President Ronald Reagan. The hymn, entitled “The Mansions of the Lord,” presents haunting lyrics that while admittedly militaristic, are entirely appropriate to commemorate the end of battles for a saint of God who has at last gone to her or to his eternal rest. This is the song, which I have come to love.

To fallen soldiers let us sing
Where no rockets fly nor bullets wing
Our broken brothers let us bring
To the mansions of the Lord

No more bleeding, no more fight
No prayers pleading through the night
Just divine embrace, eternal light
In the mansions of the Lord

Where no mothers cry and no children weep
We will stand and guard though the angels sleep
All through the ages safely keep
the mansions of the Lord²

One day, each Christian listening to the message this day will have fought the final battle. As he wrote the words of our text, the end of the Apostle’s battles could be measured in days, or perhaps even in hours. Shortly, the old man would be forced to kneel on Roman flagstones and a swordsman would raise a large sword above the old man’s outstretched neck. One swift, downward motion and the flashing sword would ensure an inglorious end for the aged Apostle.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Randall Smith, (Music by Nick Glennie-Smith), “Mansions of the Lord,” 2002

Many would see this as a deserved ending of his life; even many professing Christians, would sarcastically assert that he got what he deserved since he was so unreasonable, always refusing to compromise, always insisting on fidelity to the unseen God. However, another chapter that is unseen will shortly unfold. Paul alludes to that additional chapter when he writes, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen” [2 TIMOTHY 4:18].

Usually, our closing comments in personal missives are mundane. Though the Apostle’s comments turn to the personal, they are anything but mundane. The old man speaks of people and places, includes some exhortations and reveals that he is fully engaged in ministry to the very end. The final paragraphs are poignant. The old man longs to see the young theologian one final time. He knows he is facing the final battle alone, so he requests that Timothy hurry to Rome, bringing John Mark with him. Despite the dire situation, in the face of certain death the old man expresses confidence in the Master whom he has served through the many years.

Though we may not know the means by which we will die, we each know that we will die alone—no one else can do the dying for us. We will long for the fleeting comfort of those close friends on whom we have leaned in the past; and we will be keenly aware of those who fled, unable to stand with us. Above all, we must be forewarned that we will be engaged in combat throughout our lives if we are Christians—*we will have battles to the very end.*

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS A BATTLE — It is perhaps surprising to many to discover that the Apostle Paul was so militaristic, frequently using allusions to combat to emphasise the Christian life. It is not that he advocated violence—he did not, rather he recognised that the child of God will be constantly engaged in spiritual battle with unseen forces. Recall a few examples of the Apostle’s view of the Christian life.

In the Ephesian encyclical, Paul urged believers to prepare for combat. “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak” [EPHESIANS 6:10-20].

This theme was displayed prominently in an earlier letter to the Thessalonian Christians when Paul wrote, “Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing” [1 THESSALONIANS 5:8-11].

In the sixth chapter of the Second Letter to the saints in Corinth, the Apostle asserts that Christians commend themselves to God “with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left” [2 CORINTHIANS 6:7]

In that same missive, Paul urged believers to engage in spiritual combat. He wrote, “Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ, being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete” [2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-6].

When he cautioned the Corinthian believers against an unseemly effort to speak in other languages, he used a distinctly military illustration when he wrote, “If the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle? So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:8, 9]?

In the Letter to Roman Christians, Paul wrote, “Do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness” [ROMANS 6:12, 13 HCSB]. The word *hóplon* is often translated “instrument,” and it is so translated in the ESV in this passage. However, the word referred to any tool, instrument or means.³ In the ESV, the word is translated “weapons” in the passages previously cited from the Second Corinthian Letter and it is translated “armor” in ROMANS 13:12. It would be in keeping with the militaristic themes to which Paul often appealed to understand that in ROMANS 6:12, 13 he spoke of weapons. It may be of interest to note that Greek warriors were referred to as Hoplites, derived from the shield (*hóplon*) they carried.

