

Triumph in Christ

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter, or the section we read, and we'll look at chapter 2, and at verse 12. When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me and the Lord, my spirit was not at rest, because I did not find my brother Titus there.

So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved, and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not like so many peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

As we know, Paul loved this church, this church here in Corinth.

[1 : 17] And yet it was a church that caused him many heartaches. It was in many ways an amazing place, because while it was brimful of brilliant minds and eloquent speakers, it was a kind of place where if you really wanted to try anything, you could go to Corinth.

There were, in a sense, no boundaries. I'm sure there's a few modern cities like that. It was a city where there was freedom really to do anything.

And in many ways, it's the last place you would expect the gospel to flourish and to grow. And yet it was a city that Paul experienced great blessing and the saving of many souls.

And that's a great encouragement to us, because there are times that we can, I'm sure, feel down and feel overwhelmed by particular situations. At times we can look around our own communities and look around our cities and look around our land, and we say, well, what hope is there?

Well, we've always got to look to the one whose gospel it is. Our hope is not in ourselves. Our hope is not in our own strategy and our own eloquence and anything of these.

[2 : 36] Our hope is always in Christ and in his power. If we ever lose sight of that, we're going to go nowhere. And that was one of the things that was at the very heart of Paul.

He never lost sight of whose message he proclaimed. And he never lost sight of the one whose power alone was able to change hearts and lives. And that must be how it is with ourselves.

All was focused upon the Lord. But as we say, this was a city that caused Paul many problems, even as people turned to faith.

And it was a church that was full of issues and difficulties and problems. And Paul found these difficult. And we've got to remember that Paul actually was quite a sensitive soul.

A lot of people think that Paul was hard as nails. And there is no doubt, whatever, that he was a very robust kind of character. Because when you read his personal testimony and some of the things that he went through, the beatings, the stonings, when you see him being left for dead, he would just, he was like one of these boxers that just could not hit the canvas for any length of time.

[3 : 48] Just down and straight back up, down, straight back up. He was one of these just constantly getting up and going on. And of course it was by, again, by the strength and by the grace of God.

But he was also a sensitive soul. We must never lose sight of that. And there are times, as Paul writes, he bears his soul and something of that sensitivity comes out.

Paul was somebody who felt and got hurt. And grace produces sensitivity within our hearts. Grace produces a tender conscience.

And it's inevitable, but that the Christian will get hurt as they go along. And Paul was somebody who was not immune to these sort of things.

Now, Paul, of course, here is trying to correct something. Because Paul had to change his plans. And he had intended to enter with the church again in Corinth.

[4 : 52] And he tells us about that in 1 Corinthians. But he had to change his plan. The Corinthian church, however, thought that Paul was kind of, that he was the kind of person you couldn't depend on.

That he was the kind of person who says one thing and he does another. And this really affected the apostle Paul. And he was at pains to try and explain to them that it wasn't that he just said one thing and did another.

But that the purposes and plans of God had changed. And that he was always following God's purpose and plan. And Paul was really at pains to teach this.

And you can see why. Because Paul is saying, If they don't believe me, if they look upon me as being untrustworthy, then they're going to assume the message that I proclaim is also untrustworthy.

And so you can see Paul's dilemma while he is at them. And he's saying, Look, you've got to believe me. Because in verse 12 he says, For our boasters, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity, he says, and godly sincerity.

[6 : 15] There was an openness and an honesty about all that we were doing. We weren't trying to dupe you. We weren't trying to, in any way, twist things.

We were open. We were honest. And that's always how it has to be within the church. You know, the one place in all the wide world where there has to be openness and honesty, where everything has to be above board, is in the church.

Otherwise, we're finished. You see, the apostle is so adamant about this. Because, remember, we're preaching the truth.

I am the way, the truth, and the life, says Jesus. And always we try to be faithful to the truth. And so the church has to be true in its dealings.

There has to be an openness and honesty and a transparency in everything. And that's what the apostle is driving at. And so there has to be a consistency between his words at a personal level and also the words that he proclaims.

[7 : 25] So if he's saying to them, look, I'm going to come to you and I'm going to spend the winter with you, then it's up to him to try. But he had to change.

