

Handfuls on Purpose-2 Corinthians-James Smith

Handfuls on Purpose James Smith, 1943 2 CORINTHIANS

2 Corinthians 2:14-17 THE TRIUMPHANT LIFE.

"Thanks be unto God, who always causes us to triumph in Christ" (v. 14). The life that has always been led on in triumph should indeed be a thankful one. There are so many seeming failures in one's experience. What are the secrets of a victorious life? In those few verses as above, we note some of them.

I. A Life in Christ. "God causes us to triumph in Christ." There is no possibility of living the victorious life, in God's sight, put of Christ. To be in Christ is to be at one with Him, and so entirely yielded to His will that His will will be done in us. As the apostle put it, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). "We know that we dwell in Him, because He has given us of His Spirit" (1 John 4:13).

II. A Life that Reveals Something of the Wisdom of God. "He makes manifest the savor of His knowledge by us" (v. 14). The guiding principle in the Christian life is the truth revealed in His Word (2 Corinthians 4:2). Those led by the Spirit of God will surely be witnesses to something higher and nobler than the wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God.

III. A Life that has a Sweet Savor of Christ unto God. "For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ" (v. 15). "Christ gave Himself for us an offering to God for a sweet smelling savor" (Ephesians 5:2). Those who have been partakers of that offering are to be partakers also of the same sweet savor unto God. He could say: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," for He knew that all His interests committed to His Son would be safe and successful. Let us so seek to please God.

IV. A Life that Affects both Saved and Unsaved. "A savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish" (v. 15). The influence of one Christian's life can be made a confirmation to another who loves the same Lord. The "savor of Christ," like the fragrance of the rose, can be easily detected by those who are saved, but to those who are perishing it smells condemnation, so they don't like it (v. 16).

V. A Life True to the Word of God. "We are not as many which corrupt the Word of God" (v. 17). Those who walk in craftiness are sure to handle the Word of God deceitfully (chapter 4:2). If the heart is not true to God, the life will not be true to His Word. It is easy to corrupt God's message by mingling it with Christ dishonoring philosophies and the traditions of men. There can be no spiritual victory for those who have gone out of the way (Colossians 2:8).

VI. A Life Lived in the Presence of God. "In the sight of God speak we in Christ" (v. 17). Abiding in Christ and practicing the presence of God in the daily life is the evidence of vanquishing power. This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Faith in Him who is greater than all that can be against us. "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God. "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

2 Corinthians 4:1-7 THE GOD OF THIS AGE.

"The God of this age has blinded the thoughts of the unbelieving, that the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them" (R.V., margin). This Scripture is burdened with neglected but tremendous realities. There are mighty spiritual forces that war against the higher interests of the souls of men. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness" (Ephesians 6:12). All under the leadership of "the God of this age."

I. His Personality. This God is no mere phantom, but a great and mighty spiritual individuality. So great that even "Michael the archangel" did not dare to use abusive terms when contending with him (Jude 9). It was no ordinary wicked spirit that could dare to tempt the Lord Jesus Christ with the kingdoms of this world (Matthew 4:8, 9). Even the Lord did not sneer at his folly and ridicule his presumption. He simply said: "Get you hence, Satan." This is not language suitable to some unseen evil influence, but to the "prince of devils."

II. His Position. He is "the God of this age." This age is the dispensation of the ministry of the Holy Spirit; it is also the "hour and the

power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). In John's Gospel Satan is called "the prince of this world" three times; also "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:2). It was doubtless under his influence that the rulers of this world killed the Prince of Life, for he "deceives the whole world" (Rev. 12:9). The God of this age is not worshiped and obeyed as an ugly, cruel-faced devil, but as an "angel of light," for Satan has so transformed himself (2 Corinthians 11:14). He is the great arch-deceiver in these latter days, when knowledge has increased and multitudes run too and fro upon the earth.