You will undoubtedly recall that shortly before he gave the words of our text to his amanuensis, Paul had spoken pointedly of his life as a battle. The Apostle testified, “I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” [2 TIMOTHY 4:6, 7].

Clarify the issue of conflict and peace so that you understand the teaching of the Word. Christians are not a warlike people. We seek peace with all people. We are taught in the Word, “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” [ROMANS 12:17-21].

Remember the teaching we have received from the Apostle to the Jews in his first letter. “All of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For

³ See Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, **Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains** (United Bible Societies, New York, NY 1996) 53; William Arndt, Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature : A Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur** (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL 1979) 575

‘Whoever desires to love life
and see good days,
let him keep his tongue from evil
and his lips from speaking deceit;
let him turn away from evil and do good;
let him seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are open to their prayer.
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.’”

[1 PETER 3:8-12]

We do have battles, but our battles are not with people. As we saw when we read Paul’s instruction in the Ephesian Letter, “We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” **[EPHESIANS 6:12]**. Again, recall the Apostle’s teaching in the Second Corinthian Letter when we read, “Though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh” **[2 CORINTHIANS 10:3]**.

As Christians, we recognise that our opposition is spiritual. We know that people, even professing Christians, may attack us, seeking to injure us or even destroy us. Because we have committed our life to Christ Jesus the Lord, we recognise that behind the assaults we experience is the malevolence of the wicked one who opposes all that is righteous and godly. If we surrender to the flesh and strike out as those attacking us strike out at us, we will have given way to the flesh and dishonoured the Lord God by whose Name we are called.

An unknown author, seeking to encourage persecuted believers, wrote them, urging them to look back to what they had come through before looking forward to what awaited them. He urged battle-weary saints, “Recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For,

‘Yet a little while,
and the coming one will come and will not delay;
but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him.’

“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls” **[HEBREWS 10:32-39]**.

This teaching is predicated on Jesus’ own instruction. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword... A person’s enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” **[MATTHEW 10:34, 36-38]**.

This teaching is emphasised when Paul wrote, “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him” [2 TIMOTHY 2:3, 4]. This stern challenge was but a reminder of what had gone before in Timothy’s life. Paul had previously written, “This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience” [1 TIMOTHY 1:18, 19a].

The challenge to the individual who endeavours to follow the Saviour has not changed. Christians were commanded in the Apostle’s earlier Letter to Timothy, “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen” [1 TIMOTHY 6:12-16]. Amen, indeed.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE MUST END IN WHAT APPEARS TO BE DEFEAT — Elsewhere, Paul wrote, “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” [1 CORINTHIANS 15:26]. Until Christ returns, we who follow the Master are subject to death; of course, this is true for all mankind, sinner and saint alike. Whether we exit this life honoured by society and mourned because others keenly feel our absence or whether we leave unnoticed and unmourned, we will nevertheless face death. This is brought home pointedly when the Apostle, citing the Psalmist, states, “It is written,

‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’”

[ROMANS 8:36]

I do not want anyone to get the idea that we are always defeated in every battle. Christians can anticipate victory in the battles they shall face throughout this life; and we are confident that we shall be victorious in Christ at the last. As you rely on the Master, you should anticipate victory in the trials you are called to endure. Nevertheless, at the last we each must know that we shall succumb to the last enemy—we will pass through the dark waters separating this life from the life to come.

From the standpoint of this dark, dying world, it may appear as if the Christian has foolishly chosen to follow the Saviour. The choice appears foolish only because earth dwellers are incapable of thinking clearly—the earth dweller’s mind is blinded by the god of this world [see 2 CORINTHIANS 4:4]. The Apostle’s life will be violently taken from him in a very short while. Paul was a Roman citizen, a fact that he had used to his advantage on several occasions, most notably in Philippi and later in Jerusalem. Let’s look at those two instances so we understand the significance of the matter.

