

## The Victory That Overcometh

*"In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world"—John  
16:33*

WE are once again privileged to assemble on this, another first day of the week to remember our absent Lord in the way that has been appointed. We all realize that we enjoy this privilege through the mercy and kindness of our Heavenly Father—a privilege that is enjoyed by a very few people in the world today.

Restlessness, suspicion and fear exist throughout the world as probably never before. The outlook for the people of the world is indeed gloomy.

But for the people of God, there is comfort and assurance amidst these depressing surroundings. The comfort is in the realization that we have been called out and separated from the world and its affairs. The friends of God are few in our day. But in the purpose of God, His children will yet be a multitude that no man can number.

In the centre portion of our readings for today, we find that the Book of Ecclesiastes is unique in that it is almost wholly devoted to the demonstration of the fact that this mortal life cannot of itself give the pleasure and satisfaction which is supposed to be everyone's ambition to attain.

Ecclesiastes was written for warning rather than for comfort. The divine plan centred in Christ is fully set forth in the Scriptures, either typically, prophetically or historically, and thus the comfort of the Scriptures is great and undeniable.

**Ecclesiastes is the one book, above all others, that shows the vanity and folly of this mortal life.**

It teaches this simple but valuable lesson—that in the fairest possible circumstances, even with unlimited wealth and power at our disposal, the pursuit of happiness is vain. Mortality overshadows our brightest prospects and turns everything to dust and ashes.

In every age men have sought happiness and comfort in this life by surrounding themselves with conveniences and luxuries—and trying to find happiness in friendships. But finally all treasures must be relinquished:

"We brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

Solomon explored every avenue of human interest in both the material and the intellectual spheres. He possessed lands and cattle without number, with a multitude of servants to do his bidding; while his pre-eminence in wisdom, in music, in art gave him free rein to his every desire in the cultural field.

He kept such royal estate as had never previously been heard of, and was admired of all beholders, many coming from the uttermost parts of the earth.

There is no doubt that Solomon in all his glory as King of Israel by divine appointment foreshadowed the far more glorious and enduring reign of Christ over all nations in the millennium.

But the end of Solomon's reign brought strife and division, and in four centuries the Kingdom came to an end, showing that all human endeavours to set the world right are doomed to failure. Ecclesiastes exhorts us—

"Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight which He hath made crooked?"

The answer is, None—except the man at God's right hand. The oft-repeated phrase, "under the sun," is a keynote indicating that the sad conclusion of vanity and vexation of spirit is confined to things worldly.

Solomon refers to this sore travail that God hath given to the sons of men to afflict them—

"I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven.

"This sore travail hath God given to the sons of men to be exercised therewith (or, to afflict them)."

A wise Providence thus permits and even ordains distress and trouble as a preparation for such happiness as has not entered the heart of man to conceive. God's arrangements of present distress and future good is immutable, and God does it that men should fear before Him.

God at last will judge and settle every question. In the final analysis it shall be well with them that fear God.

Solomon speaks of wisdom in two senses. There is the wisdom in which there is much grief—

"For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (1:18).

And there is wisdom which has an inheritance (7:11)—

"Wisdom is good with an inheritance; and by it there is profit to them that see the sun."

This is the wisdom that God gives to those who are good in His sight. Many are wise enough to see the tragedy of this life, ending in disillusion and the grave. Only those who come under the operation of the Gospel are given the wisdom that shall "give to thine head an ornament of grace"—

"Wisdom is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting get understanding.

"She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee" (Prov. 4:7-9).

Many people seek refuge in various forms to which they do not give serious thought. But here we are taught that wisdom and knowledge are the only refuge.

There are many gems of true philosophy to be met with in Ecclesiastes—some to guard us against the many pitfalls that beset us in this life, and others to foster faith and trust in God.

There is a time and place for everything, and the day of recompense is set. We are not to be misled by appearances. The life of a just man may be cut off, while others may prolong their days in wickedness.

The conclusion of the whole matter states quite clearly the great reward for those who fear God and keep His commandments. The Word of God still stands fast. But few people today either read or believe it.

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IN the Acts of the Apostles, we have many things that were most surely believed among the Christian communities in the first century. And this most sure belief becomes ours when we look at the things that created their belief. They were events of which the writers had personal knowledge, even apart from the guiding help of the Holy Spirit which gave them utterance. They are described by Luke as those—

"Which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the Word."

In Acts 1:9 we read—

"When he (Jesus) had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight."

This was a wonderful sequel to a life dedicated wholly and intensely to God—a life of sorrow, suffering, and sacrifice. And now before him stretched an endless life of peace, purity and power. He is now in possession of a glorious nature.

**All down through the ages the servants of God have been strengthened by contemplating the certainty and glory of the hope set before them.**

Our Elder Brother is now at the right hand of God, strong and immortal, and has declared:

"Because I live, ye shall live also!"

Looking back upon the apostles, and seeing them in prison, oft in hunger and thirst, counted as the refuse of the earth—we see promises of those "infallible proofs" which convinced them of Christ's resurrection.

In the Acts of the Apostles this record bears on the face of it, a testimony of its own truth stamped with vigour and with lifelike examples of peoples and individuals. And from this we gain much help in the formation of our own character for we have on record the experiences of others who knew the Truth.

It may be termed an object lesson. A practical illustration of living the Truth is afforded us, and we do well to look at something of the record and gather what these primitive Christians were like, what they thought, how they conversed with one another, and so on.

It may be that by close attention we shall learn some of our own weaknesses and gain an exhortation therefrom, giving us strength which can only come from noble examples.

Learning from both failures and successes, the basis of our walk in the Truth is understood in the First Principles of the Oracles of God. Upon these First Principles is based a line of conduct, a course of life or conversation, as the Scriptures call it.