III. His Purpose. It is to blind the thoughts that the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ should not dawn upon them (v. 4). The Gospel of the coming glory of Christ, when He shall put down all authority and power, and take unto Himself His right to reign, must strike terror into the heart of Satan; for then he will be spoiled of his goods; then "that great dragon, that old serpent called the Devil and Satan, will be cast out" (Rev. 12:9). Why in this age is Satan so anxious to hinder, if possible, the dawning of the light of the truth about His Coming again in power and great glory? Is it because this revelation brings fresh inspiration and a more joyful confidence into the hearts of Christ's servants in these last and testing days? But this diabolical purpose is being largely thwarted now, in that multitudes of God's people are rejoicing in the light of the Gospel of that glory of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is surely drawing near.

IV. His Manner. How does he manage to blind the thoughts of men to the light of the Gospel of the glory of the coming Christ? See how he dealt with our Lord when tempting Him. Was he not trying to blind the thoughts of Christ to the Father's time and method of giving Him the dominion of this world when he "showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them," and offered them to Him for an act of obeisance? Does he not still show men the honors and pleasures of earth that he might blind their thoughts to the greater and more enduring things of the Kingdom of God and of His Christ? By putting a special luster on material things it is not difficult for the great deceiver to blind the eyes of men to the things that are eternal. Even when the seed of God's Word has been sown in the heart, it is easy for this wicked one to catch it away, by blinding the understanding with confused interests (Matthew 13:19). We are not ignorant of his devices. Let us watch and be sober.

V. His Subjects are those which believe not (v. 4). Those whose hearts are closed to the "light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (v. 6), and fit subjects and willing dupes to Satan's delusions. They cannot enter into the light and liberty of the sons of God because of unbelief. They may have a growing desire for the fictitious, the theatrical, and the sentimental, but the things that belong to their eternal peace are still hid from their eyes, and those counterfeits of the God of this age become increasingly attractive. If he can only hide the Gospel of Jesus Christ from their eyes he knows that his purpose will be successful—they will be lost (v. 3). For this is the condemnation that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than the light. He who believes not is condemned already (John 3:18, 19).

VI. His Overcomers are those into whose hearts "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God has shined" (v. 6). The light of God's truth alone, as revealed in the face of Jesus, can deliver from the power of darkness, which is the domain of Satan's operations. Here spiritual death reigns; but Christ, by His death, has delivered us from this death and from him that had the power of death—the Devil (Hebrews 2:14). Christ our Redeemer and Conqueror now holds the keys of Hell and of death (Rev. 1:18). He who is born of God keeps himself, and that wicked one touches him not (1 John 5:18). Jesus said to Peter, "Simon, behold Satan has desired to have you, but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not" (Luke 22:32). Listen to this joyful shout of final and eternal victory that will ring from the Heavens: "Now is come salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down! They overcame him by the Blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:10, 11). "Thanks be unto God who gives us the victory."

2 Corinthians 4:7-11 THE IDEAL LIFE.

God is being pleased to manifest Himself. In creation God is manifesting His wisdom and almightiness in the works of His hands. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the earth His handiwork." In Jesus Christ God is manifesting His love in merciful plenitude for our salvation. In the lives of the redeemed He desires to manifest His saving and satisfying grace for a witness and encouragement to the unbelieving; for the life of Jesus is to be made manifest in our mortal flesh (vv. 10, 11). The life of Jesus is the ideal life, and the life of the Christian is to be, in measure, a spiritual reproduction. Many lives of Christ have been written, but the most effective and God-honoring is the living one. "The life of Jesus made manifest in our body." Let us think of it. The life of the Lord Jesus was—

I. A Life from God. He was born from above (Luke 1:35). He could say: "I am from above: I came down from Heaven." He was God manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). If then, the life of Jesus is to be manifest in our mortal flesh, we must be born of God, born from above. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God." How then can he live the life of Jesus if he has not received the Jesus' life? Christ must live in us if His life is to be manifested by us (Galatians 2:20).

II. A Life Entirely Yielded to God. It was a life fully surrendered to the Divine will. At His baptism he gave Himself up to fulfill the righteousness of God. He said: "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do" (John 5:19). He also spoke the

words of the Father (John 14:10). "My doctrine," he declared, "is not Mine, but His that sent Me" (John 7:16). The keynote of His life was: "Not My will, but Your be done." What an example for all who desire to live the life of Jesus in their mortal bodies. Entire surrender to God's Word and will and work was needful for Him. How can it be less needful for us in seeking to live His life and to do His work? "Yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead" (Romans 6:13).