In Philippi, Paul and Silas were beaten and incarcerated resulting from a charge of sedition or lese majesté. After a dramatic intervention by God Himself, the missionaries’ wounds were treated by the jailer. The next morning, the magistrates sent word via the police to release the missionaries, running them out of town. However, it would not be quite that simple if Paul had anything to say about the matter. Listen to the account given by Luke.

“The jailer reported these words to Paul, saying, ‘The magistrates have sent to let you go. Therefore, come out now and go in peace.’ But Paul said to them, ‘They have beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and do they now throw us out secretly? No! Let them come themselves and take us out.’ The police reported these words to the magistrates, and they were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens. So they came and apologized to them. And they took them out and asked them to leave the city” [ACTS 16:36-39].

Take special note that the magistrates “were afraid when they heard that they were Roman citizens” [ACTS 16:38]. The magistrates had every reason to be afraid! Inflicting corporal punishment on a Roman citizen was a serious offence! The serious nature of the offence was compounded by the fact that the punishment had been meted out without a trial. The magistrates had perpetuated a grave injustice. At a minimum, they were liable to be removed from office. Perhaps more worrisome was that the status of the city as a Roman colony had been jeopardised through the action of the magistrates. The consequences for the city could be financially ruinous. Worse still, the freedom the city enjoyed was placed in doubt by their violation of Roman law. Citizenship became Paul’s means of ensuring that the nascent congregation in Philippi would continue without harassment or interdiction from the authorities.

In Jerusalem, Paul was rescued from an enraged Jewish mob by Roman guards stationed in the city. Charges flew as the mob accused Paul of causing a major disturbance, so the tribune ordered that Paul was to be examined by flogging. Flogging, or scourging, was a frightful ordeal in which an individual was beaten with a flagellum—a wooden handle to which were attached leather thongs knotted and often tipped with bits of metal and bone. The ordeal was so terrible that those beaten often died from loss of blood and subsequent infection. The beating that was ordered would have surpassed anything Paul had received prior to that time.

The soldiers stretched Paul out face down, tying him hand and foot with leather thongs to hold his body taut in order to magnify the impact of the blows. Before the scourging began, he asked the centurion preparing to beat him, “Is it lawful for you to flog a man who is a Roman citizen and uncondemned” [ACTS 22:25]? The question appears almost casual; but the impact of the question on the centurion was anything but casual.

“When the centurion heard this, he went to the tribune and said to him, ‘What are you about to do? For this man is a Roman citizen.’ So the tribune came and said to him, ‘Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?’ And he said, ‘Yes.’ The tribune answered, ‘I bought this citizenship for a large sum.’ Paul said, ‘But I am a citizen by birth.’ So those who were about to examine him withdrew from him immediately, and the tribune also was afraid, for he realized that Paul was a Roman citizen and that he had bound him” [ACTS 22:26-29].

As in the former instance, the tribune had every reason for fear. He had almost beaten a Roman citizen, and that without a trial. It was violation of a most basic right of citizenship—the right to be secure in one’s person. At the very least, had the examination by flagellation been carried out, Lysias’ military career would have been over; at the most, it could have meant that Lysias himself would be put to death.

Citizenship was a great privilege in that ancient world, but it could only go so far. Ultimately, Paul was sentenced to death under Nero. As a citizen, he would not be crucified; neither would he be burned alive as some would suffer under the mad emperor. The Apostle would be beheaded as a privilege of citizenship. His execution would be reasonably quick—he would kneel and the executioner’s sword would swiftly arc downward to strike his outstretched neck and that would be the end of life for the Apostle to the Gentiles.

The man who was accused of turning the world upside down [see **ACTS 17:6**] would be rudely dragged from the Tullianum where he was incarcerated and forced to kneel before being executed. His earthly remains would be cast into an unmarked grave so that no one would be able to show respect to his memory through proper burial rites. Roman citizens were normally spared execution; practically the only charge that carried the penalty of capital punishment was treason. Because he confessed Jesus as Master, the Apostle could be charged with treason against the Emperor. Therefore, he was subject to the penalty of death.