And we know in life, often we have to change our plans. Because life is always changing. And it's right for us to make our plans. But you and I know that life is always other things coming the way. Things change. And so the apostle is explaining to them, look, I had to go. I had to abandon the plans.

Because the Corinthian church were really putting the boot into the apostle. And they were saying, he's somebody that can't be trusted. And you know, the basic problem was this.

And it's a problem that happens far too often. The Corinthian church only knew a wee bit of it. They knew some of the facts, but they didn't know all the facts. And they built their attack upon Paul through misunderstanding.

[8 : 25] And that is happening in life all the time. It happens within our homes and our families. It happens within our churches. It happens at work.

It happens in our communities. It happens in relationships. That so often there is fallout. There is division. There is conflict. Because of misunderstanding.

People don't know all the facts. And we straight away make our judgment. And the Lord is always telling us, Judge not that you be not judged. We make our judgment according to what we know at a particular given time.

And often we don't even know. You know how often we've said it about people or about things. And you say, Oh, you know, I came to a...

And so often, maybe it's down the line. Maybe a year or maybe months. And you say to yourself, If I had known what I know now, I wouldn't have spoken in the way that I did.

[9 : 25] We've often said that. Because we've come to realize, Oh, there was another side. I didn't know that. And so this is what the apostle is at.

He's trying to address the problem. And he's trying to show the Corinthian church, It's not what you think. And then the apostle, After he's talking to them in this particular way, He then moves on to address, As we would say, The thorny problem, Or touches upon it anyway, The thorny problem of

discipline within the church.

And somebody in the church had caused a problem. And again, if we go back to 1 Corinthians, We can see one of the big problems that was in the church, An improper relationship.

And obviously, the person who was guilty here Had not initially accepted the discipline of the church. But Paul is showing that, As time went on, This person came to accept it.

And Paul is highlighting, really, That church discipline, All discipline, really, Is restorative in its intent. It's there in order to bring a person back.

[10:43] A parent disciplines a child. Not out of anger, Or just because, I'm in a bad mood today, Wallop. People, you just don't do that.

Discipline is always in order to correct. It's always in order to benefit the patient. It is always for the patient's good. When you love your children, You want the best for them, And you teach them in the way to go.

And that is what discipline is about. And discipline is always about the idea of restoring. Not about, You've done wrong forevermore, That's it, We're going to trample on you, Keep you underfoot, Your head's coming back up, No, we're going to keep pressing it down.

The apostle says, No, That is not the way to deal. There has to come a time, When the passion is repentant, When the passion has repented, And you have to bring that passion back.

You're always seeking, For the good, For the development, For the building up of. And so, This is part of what, What the apostle is saying. You mustn't keep on, And on, And on.

[11:55] We've got to, As we're told, To forgive and to forget. And the forgetting part, Is often the hardest. Because sometimes you can say to somebody, I forgive you.

But deep down, You don't really. You know, When it comes to forgiveness, We've always got to remember, That our forgiving people, Is tied into the very way, That the Lord forgives us.

Remember the Lord's prayer, Forgive us our debts. How? As we forgive our debtors. We're asking the Lord, To forgive us, Our wrongdoings, In the same way, As we forgive those, Who have done wrong to us.

Now that's a challenge. Do we? Are we really wanting God, To forgive us, In the same way, As we forgive those, Who have wronged us? Hand and heart.

And we have to look at our life, And look at our own, Forgiving of people. And do we say, Do we really forgive people? Because if we don't then, Are we saying to the Lord, Well, Just partially forgive me Lord?

[13:12] Or are we looking for a complete forgiveness? Or are we able to give this, Complete forgiveness? Anyway, We find that, The apostle, Is then going on, And he's showing, With a great burning drive, That is within his heart.

That he's going on, To proclaim the gospel. That's one of the things, That all was, In the apostle's heart. So we find that, Paul then goes on, To throw us, Part of the great commission, That Paul had to, To go, And preach the gospel.

