

MORE THAN CONQUERORS...

Pastor Helen Turner
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INTRODUCTION

The path to the heavenly city led down through a valley...the valley of humiliation. Christian, who was on the journey from his former home in the City of Destruction to the City of Zion, had to stay on the King's highway, and so down through this valley it led, the valley of humiliation.

John Bunyan penned this story, 'The Pilgrim's Progress' from his prison cell in the 1670s – where he was held for preaching the gospel. He was a poor, humble man who was saved from a worldly life by an encounter with God, and would not agree to preach only in the Anglican church in England, and spent years in prison as a result (about 330 years ago).

And so we pick up the story from Part 1, the fourth stage...

But now, in this Valley of Humiliation, poor CHRISTIAN was hard put to it; for he had gone but a little way, before he noticed a foul fiend coming over the field to meet with him; his name was APOLLYON. Then CHRISTIAN began to be afraid, and to toss in his mind whether to go back or to stand his ground. But he considered again, that he had no armour for his back, and therefore thought that to turn his back to him might give him a greater advantage, so that he could pierce him with ease with his darts; therefore he resolved to be bold, and stand his ground. For, he thought, had I no more in my sights than the saving of my life, it would be the best way to stand.

So he went on, and APOLLYON met him. Now the monster was hideous to look upon; he was clothed with scales like a fish (and they are his pride); he had wings like a dragon; feet like a bear; and out of his belly came fire and smoke; and his mouth was as the mouth of a lion. When he had come up to CHRISTIAN, he looked at him with a disdainful expression, and began to question him this way:

***Apollyon.** Where have you come from, and where are you going?"*

***Chr.** I have come from the city of Destruction, which is the place of all evil, and am going to the City of Zion.*

***Apol.** By this I perceive you are one of my subjects; for all that country is mine, and I am the prince and god of it. How is it, then, that you have run away from your king? If it were it not that I hope you may do me more service, I would strike you now at one blow to the ground.*

(My summary of the next part... Now... Apollyon enters an argument with Christian to convince him to turn back to his domain. Apollyon tries flattering Christian, he pretends to be merciful, he points out what shameful ends servants of the Prince

come to, and how much better his life would be if he turned back, and finally throws condemnation on Christian for being unfaithful to his Prince.)

Apol. *You fainted when first setting out, when you were almost choked in the Gulf of Despond; you attempted wrong ways to be rid of your burden, when you should have waited till your Prince had taken it off; you sinfully slept and lost your choice thing; you were also almost persuaded to go back at the sight of the lions; and when you talk of your journey, and of what you have heard and seen, you are inwardly desirous of vain-glory in all that you say or do.*

Chr. *All this is true; and much more which you have left out: but the Prince whom I serve and honour is merciful and ready to forgive. But besides, these infirmities seized upon me in your country; for there I sucked them in, and I have groaned under them, being sorry for them, and have obtained pardon from my Prince.*

Apol. Then APOLLYON broke out into a grievous rage, saying, "I am an enemy to this Prince: I hate his person, his laws, and people: I have come out on purpose to oppose you."

Chr. APOLLYON, beware what you do; for I am in the King's highway, the way of holiness: therefore pay attention to yourself!

Apol. Then APOLLYON straddled himself over the whole breadth of the way, and said, "I am void of fear in this matter: prepare yourself to die! for I swear by my infernal den that you shall go no further; here I will spill your soul." And with that he threw a flaming dart at his breast; but CHRISTIAN had a shield in his hand, with which he caught it, and so prevented the danger of that. Then CHRISTIAN drew his sword, for he saw it was time to act; and APOLLYON very quickly assaulted him, throwing darts as thick as hail, which, notwithstanding all that CHRISTIAN could do to avoid it, APOLLYON wounded him in his head, his hand, and foot. This made CHRISTIAN give a little ground; APOLLYON therefore followed his work furiously, and CHRISTIAN again took courage, and resisted as manfully as he could. This hot combat lasted for above half a day, even till CHRISTIAN was almost quite exhausted. For you must know that CHRISTIAN, because of his wounds, grew weaker and weaker.

Then APOLLYON, seeing his opportunity, began to get up closer to CHRISTIAN, and wrestling with him, gave him a dreadful plunge: and with that, CHRISTIAN'S sword flew out of his hand.

Then APOLLYON said, "I am sure of you now"; and with that he had almost pressed him to death, so that CHRISTIAN began to despair of life. But as God would have it, while APOLLYON was making his last blow, by which to make a full end of this good man, CHRISTIAN nimbly reached out his hand for his sword, and caught it, saying, "Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; when I fall, I shall arise";

"Do not rejoice over me, my enemy; When I fall, I will arise; When I sit in darkness, The Lord will be a light to me." Micah 7:8

and with that, gave him a deadly thrust, which made him give ground, as one that had received his mortal wound. Seeing this, CHRISTIAN swung at him again, saying, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us".

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." **Romans 8:37**

And with that, APOLLYON spread out his dragon's wings, and fled,

"Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." **James 4:7**

and CHRISTIAN for a season saw him no more.