I'm not suggesting that you will be charged as treasonous if you are a follower of the Christ. Perhaps that will be the case at some point in the future, but it is assuredly not the case today. However, one need not be a prophet to recognise disturbing trends in contemporary society as the Christian Faith is assailed by a variety of opponents.

Anyone who believes society is a friend of the Christian Faith must ignore the attitudes regnant in contemporary society—society has never been disposed to accept the faithful. Jesus warned His followers, “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets” [**LUKE 6:26**]. The Apostle of Love cautions believers, “Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you” [**1 JOHN 3:13**]. In saying this, John is echoing the words the Master offered up in His High Priestly prayer. “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” [**JOHN 17:14-16**].

Lest some Christian should despair, imagining that Jesus has not included us who follow in the footsteps of those earlier disciples, listen to His request of the Father in that prayer, “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” [**JOHN 17:20-26**].

Increasingly, the prevalent sentiment expressed within society is that the Faith of Christ the Lord should be confined to what is done on a Sunday morning within the four walls of the church building. The world still expects the churches to be available to meet their expectations of providing a wedding ceremony or to provide a funeral for their loved ones, but between the marriage and the burial, the inhabitants of this darkened world would prefer that Christians remain silent concerning their Faith. Whatever a Christian may do, they must not make the sinner feel uncomfortable about their lack of relationship to the True and Living God.

Tragically, even professed followers of the Master willingly adopt this attitude of silence in the face of wickedness. Even modern jurisprudence, taking the cue from legislators elected to direct the affairs of the nation, appears to have adopted the view that Christians should not be permitted to live out their Faith in the public arena. To hold to a biblical morality may be tolerated so long as some sinner is not made to feel uncomfortable; but you may be certain that the conscientious Christian will be publicly shamed and openly censured should she or he make their moral views known.

When bakers no longer have the right to refuse to compromise their conscience, when photographers are condemned and fined for refusing to surrender their moral code to the god of this age, when florists are compelled to participate in those acts which violate conscience, when teachers are not permitted to hold openly opinions that are contrary to modern sexual ethics and when Christian schools cannot expect students to adhere to biblical morality without being condemned by the courts, it cannot be denied that the Faith is under assault. My question is why should Christians expect that the courts would be righteous and moral in deciding such conflicts? Why would the faithful expect that Parliament and the various legislatures would be sympathetic to biblical morality when they have been primary promoters of the very views that are against the Word? Why would Christians appeal to the institutions of this world to act justly when it was those very institutions that promoted the worldview that now attacks the Faith?

The world considers the Christian to be a fool who throws away her life believing a fantasy. In the world's view, the Christian clings to a fallacious myth that steals fun and makes him a judgemental individual who cannot go along to get along. If the world thinks of the Christian at all, they believe she will come to the end of a miserable life unloved and unlovable. Just as Paul was deserted by Demas and left alone because others had appointments requiring their attention, so the Christian will die alone and without the comfort of friends in the end. Sadly, each of us does die alone! Except, we are not truly alone. Christ stands to receive His own as they enter Heaven; and the faithful may be distracted, but their prayers for comfort and strength ascend before the throne of God. And those prayers are heard. At the last, the child of God will be victorious.

VICTORY AWAITS THE CHILD OF GOD — Paul spoke of standing alone before Caesar's court. His statement may appear pathetic when he writes, "All deserted me" [2 TIMOTHY 4:16a]. However, what follows that truthful assertion is anything but pathetic. "The Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into His heavenly kingdom" [2 TIMOTHY 4:17, 18]. This is a declaration of victory. If we are seeking personal vindication in this life, we will be disappointed. However, if we are living for Christ and His glory, we are assured of victory.

Paul warned that each of us would face the last enemy, as we saw in the previous point. Nevertheless, the Apostle also spoke of what we anticipate as worshippers of the Living Christ. "I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’
‘O death, where is your victory?’
O death, where is your sting?’