Our lives are intended to be moulded upon the understanding of all these foundation facts and principles. Those who regard doctrine as fit merely for people without reason to argue over, know nothing of the Truth and the influence and control it is intended to have on our lives, and over our characters.

**Without sound doctrine there can be no God-like character formation.**

For a right life is founded upon a belief, from the heart, of a "form of sound words"—the "looking for and hasting unto the coming of Christ"; the Hope of Israel reaching its highest point in the Kingdom of God on earth; the knowledge that sin brought death, the effects of which could only be reversed by the loving provision of Jesus Christ and his death as a condemnation of sin and the future, final destruction thereof.

All these teachings and more besides influenced the early Christians' conception of their duties in life; causing them to avoid the worldly entanglements of all sorts, and leading them to the right understanding of God's majesty, holiness and righteousness as declared in Jesus' death.

**Separateness, humility, reverence to God—all these characteristics arose out of the Apostolic doctrine which when departed from, led to a worldly spirit.**

By a study of this record, we can in some measure regain the atmosphere of those early times in order that we may the more readily impart this atmosphere into our own midst as brethren and sisters of Christ, striving to be like those early faithful ones.

And we are reminded here also of the fact that not all early Christians displayed great qualities. Many are the records of defaulters, grumblers and sowers of discord, wolves in sheep's clothing, apostates and self-willed ones. Yes, the faults common to man entered into the early ecclesia, often marring the joy and tarnishing the purity of standard set by the Apostles.

"A perfect Truth professed by an imperfect community" well describes this situation.

**We see from this that even in the Ecclesia, which had the Holy Spirit given to some of its members, there were imperfections and troubles.**

Yet while this thought may console us, it must not give us a false sense of security and comfort. The very facts recorded and their bitter and tragic results in disruption and universal

apostasy, and our knowledge derived from the record, should at least help us individually to become vigilant lest we be swallowed up in the general collapse of earthly affairs.

In the midst of much distressful opposition and trying circumstances, our aim should be **to develop a balanced character**, taking a soberly discerned scriptural view of our duties in the Truth. We come to this conclusion solely from reading the evidence, and a discerning judgment scripturally cleansed.

Most of us probably are prone to be influenced strongly by our prejudices, our feelings, our emotions, instead of by our reason, scripturally enlightened. A study of the early Christians, what they taught, what they were warned and what they did, should help us as to the true perspective of our duties in the Truth.

It is a sad day in the life of anyone, when they lose their sense of right and wrong.

As often as we read this record of the Acts of the Apostles, we should find our review of these early Christian days most enlightening, interesting and beneficial in the lessons they hold for our days.

From the Acts of the Apostles we have had a brief resume of the type of men and women that will be part of the new order when our Elder Brother returns. The Word of God has enlightened us on many occasions with regard to the state and condition that will then exist. And there will reign with Christ all those men and women who during these ages of probation pleased God by their submission and conformity to Christ.

**This is where the tremendous power of the case comes in. We are not dealing with a theory of things, but with a purpose of God.**

The purpose of God can never fail, for it depends upon His Own creative power. Let God enunciate a purpose, and men have before them a stupendous and solid foundation. This is the position of the Gospel of the Kingdom. God has declared that He will set up a Kingdom that will never be destroyed and in this Kingdom His Son shall be the head, and with him will be a host of kings and priests developed in times of darkness. No member of that host will be there without a history, without a character. No man or woman will enter into the Kingdom of God if they do not deserve it according to God's standards.

**Therefore the most important thing is GOD'S STANDARDS and as bearing upon our present life, nothing is more unreal and more unimportant in popular estimation than this.**

If we are influenced by popular estimation, we are liable to fail. In a reasonable sense in this matter, we are of God as determining destiny. There is where it is so important to pursue that line of life that enables us to come under its power and to avoid all associations that have a contrary effect.

People see this very clearly when they come to die; the victory comes in seeing it while we are yet ALIVE.

This victory is only to be achieved by the weapons God has given us. To that end we are told to "put on the WHOLE armour of God;" do not leave off any part. The Scripture of Truth is the armour, and we cannot get the means of victory anywhere else.

The man or woman of God will persevere in the ways of wisdom, and they will be rewarded, for God is on the side of those who faithfully fight the battle appointed for the sons of men. The nature of things is on their side as well, for who can bring their mind into habitual contact with the Bible without having their minds conformed to its ideas and principles?

**This victory is indispensable. All the promises are to those that overcome.**

The battle in which this overcoming has to be achieved is with diversified foes. We have to fight ourselves, fight to make of ourselves the type of person fit for the Master's use. This battle, brethren and sisters, is endless while we have breath in our bodies. Our strivings must be to make

ourselves over. We all know what this battle is. But we will win if we keep our eyes on Christ, have faith and walk humbly before our God. John says—

"This is the victory that overcometh: our faith."

Faith is the mental discernment and conviction of facts not seen with the natural eye, but to be discerned by the mental eye. This was the position of multitudes of believers in the first century to whom

Peter therefore had to say concerning Christ—

"Whom, having not seen, ye love."

It seems impossible to know Christ without loving him. And it is impossible to read the Bible without getting a clear understanding of what is involved in it, and a determination not to be defeated by anything in the effort to secure the unspeakable prize of everlasting life which Christ has invited us to possess.

We shall have failures but let us not be discouraged. We have a merciful and faithful High Priest. He ever liveth to make intercession for those who are engaged in the battle with weak flesh, a battle to which he has summoned us.

The shining heights of victory are ahead, we are told to be strong and of good courage in the conflict. We remember the words of our Elder Brother—

"In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world." —

R. H.

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