And you know, One of the wonderful things, That the apostle always did, He always tried to go to places, Where people hadn't been before. And Paul tells us, Very simply, If we go to Romans, This is what he says, I make my ambition, To preach the gospel, Not where Christ, Has already been named, Lest I build, On someone else's, Foundation.

The apostle, Did not want to come, To where, Where a church, Was already flourishing, And growing, Lest he be charged, With, Building on, Another person's church, Another person's work. So he was very clear on that, That as he went, To plant a church, That he wasn't intruding, Upon anybody else, That he wasn't building, Upon what anybody else, Was doing, But that this was, An original work, That he was starting, He was planting a church, Where in another place.

[14:42] And so this is what, What the apostle, This is how he went. And then he tells us, That a door was opened, Unto him of the Lord. A door was opened, A door of opportunity.

This is one of the wonderful things, Beautiful expression, A door was opened. It's something you and I, Ought always to be praying for. If you're a believer today, Here, You be praying, As you go through life, That the Lord will constantly, Open doors for you, To speak a word to people.

Remember, You're a missionary, Every believer is a missionary. I think the most effective, Evangelism, That can ever take place, Is an evangelism, That does take place, In this community. Where Christians, Will speak, Not in a way of bombarding, Others with the gospel, But using the opportunities, That God gives to us, To speak to people.

And, Hopefully, Our very life will speak, Because remember, And we'll come to this in a moment, A Christian's life, Is either doing good, Or doing bad, Within the community, Within the workplace, Wherever you are, As people come to know you, And remember, The closer people, That you live with people, Or work with people, The more they get to know you.

[16:03] And if you, If you, If you live, If you're an angry person, And you're unreasonable, And you're the kind of person, That says one thing, And you do another, And if your life is completely, Inconsistent, And if you're operating, Shady dealings, And all these kind of things, And then come and tell a person, Now, You've got to be a Christian, They're going to say, Sorry, Your life, Doesn't match up, To this.

So we've always got to be careful, Because these are very challenging things. So we've always got to seek, That our life, Is, As the apostle was saying, As we said, Said that earlier on, That we behave with simplicity, And godly sincerity.

And then we will get the opportunity. So let us pray, That the Lord will give these, These open doors. Because you know people, Better than anybody else.

You build up relationships, At work, In your neighborhood, In the community. You get to know people, And ask the Lord, To give you the time, Because it might not be, The right time.

Sometimes Christians think, That every time is the right time, And that you've got to hit wherever. No. I think one of the great examples, Is Peter and John, Going up to the temple, And remember, Where the lame man was healed.

[17:29] That man was at the temple, Every day. Peter and John, Were passing him every day. But there came a day, When the man spoke to them. And that was the opportunity.

They took the initiative, When that man had opened the door. This man spoke to them, Ah, Here's an opportunity. Rather than us, Forcing ourselves upon him, He initiated the conversation. And these are often, Often indicators to us. So we need to be sensitive, Very, Very sensitive, To the opportunities, That God gives us.

But he will. He will open doors. We need to pray, That the Lord will open doors, In the preaching of the word. Because remember, Faith comes by hearing, And hearing by the word of God.

We pray that the Lord, Will open doors, Into people's hearts, Under the preaching. You know, That's one of the great things. Every time we come under, The word of God, We are in the place, Where God can, And does, Deal with people's souls.

[18:37] So when you come to church, A, Pray that your own heart, That your own soul, Will be opened afresh, To hear. Because you know, This is one of the wonderful things, About God's word, Is that, God is able to make, Old things become new.

The old things, Things that you're familiar with. It's just in the same way. It's just like eating. We maybe eat, There are some, Foods that we eat, Constantly.

Whether it's at breakfast time, Or, Tea time, Whatever. That we eat them, More than any other. But we don't get fed up of them, Because, Today's another day.

I'm not going to live, On what I had yesterday morning, For breakfast. I need another breakfast, This morning. And it's the same, With the gospel. Even although, We may be familiar with it, Even although, There are truths, That we know inside out, Today is another day.

And the Lord is able, To make the old, New. He's able to make it personal, He's able to make it real, And vibrant, And vital, In your heart.

[19:54] And if you today, Don't know Jesus Christ, As Savior, He's able today, To open your heart. And I hope you pray, If you're a believer today, That you're praying for those, In your own family.