The nature of the battle has not changed in 2000 years of Christian history, or in 330 odd years since John Bunyan wrote about the journey from his prison cell in England. The same armour and Word of God is still ours, and 'yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us'. Let's read together:

***Rom 8:35-39** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 **Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.** 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

These are difficult times. Many people here today, and some of our church family not here today, children of God, followers of Jesus, are going through times of trouble. Today, the word of God remains sure – nothing can separate us from His love - in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

1. IN ALL THESE THINGS

What things? We are in a battle. We are guaranteed to be in a battle as believers. The forces of darkness are arrayed against the children of the Kingdom of light. Just like Bunyan's story – foul things are let loose against Christian on his journey to the heavenly city. The enemy of our soul desperately wants us to turn back, and not to have the influence on earth that children of light are called to.

Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, death/life, principalities, powers, present things, things to come, any created thing – there are spiritual and natural things, present, future, external, internal.... We are pressed, pressured, attacked even by things, circumstances, troubles. We are guaranteed by Jesus that

in this world, as His followers, **we will have tribulation**, trouble. Early church fathers and many men and women of God over the centuries have felt that if they were not experiencing troubles of some kind, that their zeal for God must have waned. That is so easily the case even today – when it's smooth sailing, we easily lose our passion for God, our spiritual edge, our call to populate eternity with Jesus followers. When the enemy sees us as a threat to his dark kingdom, he targets us. He hates passion for God. He hates it when we love God. So, he presses us, troubles us. Paul said he was 'pressed but not crushed'.

2 Cor 4:7-10 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.

What are 'all these things'? Well, sometimes trials come our way because we need to look at some things in our walk. See the 'from Gladwyn' in this month's newsletter. Are we living in the word, are we entertaining areas of sin, breaking covenant in how we raise our children or in our marriage, are we tithing to the Lord, fellowshiping? We *do* need to look at all these things. However, there are trials, hard times, that will come our way because we are followers of Jesus, when the enemy jumps on situations and does his best to bring us down and turn us back, and the Lord is at work, purifying and strengthening us. Yet whatever the reason, in all these things, as we look to our loving Saviour, and live in His love, we are more than conquerors. Troubles that come from failure on our part – as we look to Jesus, and walk in repentance – He causes all things to work together for good to them who love Him. He is at work in our season of trouble.

Let's look at a few who have gone before...and in all these things, been more than conquerors...

Paul, who was inspired to write this – he was once in prison in Philippi, with Silas, praying and praising at midnight. He knew ...perils, shipwrecks, slander, false brethren, etc...

2 Cor 11:24-29 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness — 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak?

...– but he was in all these things more than a conqueror!

Job – after losing his children, his wealth, his health, and having friends who misjudged Job and misunderstood God, he said - 'I know that my Redeemer lives...'.

Joseph – was sold as slave by his brothers, in prison, falsely accused – kept his integrity, faith, came out trusting God, hearing from God – not crushed, but triumphant. And to his brothers when he revealed his identity, prime minister/saviour of famine-struck, powerful Egypt, but the brother they had sold as a slave years ago, he said –

Gen 50:20-21 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. 21 Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph was MORE than a conqueror.

We might not be in hunger and nakedness, because of following Jesus, as happens in other times and places. We may not today be in severe persecution. Yet as real as ever is the war in the unseen realm, to hard press us on every side, to render us ineffective, and drain away our relationship with God, who so loved us, whose children we are once we have surrendered our life to Him. What storm are you in today, what distress, pressure, adverse circumstance, financial storm, relationship storm, family storm, attack on your personal integrity...Yet it is not in some things that we are conquerors – it is in ALL these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. We win through Him.

2. MORE THAN CONQUERORS ?

What is 'more than a conqueror'? Well a conqueror has had a battle. A conqueror is one who has won over an enemy. But 'more than a conqueror'? Now when two evenly matched opponents battle, and one wins, it is because he is better, more clever, smarter. But suppose the primary school cricket team played the Australian International cricket team and had them all out for 35 – the primary school cricket team would be 'more than conquerors'. Suppose my grandson Solomon battled the world champion sumo wrestler and won – Solomon would be more than a conqueror. Suppose almost 3 year old Samuel faced a 4 metre crocodile alone, and slew it – he would be more than a conqueror. Suppose – well we know these things are impossible, they make us laugh. But....

In personal weakness....Jesus is my source of strength – when we are weak, He is strong, His strength is perfected in our weakness...when Christian comes from a battle victorious, and has overcome worldly wisdom, but is not in him or herself clever – he is **more than a conqueror**. **1 Cor.1:26-29**. When a person who in themselves is weak, comes out victorious from the struggle, the tribulation, the distress – he is more than a conqueror. When brute force is overcome by love and meekness – Christian is more than a conqueror. When the base things of this world overcome the mighty, when God's grace triumphs in the sinner – he is more than a conqueror. When in the face of slander and evil speaking, Christian quietly waits for his salvation, in the sight of God he is more than a conqueror.