"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" [1 CORINTHIANS 15:50-57].

We have been given a shouting song! “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!” The Apostle John in his First Letter to believers has written,

“I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.
I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.
I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.
I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.”

[1 JOHN 2:13, 14]

“You have overcome the evil one,” the Word assures; or as the Holman Christian Standard Bible renders John’s assessment of the struggles faced as young men, “You have had victory over the evil one.” In the fiery zeal of youthful faith, God says we have had victory over the evil one. The mere fact that we came to faith is a victorious act. The fact that we exchanged death for life is a victory. We stepped out of darkness and into the light, and that is victory. Underscore this truth—already the child of God is enjoying victory.

We are prone to focus on those few times when we didn’t win as resoundingly we wanted. Perhaps we succumbed to sinful impulse or perhaps we were trapped in a besetting sin. Our tendency is to wallow in our defeat, forgetting that we now have victory in Christ the Lord. The difference between a sheep and a pig is that a sheep may fall into sin, but a sheep will never enjoy lying down in the sin. A pig will seek out a stinking bog to lie down; but a sheep will want to be free of the mud. How precious is the encouragement we have received in the promise of God, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” **[1 JOHN 1:9]**.

How victorious is the testimony John has penned for believers! “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God’s seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother” **[1 JOHN 3:4-10]**.

The issue is not that we are sinless and thus victorious because we are sinless; the issue is that we no longer enjoy sinning because we are born from above and into the love of God! We no longer enjoy sin. We may experience a transient thrill, but we know we are defeated after we surrendered to the desire of the flesh and we cannot enjoy sin!

Consider another powerful encouragement that John has given to us who follow the Saviour. “Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” [1 JOHN 5:1-5]? That is powerful! ***This is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith!***

The Lord stood by Paul, and the Lord stands by you in your time of greatest need. The advance of the Faith was in question as Paul began his service in Corinth. The Apostle was hesitant, questioning whether he should continue in the city. However, the Lord appeared one night in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are My people” [ACTS 18:9, 10]. The Apostle stayed another year and a half, advancing the cause of Christ.

It appears that the Apostle is about to be defeated through execution—the sentence of death is pronounced and the Apostle stands alone. Except he isn’t alone. “The Lord stood by me and strengthened me” [2 TIMOTHY 4:17a]. What appeared to be defeat was victory, for the message of grace was fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles would hear it,

In what some will see as your greatest defeat, look beyond this moment and you will see the Lord standing with you to transform your defeat into victory. Who knows what will be accomplished through your courageous stand even though you appear to stand alone—except the Lord is standing with you. One of the great passages of the Word that has encouraged me on many occasions was written by an unknown writer. “By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible” [HEBREWS 11:24-27]. It is as though God pulled aside the curtain that separates time from eternity, saying to Moses, “Look up! I am your great reward. I am standing with you.” Just so, He will pull aside the curtain at just the right moment so that you can look up and see Him.

“I was rescued from the lion’s mouth!” Satan goes around as a roaring lion seeking someone to devour—but we who are redeemed anticipate that we shall be rescued from the lion’s mouth.

I’ve said this because some of you need encouragement today. Things look mighty dark, if your eyes are fixed on this world. There is uncertainty about the American election. Europe seems to stumble from one crisis to another. The Middle East is a boiling cauldron of unrest. China continues to stir up trouble in the Sea of Japan. Russia threatens Ukraine and the Baltic States. Jerusalem is surrounded on all sides and the times look very desperate. At just this moment we need to hear the Master’s voice, “Raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” [LUKE 21:28].

We stand on the cusp of victory. Jesus is coming again and we are on the winning side. Now is the time for Christians to stand firm, anticipating our greatest victory lies immediately ahead. Let the people of God pursue righteousness and the will of God. Even so, come Lord Jesus. Amen.