Or even praying for those, That you know, In the church here, Who you know, Aren't believers. We've got to be careful, Because, It's a very personal thing, But, Maybe you've spoken to them. And they say, Well you know, I would like to be a believer, But up till now, I don't know Jesus Christ, As my Savior. I hope you're praying for them. And say, Lord, Please open their heart, So that whatever is holding them back, Whatever obstacles in the way, Lord remove it, So that they'll come, To know you as Savior.

And so, The apostle is here, Talking about, This door that was set, Open for him. But, Even although, This door was open, It tells us, That the spirit wasn't at rest, Because he couldn't find, His brother Titus.

So I took leave of them, And went on to Macedonia. Paul is giving a glimpse here, Of how important, We are to one another. Here's this, Robust, Strong, Christian.
[21 : 09] But he's needing, His brother Titus, At this time. And you will always find, That when Paul went out, Preaching, When he went out, That there was always, Somebody else.

Paul and Barnabas. Paul and Silas. Paul and Titus. When Jesus sent, The disciples out, On there, He sent them out, In twos.

You know, We weren't made, For isolation. Two are better than one, Because when one falls, The Bible says, The other can pull him up. That's a wonderful thing, About companionship.

God has given us, Friendships in life. And how important, Our friendships are. Iron sharpens iron. That's what the word tells us, In that very context, Of friendship.

And so, Although here's this great man, This passionate man, Yet we see, How important, The friendships, The bonds are, In the gospel. Thank the Lord, For your friends, For good friends, For friends that God has given you, And particularly friends, In the gospel.

[22 : 21] But then we find, That Paul, Breaks out as he always does, Into praise. Thanks be to God, Who in Christ, Always leads us, In triumphal procession.

Isn't that wonderful? Always leads us, In triumphal procession. Not sometimes, But always. One hundred, Times out of a hundred, The Lord leads us, In triumphal procession.

That may not be the way, Christianity looks, To the world today. A media man, Across the Atlantic, I read once, He, One of his famous quotes, Christianity, He said, Is for losers.

And he based that, Upon his assessment, Of Christ. That he had a cause, But he died, Only at the age of 33, A violent death.

And he looked on, Jesus, His dream, And he saw, Jesus' dream, Die with himself. That was it. And so, To this day, This is his assessment, That Christianity, Is for losers.

[23 : 33] Nothing, Could be further, From the truth. It is the very, Very, Very opposite. Christianity, Is not just, For winners, But Christianity, Is about winning.

It's about triumph. It makes, Those who are losers, Become winners. Because we triumph, In Christ. That's what happens. Our starting point, Today, If you're a believer, Your starting point, Is already victory.

Yes, There are daily battles. There are daily struggles. But the end result, My friend, Is victory. That's how we go on. From victory, To victory.

Because Jesus Christ, Has already won, This for us. And so, Christ leads us, In triumphal procession, And through us, Spreads the fragrance, Of the knowledge, Of him everywhere.

Now, Paul is writing here, And he's got the Roman procession, In mind. Here is this, Glorious procession, After war. And you find, That the leading commander, Or general, Is marching, Through the city, In his golden chariot.

[24 : 47] And behind him, Will come all the army, But behind that, Will come the spoils, Of war, And the captives. And often, These captives, Were being led, To the arena.

To the place of, Conflict, Battle and death. And so, There were two different, Pictures here. You had on the one hand, You had the, Picture of life, And vitality, And triumph, And victory, But you also had those, Who had been, Who were captive.

And, He goes on to say, For the aroma, Of Christ to God, Among them, Those who had been saved, And among those, Who are perishing. To one, A fragrance from death, To death to the other, A fragrance from life, To life.

Apparently, In those Roman processions, The Roman priests, Were throwing, Were burning incense, So there was this, Burning, There was this, Aroma, Of incense, All round.

And as, The, The general, Or the commander, Would be marching, Apparently, His sons, Marched in triumph, Behind his chariot.

[25 : 53] And I think, The apostle here, Is giving us a picture, Of just, What exactly, Is happening, At this particular time. Because, We are, The sons of God.