III. A Life Empowered by the Spirit of God. John bare record, saying: "I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him." God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power (Acts 10:38). Being made in the likeness of sinful flesh, He made Himself dependent on the power of the Holy Spirit given Him by the Father (see Isaiah 11:2, 3), and when He began His public ministry He testified that "the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel" (Luke 4:18). He knew that all His disciples needed this spiritual endowment from on high if they were to be true witnesses for Him. So He told them to tarry at Jerusalem until they were endued. How can we expect to live this life of Jesus without this gift? There is no substitute on earth for spiritual power. There is no excuse for being without it. For the promise is to you and to all that are afar off (Acts 2:29).

IV. A Life of Unwavering Faith in God. His face was steadfastly set to do the will of His Father at any cost. Because of this attitude and His devotion, He must needs suffer. The holiness of His character brought suffering, because He could not be understood by sinful and wicked men. He suffered through His faithfulness in testifying against the world's evil works (John 7:7). He was not of the world, therefore the world hated Him (John 15:9). He suffered because of His intense love for blind, deluded sinners, as seen in His tears over guilty Jerusalem. Yet withal, His faith in the Father had no tremor of doubt. "If any man will live godly he must suffer." How ready we are to shrink from seeking to live "the life of Jesus" in our mortal bodies, because of the testing conditions that are sure to follow. This is when a steadfast faith is needed. But who is sufficient for these things? Our sufficiency is of God (2 Corinthians 3:5). "For it is God Himself who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

V. A Life of Concentrated Activity. His first recorded utterance was: "Knew you not that I must be about My Father's business?" The Father's business was His life's business. Never was there any one more diligent in business than Jesus. "Lo, I come, in the volume of the Book it is written of Me. I delight to do Your will, O My God" (Psalm 40:7). In our Lord's ministry there was no dissipation of interest or of energy. Everything was subordinate to the known will of His Father. If this feature of the character of Jesus is to be manifest in our present life, then we also must be willing to make ourselves of no reputation, and take the form of a servant, by putting on His yoke, that we might learn of Him meekness and lowliness of heart; and so in fellowship with Him in service, manifest in our bodies the devotion of Jesus Christ. "This one thing I do."

VI. A Life Crowned with Victory. It was one prolonged battle, with one prolonged victory. His words were all victories of wisdom. His miracles were all victories over human weaknesses. His dying was His victory over the world's sin, in the breaking down of the great barrier that stood in the way of man's approach to God. His resurrection was His victory over mortality, death, and the grave. He knew no defeat. May we who are called upon to manifest "the life of Jesus" in our mortal flesh, expect to have victory all along our pilgrim life? Has God made provision for victory or defeat? Was the apostle fearful because of the infirmities of the flesh when he said: "Thanks be to God, who always causes us to triumph in Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:14). Again, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:54). If Jesus Christ has conquered in us, then in all these things we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37). We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God (v. 7). "Bear about. . . the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus may be manifest in the body" (v. 10). "Not I, but Christ."

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 THE GREAT CHANGE.

The experiences of a Christian may not all be Christian experience. Experiences may be as varied as Christians themselves. But there are some radical and fundamental experiences that lie at the root of every real Christian life. Here are some of them. We shall note—

I. The Change Needed. "If One died for all, then were all dead" (v. 14). "Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Romans 5:12). "The wages of sin is death." Sin separates from God, and to be separated from God is spiritual death. A change is needed, not in God, but in the condition of the soul that is already lost to Him because of sin.

II. The Change Wrought. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation" (v. 17). To be in Christ is to be trusting Him so entirely that God is pleased in grace to reckon the righteousness of His Son as for us. In this new creation old things have passed away. No man can create himself. We are His workmanship. "Created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Ephesians 2:10). The change is so great that "all things become new," both in us and around us, because the heart is renewed and the eyes are enlightened.

III. The Divine Method in Accomplishing this Change. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (v. 19). Yes, in Jesus of Nazareth this lowly Man of Sorrows, God was seeking to reconcile a world at enmity with Himself. In Christ we meet with this seeking and forgiving God, finding salvation and newness of life, being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24). "By grace are you saved through faith." "It is of faith that it might be by grace" (Romans 4:16).

