

Thanks be to God Which Giveth Victory

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn to 1 Corinthians, Chapter 15 and read.

Now to our Text, if you please. We are dealing with the theme, Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory. But we see it in its context. Context is what goes before and goes after, and this statement that we have is taken from the 57th verse, ought to be seen in its setting. Now the highest peak in this mountain range of eternal proof which we call 1 Corinthians 15 is probably, at least in my estimation, verse 20. Let me read it for you. "But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept." It is this fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead which has changed all the darkness of an earthly life without hope into a blaze of light that fills the heart with peace and joy eternally. This historical fact established by the certain testimony of creditable eye witnesses has arisen like the sun to dispel the cool chilling clouds that surround the heart as we contemplate death and the grave. Every one of us is aware of it. I heard this week that you can tell the difference between old age and youth by the response that one makes to the newspaper. When you turn to the obituary page before you turn to the sports section, then it is clear evidence that you have passed from youth into old age. And all of us are apprised by the fact that death is that goal that we shall all experience unless the Lord Jesus Christ comes. Many of us, as has been true for centuries past, are joyfully looking for the Uppertaker rather than the undertaker. But should it be that He tarries in His return then we know that it shall come to us as it has to our fathers – there shall come that hour, that time when loved ones gathered round shall say, "He is gone, he is gone." And we too will have stepped across that thin veil between time and eternity. We contemplate this step with joy and with peace and equanimity of mind and heart because the Lord Jesus has arisen from the dead. This fact and this alone has given to this event the meaning and significance that it ought to have. Without it there is nothing but gray gloom. The One Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, because He has risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept, has thereby given a promise of a harvest far greater in the future when the house of the husbandman shall be filled with that the fruit of His own dying. Have you ever stopped to think what joy there must be in the heart of God when sinners, repenting of their sin, in different countries, and think of it today as back in the Pacific it is day dawned, this Lord's day there are those that are meeting with Believers for the first time. He didn't come last week, and because of His tarrying and because of the faithful proclamation of the Word, there are some gathered with the Believers that have never been there before. There are little mountain communions, and in city groups, and in rural fellowship, individuals standing saying, "This past week I opened my heart and received the Lord Jesus Christ." And there are more today in the diadem of our Lord Jesus than there were last Lord's Day. This is the glorious fact that in His tarrying there is still being gathered to Him that harvest from His death. It is because Christ has died for our sin according to the Scripture and was buried and was raised again the third day, according the Scripture, that there is a Gospel, and it is this Gospel that has been preached by lay evangelists, by missionaries, by colporteurs carrying Scripture portions, by street evangelists in Japan and in the large cities of the Orient, this Gospel –this Good News– that has been the means of bringing men out of death into life has come directly out of the fact that Christ has been raised from the dead, and if you are here today with peace in your heart and joy at the knowledge of sins forgiven you are here with that peace and joy because Christ died and has risen from the dead.

The message that we proclaim to sinners far and near, wherever we can get one that will listen, is this, that if they will confess with the mouth Jesus to be Lord and believe in their heart that God hath raised Him from the dead they shall be saved. Now if you are here today and you are unsaved and you do not know that you are a child of God then this is the Gospel news for you, that if you will recognize that your crime, the crime we call sin was that you turned to your own way and reigned and ruled as God in your life, this was the reason why you were under the sentence of death, the Lord Jesus loved you and died for you in your place instead with the mountain of your guilt on Him, and God accepted His death for you, and that He has sealed this acceptance by raising Christ from the dead. Now, if you will confess with your mouth Jesus to be Lord, from henceforth and hereafter, as long as you shall live and for eternity, and if you will believe that He died for you in your place instead, the Scripture testimony is, you will be saved.

Now there could be no Gospel if there had not been resurrection. This salvation of which we have spoken, Thou shalt be saved....This salvation is far more inclusive than most people think. It includes of course deliverance from the penalty of sin, the removal of that mountain of guilt that separated you from God. But it is more than the removal of guilt and pardon for past transgressions. It is deliverance from the power of sin, by His indwelling presence. It is deliverance from the presence of sin, by His return for you in Glory. It is deliverance from the effect of sin in your mortal body by granting to you a glorious body, immortal and incorruptible, like unto His own Body of glory. So it's a complete salvation that the Lord Jesus died to bring to you. This good news isn't just pardon I say, but it carries us through all the years of time and right out into the endless ages of eternity. As the body of the Lord Jesus is the first fruit of the resurrection, so we are certain that in that day our bodies will be like His.