And we are, Following this, Triumphal procession. We are, Following the Lord, Jesus Christ. And there is this, Aroma, As it were, This, The fragrance, Of Christ.

And you'll notice, What it says, For we are the aroma, Of Christ to God. As God, Looks upon his people, It's like, A perfume, That has come, Through Jesus Christ.

His sacrifice, On the cross, This is what it has produced. A sweet, Smelling, Aroma, In the, As it were, Before God.

But just as this, Fragrance, That was going on, Was speaking about life, And about victory, It was also, Speaking about death, To those, Who had been captured.

[26 : 58] Now, Thanks be to God, And Christ, Who always leads us. But you know, The wonderful thing, That Jesus Christ, Is the great, Captain of salvation. He has broken, Into the enemy.

And instead of, Slaying by the millions, He has brought, Them captive, To himself, To make them, His own. He's not leading them, To death, But leading to life.

That's what Jesus is doing. That's what Jesus has done in you. He has brought light, And life, Into your heart. It's a wonderful concept, A wonderful thought.

But you know, Every believer's life, Ought, To be fragrant. And we mean this, In spiritual terms. If you get, Supposing you, You, You, You, Get fruit, Or get in it, You have really to break something, Before you get, The smell, Of what you have.

It's if you, Even if you just break something, As simply as a peach, Or an orange, Or whatever, It's when you get into it, That you really get the smell, Coming out of it. To the ladies, If somebody gives you, A bottle of perfume, You've got to break the seal, And open the lid, And it's then, That the fragrance, Will rise out.

[28 : 21] And you know, Spiritually, That is true as well. That it is in the breaking, In the crushing, Of the believer, So often, That the spiritual fragrance, The Christ-like aroma, Comes out.

And I'm sure, We know it, That some of those, Who have been, Most pressed down, By God's hand, Have brought something, Into their, Something into our lives.

You know, There are certain Christians, When you're with them, They go away, But it's like, Something lingers, It's like their presence, Lingers on.

The impact, That they made, In life, It doesn't just, Go immediately, It's got a lingering, Presence.

There are believers, Who have died, And it's almost as if, Their presence, Is still with us.

There is that, Lingering impact, Lingering effect. It's a wonderful thing. And that's what, What we have here. And then Paul says, As he's talking about, All these things, He then says, Who is sufficient, For these things?

[29 : 36] Who is? Well, If you are ever involved, In gospel work, At any level, And you all are, One way or another, You ask that question, You say, Who is sufficient, For these things?

Well, Paul answers that question, Later on, In chapter 3, He says in verse 5, Not that we, Are sufficient in ourselves, But our sufficiency, Is from God.

That's what it is. God is our hope, He's our encouragement, He's our stability, He is everything. And I hope today, My dear friends, That you know that in your heart.

Because it makes all the difference, To life. A life, I mean, When you boil it all down, What we are, Is what God has made us.

What we have, Is what God has given us. The word tells us that. What do you have, That you have not received? We're told that it's in Him, That we live, Move, And have our being.

[30 : 44] And I hope today, That you realize, That your sufficiency, Even of life itself, Is about Him, It's from Him, All, Has been given to us, By God.

Let us pray. O Lord, O God, We pray that, We may understand, More and more, Where this sufficiency, Comes from.

And that, It is in Christ, That we have this. We give thanks, O Lord, Today, For the sacrifice, Of Jesus, And of all that He has, Brought for us, That He has won, Victory for us, That He is in the business, Of transforming us, And changing us, And preparing us, For that great change, That will yet take place, A change has taken place, Where we have been brought, From darkness to light, We have been brought, From death to life, But an even greater change, Will take place, When we will be brought, When the storm is over, And changed into the calm, And when we will be, Immediately, Made Christ-like, Where we will be, Perfected in holiness, O Lord, We give thanks, For the great hope, That is in Christ, And help us all, To go forward, Looking to Jesus, Bless everybody here today, With health and strength, Prosperity and peace, And take away from us, Our sin, We pray to bless, The cup of tea, In the hall afterwards, And watch over us, And everything, In Jesus name we ask all, Amen.