David & Goliath – he was 'but a lad'. He overcame the giant, not by his strength, but because he knew his God. He was more than a conqueror.

I knew a young lady once who was skin and bone, with the look of death. Her kidney disease had wasted her body. Dialysis was keeping her alive, but infection was raging. Yet today, she lives, she trusts God, she has been on mission trips, she is a living, walking testimony of a child of God who is more than a conqueror through Him who loved her.

Not 'self' motive like earthly conquerors – we have a different motivation: A worldly conqueror fights for victory with a motive that he will himself be the victor, or his country – it is a self-focussed motive, in fact. He becomes a conqueror by his own strength and by his motive, his desire to win. Our strength and our motive is not from ourselves; Christian's strength comes from the love of God which will never let him go, from which nothing can separate him. His love will provide for him, and see him victorious in all these things. Christian's motive is the glory of God, and his strength is not his, but it is the divine strength, Christ in me, the hope of glory. So, **because our strength and motive are superior, we are more than conquerors.**

Christian grows stronger under trial - Conquerors have to work, struggle, agonize to win the conquest. Have you ever seen an athlete collapse at the end of a race? Have you ever seen one collapse partway? Yet all Christians, when their faith is fixed in Jesus, have found increasing strength in trials, hard times, suffering for the Lord. Tribulation produces!

Rom 5:3-5** And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing **that tribulation produces** perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because **the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

This is not the way things work in the world!

We come out not only victorious, but stronger for the trial. Christian's patience, under temptation, when victorious, produces character, hope, fuelled by the love of God in our hearts. **Nay, yes, yet...In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us!**

Christian under persecution is more than a conqueror – when suffering for his or her faith, patiently enduring it. From Foxe's book of martyrs, about the Fourth Persecution, Under Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, A.D. 162 ...

*The principal of these martyrs were Vetius Agathus, a young man; **Blandina, a Christian lady, of a weak constitution**; Sanctus, a deacon of Vienna; red hot plates of brass were placed upon the tenderest parts of his body; Biblias, a weak woman, once an apostate. Attalus, of Pergamus; and Pothinus, the venerable bishop of Lyons, who was ninety years of age. Blandina, on the day when she and the three other champions were first brought into the amphitheater, she was suspended on a piece of wood fixed in the ground, and exposed as food for the wild beasts; at which time, by her earnest prayers, she encouraged others. But none of the wild beasts would touch her, so that she was remanded to prison. When she was again produced for the third and*

last time, she was accompanied by Ponticus, a youth of fifteen, and the constancy of their faith so enraged the multitude that neither the sex of the one nor the youth of the other were respected, being exposed to all manner of punishments and tortures. Being strengthened by Blandina, he persevered unto death; and she, after enduring all the torments heretofore mentioned, was at length slain with the sword. She was more than a conqueror. She was weak, yet conquered.

There are thousands of stories of Christians, weak yet strong, who suffered, yet went from this world to the next **more** than conquerors.

When the weak conquers, when the simple is wise and conquers, when the suffering one grows stronger under trouble, they are more, more, more than a conqueror. This is no ordinary conqueror, this is more than a conqueror through Him who loved us... and WE are more than conquerors through Him who loved us...this includes you when you are in Jesus....take heart Christian.

3. THROUGH HIM WHO LOVED US

The **love of Christ – is what drives us**, compels us... **2 Cor 5:14** *For the love of Christ compels us.* The mark of a Christian is that He is confident in the love of Jesus, and passionately loves Jesus in return. Driven by that passionate zeal, love of God – many through church history have not been afraid of their enemies, they did amazing things. Love for Jesus would not allow them to recant on their faith, inspired great reforms, great feats of carrying the gospel. By comparison, today, here and now, many are lukewarm in our love for Jesus. How easy it is today to be lulled to silence by the world around us, in comfort. Yet, **when the pressure comes, this is very often when real love and zeal for God gets fired up**, when we are challenged...(read **v. 35-37** again...) ‘yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us’. Are you in a time of trouble, of pressure, storm waves all around, desert time...this very battle is the time when you can grow strong in Him – he is stronger – take hold of His Word sword, pray with the Spirit, keep yourself in the love of God...in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. It’s the **power of His love...nothing can separate us from His love**. The devil tries through open, obvious trials, persecutions, privations or inner, soft, ‘bearhug’ pressures – to get the love of Christ out of you. Yet for God’s part – nothing can separate us from His love. Let’s heed the Word and **keep ourselves in the love of God** – by loving one another and keeping His word, and by praying in the Holy Spirit...**Jn.15:9,10; 1 Jn.4:12; Jude 20**.

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. What manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the sons of God. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and gave Himself for us. Greater love has no man than this – that a man should lay down his life for his friends. The love of God is deeper, wider, higher than we can imagine. And He has set His love on me. The love of God, that sent Jesus to Calvary, is the love that will not let me go. I can trust in His great love. Nothing can separate me from His love – nothing on earth below and nothing above. **SO – in all these things...I am more than a conqueror through Him who loved me. AMEN**