We saw last week that after the resurrection Christ ate fish and bread, but He didn't eat it in order to sustain His body, for the life was no longer in the blood, and need be nourished by the intake of food, but the life was in the Spirit. Yet He was capable of eating. He walked, but He needed not to walk. He wasn't limited to passing space by walking, for He could pass through the door into the closed room and could rise into the presence of the Father. And so we find that we have in this some intimation of what our bodies will be, that we will be able to eat and to move and to walk, but we will not be limited to the necessity of eating or walking or of respecting gravity. In that day, we shall have bodies like unto His. Since the Scripture declares that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, it will profit us greatly to consider carefully the nature of this Kingdom into which we are to come with these glorious bodies. Now I do this in anticipation of our considering in a few moments the theme.

We'll only take a few moments now to add to what we saw last week. The first thing I would have you know about this Kingdom of which you read here in the 50th verse is that this Kingdom is not synonymous with Christian civilization. In Christian civilization flesh and blood is the common characteristic, but in this Kingdom which is to come flesh and blood will not be necessary, (in fact it will not even be possible to share in it if you possess flesh and blood) flesh and bone indeed, but the life in this Kingdom cannot reside in the blood. Isn't it strange that for 50 years in America we have been hearing about the Kingdom of God, and our religious sociologists have been trying to bring in the Kingdom by legislation and social maneuvering. After 50 years or longer, for it was back about 1870 that R... wrote the first volume endeavoring to equate the Kingdom of God with Society. All of these years men have been trying to bring in the Kingdom — do you know of a village, do you know of a hamlet, much less a town or a city, where Christ reigns and rules and governs and controls. I don't. I do not know of a single such community. Unfortunately it is still true that Satan is the god of this world. After 50 years or a hundred years of effort to bring in the Kingdom, we have seen during these last 50 years Communism come in, a Kingdom of Darkness, Satan's great masterpiece of governmental strategy, just as Islam is his great masterpiece of religious strategy. But during this past 50 years or 100 years we do not find the Kingdom of God in any sense nearer than when men began to divert themselves from the task of preaching the Gospel to that of bringing in the Kingdom. Our Lord Jesus once and for all established that His Kingdom was not to be equated with Society as we now know it. He answered Pilate's question with these words, "My Kingdom is not of this world. If My Kingdom were of this world, then would My servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews, but now is My Kingdom not from hence" (Joh. 18:36). And when you speak of bringing in the Kingdom, please hereafter do not equate it with a metamorphosis of Society that will bring the Kingdom of God here to earth. It just doesn't come that way. It isn't to be equated with Society as such. Furthermore we have seen and intimated this Kingdom is not composed of mortal men; flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. We are in mortal bodies now. We were in mortal bodies when we repented and believed the Gospel, but in that day when we enter into that Kingdom we will have immortal and incorruptible bodies. "The Lord Himself shall descend with a shout, with a voice of the Archangel, with the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them and so shall we be with the Lord" (I The. 4:16). And this is the preparation for the inauguration of the Kingdom, the return of the King in this visible splendor and authority.

Those of us, should we be alive at that time must, as those who have already died, have new bodies. And thus we read here that when we see Him we shall be like Him. "The dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together." We shall see the Lord; "we shall be transformed in a moment and the twinkling of an eye into His image and into His likeness in preparation for our part with Him" (I Cor. 15:52). Now let it be clear that the Kingdom that is referred to here will not be revealed until Christ returns.

Dr. W. B. Riley¹ has written, “Christ has gone to receive for Himself a Kingdom and to return.” When Paul was delivering his charge to Timothy to preach the Word, be instant in season-out of season, he did it in the sight of God and the Lord Jesus Christ Whom he said should judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His Kingdom. But His appearing must precede His Kingdom. The order and the connection are established. The appearing first; the Kingdom afterwards, and the Kingdom the consequence of His appearing. There is no place in the Scripture that I know of where the Kingdom is presented as coming before He does. The King must be present if there is to be a Kingdom. The King Himself must be here to set it up.

Now, something of the nature of the Kingdom leads us to consider verses 51 – 57, the nature of the changes to be accomplished in us to prepare us for our place and part in the Kingdom. In this portion, 51-57, 56 rather, you have the words, “Behold I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we all shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed.” We could paraphrase Paul’s words this way, Listen carefully: “And I will state to you the facts which though they have not been known or recorded before are now being revealed through me.” (Pay close attention because these things, things I am going to state involve you. They reveal your future.) You ought to be interested in your future. It ought to concern you. You ought to know what is going to happen to you. God does not want you to be in ignorance. It could be that the Lord Jesus comes back today. I personally look for His imminent coming. I yearn for it. Those who try to tell me that He can’t come for X number of years thus do something to minimize the blessed hope in my heart and I can’t respond to it. I personally would love to see Him come before this Service is over, and I yearn for and long for His return. But whereas someone has said we should live as though He were coming within the hour, and we should plan as though He were not coming for a thousand years. This I believe is good advice and the manner in which we must approach the fact of His coming. We do not know when the Lord will come. It may be as we pointed out earlier that you will have to die. It may be that He will delay His coming and that you will go the way of all flesh and into the grave. But the Scripture teaches us that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. And the moment that your Spirit, you who are the Spirit, leave your body which is clay, you if you are in Christ will be with Christ. Now this is the glorious truth that you need to bear in mind. The Scripture does not teach Purgatory; it does not teach soul sleep; it does not teach an intermediate state. You say, “Well what about Paradise. What about Abraham’s Bosom.” Yes, before the death of Christ, the righteous dead, those that had died in faith, were carried to a place called Abraham’s Bosom. And there they awaited until their redemption should be effected. But our Lord, it is said, preached to them which were in prison. I believe, He went to them at that time even after He had died and given up His Spirit into death that He went to them in that time, and He said, Now is your redemption accomplished, That for which you have waited and longed and hoped. And now, and now you are to be taken with Me. And there is no longer an Abraham’s Bosom, no longer do those who die in Christ go to some intermediate place. The Scripture teaches, to be absent from the body is to be present then with the Lord. This is the glorious fact of our future. Should He therefore refrain from coming and tarry, you’ll go to be with Him. If He comes, you’ll go to be with Him. In either case therefore the means, whether it be Uppertaker, or undertaker it relatively inconsequential because you are to be with the Lord. Those that are dead, those that have died and gone to be with the Lord at His coming will be given glorified bodies, and those who are alive will have their bodies changed, into His image and likeness.

Now this is certain. You will notice the words that we have here, “we shall all be changed” (I Cor. 15:51). There is not going to be anyone in this Kingdom, according to what we have here, that is in a mortal body with life in the blood. With Charles Wesley therefore our hearts sing,

Our great Creator God
Who built this house of clay
Shall reinspire the breathless clod
In His appointed day.

From dust He formed us man
And shall we doubt His power?
No, surely the Almighty can

¹ Rev. Dr. William Bell Riley (1861-1947) Pastor of the First Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN. and educator.

Our molded dust restore.

Who breathed into our earth
The breath of life divine
Can by a new celestial birth
God and the sinner join.

Thus we the pledge receive
Of immortality
Sure that our bodies too shall live
Forever one with Thee.

This change is not only instant, indispensable, it is also instantaneous... in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump. Can anything be shorter than that? Can you reduce anything down to less space of time than that? It's no long process of transmutation; it's an instantaneous, supernatural change. In an unknown moment, when the living population least expects it the blast of the trumpet shall be heard. The Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. At that moment the dead in Christ shall rise, and in a moment, the twinkling of an eye shall change, from what they were to what they are going to be.

We also want to see that it is not only a certain and indispensable change, and an instantaneous change, but it's a glorious change. I mentioned a few moments ago W. B. Riley. He was my Pastor, and I knew him and loved him dearly. This dear man, now with the Lord some ten years or more, lived in the lovely expectation of our Lord's moment by moment return. And these were his words:

"When He comes, under whose hands these mighty changes shall be wrought, we shall all be changed from dishonor to glory, from weakness to power, from the natural body to the spiritual, and in that hour we shall shine forth as the children of the Kingdom."

I like to think of these bodies that shall be with all corruption gone, incorruptible; with all mortality gone, immortal; with all weakness gone, powerful; with all dishonor gone glorious; with all appetite gone spiritual.

No wonder Paul said, "Our manner of life is in heaven, from whence also we look for the city of the Lord Jesus Christ who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby subdue He is able to subdue all things to Himself" (Php. 3:20-21).

With John, the revelator, we should certainly cry out in the light of this, Even so come quickly, Lord Jesus. How we long to see Him. Do you? Is it the blessed hope. Are you living in the delightful thought that it could be today? No wonder when Paul saw this he could cry out, "Oh death where is thy sting; oh grave where is thy victory" (I Cor. 15:55). The sting of death is sin. The strength of sin is the law, "but thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 15:57).

I've collected several sacred poems, and one of these precious hymns brings this truth to us:

When the last trumpet's awful voice
This rending earth shall shake
When opening graves shall yield their charge
When dust to life awake.

Those bodies that corrupted fell
Shall incorrupt arise
And mortal form shall spring to life
Immortal in the skies.

Behold what heavenly prophet Son

Is now at last fulfilled.
And death yields up his ancient reign
And vanquished, quits the field.

Let faith exalt her joyful voice
And now in triumph sing,
O grave, where is thy victory,
And where, oh death, thy sting.

Isaac Watts

“Therefore,” said the Lord Jesus, “be ye also ready, for in such an hour as you think not the Son of Man cometh” (Mat. 24:44).

But we need to understand something of the nature of this triumph as it is to be ours during time, –Not only for eternity. When Paul cries out, “Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ,” he is thinking back, I am sure, to all of the problems that he had discussed in this letter... Problems that occurred in the Corinthian church. You recall how early in this epistle you read about schisms and division: One saying, “I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; and another, I am of Cephas; and another, I am of Christ” (I Cor. 1:12). And Paul said, In the light of this, in the light of the resurrection, of Christ, in the light that Paul and Apollos and Peter shall be changed, immortality and corruptibility cannot inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God. What is Paul? Who is Apollos? Who is Cephas? Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory over human personality. Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory over human loyalty. Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory over this tendency to schism and division which rent the church. Then you recall how that there was a sensual sin there in that church at Corinth. There was incest and fornication that had polluted the church and as Paul had dealt with this sin, and had condemned it and had forced the people to examine their hearts in the light of the uncleanness they had tolerated, what do we find? Paul is saying, Listen, just as there is victory over schism, just as there is victory over dissension, so there is victory over sensuality, over the temptations to the appetites of the flesh. You need not be victimized by your appetites, because of your mortal bodies. You need not be longer held in slavery to something that is going to vanish away. Thanks be to God which gives the victory over our appetites. There doesn’t have to be this failure. There doesn’t have to be this sin. Paul is looking backward to that which has caused grief, and heartache and shame, and powerlessness in the Church. And he is saying, there is victory in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then, you recall how there was spiritual pride of the individuals. There were some that had taken to themselves authority and how Paul had condemned them. Some that found their status in their activities and how Paul had said, what are you. He had said that he was willing to be anything for the glory of God. He was willing to become the least of the saints, he was willing to take the least place. Paul had had to deal with this matter of pride, matter of ambition, the matter of people trying to find their status in position rather than in Christ. And he said, “Listen. You don’t need to be victimized by your appetites for status. This thing which has tormented you and hounded you, hurt you and bruised you — victimized because you are not patted and petted and applauded as you think you should be. Oh, said Paul, don’t be brought into bondage to this, for this is part of the flesh. And it is going to be done away with and put off. There is victory over pride and vanity and ambition.” Then you recall how one of the problems of the church was false liberty. I can do this. I can do that. I can eat meat sacrificed to idols. Paul looks back to them and said, “Listen, what is your liberty. What difference does it make what you eat or what you don’t eat, what you see or what you don’t see, what you do or what you don’t do, where you go or where you don’t go. It is all for just a moment. There is no lasting enduring quality. It has no permanent significance. What difference does this make, what you see with your eyes, or hear with your ears, or you experience with your senses. There is something more important to life than that.” And so he says, “Thanks be to God Which giveth us the victory over our liberty. We have liberty, but we are not going to become libertarians, and use our liberty as the occasion of stumbling.”

Then there was something else. There was heresy. There was the creeping in of false doctrine and false teaching. And Paul thought back on that and he said, “Oh thanks be to God which giveth us the victory.” And there were those who were even attacking the resurrection because of their lies. And so Paul said there was victory over heresy. You do not need to be victimized by this. Then you recall how there was extravagance in the gifts and how they were carried away by the enjoyment

of the supernatural and using the supernatural gifts of the Spirit as play things instead of as tools for the glory of Christ. And Paul looks back and says, There is victory over that. There is victory there also.

Now how comes this victory to us? Well you see the principle is established back in Romans 7 when Paul has there spoken of his bondage, "Oh wretched man that I am. Who shall deliver me from the body of this death." And then he cries out. I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Where is the victory? Back in Romans 6, in the 6th verse. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Christ." There is the source of victory over schism, over fornication, over pride, over false liberty, over heresy, over extravagance. They are of the earth earthy, and there is victory. Why? Well, said Paul, come with me. When the Lord Jesus Christ died for you, you died with him. The Father made a covenant with the Son and it was this. Where He said, Father I will die for her, and I will die for him on the condition that you count that everything that happens to her and every benefit that is to be received be transmitted to them according to their faith. And so when Christ died, you died. And my dear Christian friend, the actual inference that we must derive is this, that if you go on in Schism, if you go on in fornication, if you go on in pride, or false liberty, or extravagance, or heresy, we do it out of defiance of God who made provision for it. You don't have to. You don't have to be victimized by your appetites. You don't have to be victimized by your pride. You don't have to seek your status at the expense of the unity of the Body of Christ. You don't have to. If you do it you do it in defiance of everything God could do to give victory. So now it becomes no longer a sin of ignorance, but it becomes now a deliberate sin of transgression for which there was no offering. There was offering for sins of ignorance, but there was no offering for deliberate transgression. It wasn't provided for in the Old Testament, for that man who set his will to defy God in disobedience there was provided no offering, but he was to be cut off. And so we are brought face to face with the fact that truth of deliverance becomes a dangerous thing. If I take it, and abide by it, and experience it, and live in it, then I have the blessing that it brings. But should it be that I have refused victory, choosing defeat, I choose shame rather than honor, I choose pride rather than humility, choosing heresy rather than truth, then we have identified ourselves as being unworthy of the Name we name and the testimony we bear. So victory is a dangerous thing. Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory. It is one thing to give it. It is another thing to take it. Are you taking victory? Are you desirous of victory? Do you want to be delivered from your personality? Do you want to be delivered from the tyranny of yourself? Do you want to be delivered from your service to the flesh, and the world, and the devil? Victory has been provided. There is victory. You do not need to go on any longer victimized by the habits of the past. You do not need to go on any longer victimized by the attitudes of the past. There is victory. Will you take it? Will you take it?

What is the result of it? Well we only know this. That for that sin of transgression committed willfully against God in the Old Testament there was no pardon, there was no offering, and they were to be cut off from the people. And the attitude that you have toward your sin determines your relationship to Christ. If you have been born of Him, you feel the same way about sin in your life that the Lord Jesus felt, as I have said so often, about the money changers and the oxen in His Father's Temple. You hate it. And the evidence that you are a child of God is that you will not make peace with sin, you will not compromise with it, you will not find some grounds of protection of it, but you will declare war against everything in your heart and life that is unlike Him.

There is victory given, but it must be provided for. We are crucified with Christ, and buried with Christ, and risen with Christ in order that we could have victory over mortality, over corruptibility, over personality, over the world, the flesh and the devil. "Who the Son makes free is free indeed" (Joh. 8:36). Do you want it? The evidence that you are a child of God today is that as the Spirit of God speaks to you and shows you any attitude or area of activity or interest or ambition that is contrary to the tenor of the Scripture and the mind of the Holy Ghost, against this you have declared war, with this you will not come to terms or peace, for you will have victory in the Lord Jesus Christ. You can have it. Your attitude toward it determines your relationship to Christ. "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." This was the testimony of Dr. Simpson². You should hear those words as we close from the hymn we sang. It will mean something more perhaps to your heart now:

² Albert Benjamin Simpson (1843-1919) founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance

There's a battle raging in the heavenly places
Sin and death and sickness with Satan leading on
With the hosts of earth and hell arrayed against us
How in all our weakness shall the fight be won.

Jesus giveth us the victory (There it is)
He who overcame on Calvary
Overcomes again in you and me
Hallelujah, Jesus giveth us the victory.

“Jesus Giveth Us the Victory” A.B. Simpson (1918)

I do not know what the problem is, but I know whatever He shows you is wrong He has shown you the means of victory in the Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever is contrary to His mind has His provision for deliverance in the finished work of Christ. This is Paul's testimony as he sees the Lord Jesus risen, he cries out. “Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Oh dear child, child of God, open your heart to take the victory in your need that the Lord Jesus died to provide. Shall we bow in prayer.

Our Father, we are here before Thee. There is no question about our failure, no question, Lord, about our weakness. There is no question, Lord, about our inclination toward sin, and that we are so easily tempted. And there is no question in our minds at all, Lord, about the weakness of our will and purpose; but, oh Father, all of these things Thou hast understood and Thou hast provided victory in the Lord Jesus Christ for people just as frail and weak and sinful as are we. And so, Father, whatever the need, may be, whatever the problem, may be, Lord, whatever the past may be, there is victory in the Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him, through our union with Him, through our identification with Him, breathe Father upon us and let not one of us go out content to go as we came, but may we, like thou hast instructed us, reckon ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ who giveth us the victory. In His Name and for His Sake we pray. Amen.

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, July 24, 1960 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

©PRBTMI 1960