IV. The Evidence of this Change. "He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them" (v. 15). The evidence that we have of being redeemed and transformed is a changed attitude towards ourselves and our Lord. It is not "I" now, but "Christ." He gave Himself that He might redeem us. Now henceforth it must be ourselves for Him. This new purpose in life is surely what is expected from a new creature. Let the time past suffice for the love of self, the will of the flesh, and the pride of place. The grace of God that saved us now teaches us to deny worldly lust and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Titus 2:12). For God has called us unto holiness (1 Thessalonians 1:7).

V. The Responsibilities Connected with this Change. "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ" (v. 20). We are Christ's representatives in the world, both as to His character and His purpose. In Christ's stead we are to beseech men to be reconciled to God. Having been reconciled to God by Jesus Christ, there is committed unto us "the ministry of reconciliation" (v. 18). Thank God, it is not the ministry of hopeless damnation. God is not waiting to be reconciled to men, but to reconcile men to Himself. As ambassadors, we are not left to our own resources. We are workers together with Him (chapter 6:1). Out of His fullness are we all to receive. Let us labor and pray that souls may be won for Christ and His Kingdom

2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 7:1 A CALL TO SEPARATION. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 7:1

The Christian is not of the world, but has been sent into it as a new creature, to be a witness for Jesus Christ (John 17:18). The danger is to compromise with the evil customs and false doctrines with which he is surrounded.

I. Why is Separation Needed? Because the two great currents of influence in the world are diametrically opposed to each other. "The Spirit of Truth and the spirit of error." The purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ and "the God of this age" are vastly different.

1. "What Fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness?" How can the righteousness of God and the unrighteousness of Godless men abide in fellowship?

2. "What Communion has light with darkness?" Darkness, it is said, is the natural condition of the universe. Light is its conqueror. "You were sometime darkness, but now are you light in the Lord." Walk as children of light. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness (Ephesians 5:6-11).

3. "What Concord has Christ with Belial?" What harmony can exist between the Holy Christ and pure vileness and worthlessness? (Deuteronomy 13:13).

4. "What Part has he who believes with an infidel?" The part of the believer is the knowledge of God and the joy of His salvation. What is the part of the infidel?

5. "What Agreement has the temple of God with idols? "You are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you" (1 Corinthians 3:16). How could the Spirit of God agree to that which would dethrone God? Separation is absolutely needed.

II. The Call to Separation. "Come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean" (v. 17). God at the first "divided the light from the darkness" (Genesis 1:4), and ever since man has been trying to blend them. The carnal and the spiritual, the works of the flesh, with the works of the Spirit. In our minds and hearts, in our thoughts and affections, there is to be an exodus from the dominion of world influences, and a complete surrender of ourselves to the call of God. "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth, for you are risen with Christ, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Ephesians 3:1-3). They are reckoned enemies of the Cross who are devoted to earthly things (Philippians 3:18, 19). "You cannot serve God and mammon." Therefore come out and be separated for God and for His Christ.

III. The Promises Made to the Separated.

1. "I will receive you" (v. 17). You are not going out into cold isolation. When you separate yourself for God, you are but going closer into His arms, and nearer to His heart. The man of the world may look upon you with wondering pity, because he has no experience of fellowship with God or of victory by His constraining Spirit.

2. "I will be a Father unto you" (v. 18). Our God knows how very much we shall need Him when we are separated for Him. So He promises, and will act the true Fatherly part toward His devoted children. They can joyfully say: "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us" (1 John 3:1). Fear not, He will not fail you.

Having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (chapter 7:1). Father, I will.

2 Corinthians 10:3-7 OUR WARFARE.

The idea of warfare here is very emphatic. It is a bloodless struggle for the higher life. Being deserters from the camp of Satan, we must expect conflict, but greater is He who is for us.

I. Our Enemy. Our enemy consists of allied forces. There is—

1. The Flesh, or Carnal Mind. "Though we walk in the flesh (body) we do not war after the flesh" (v. 3). "The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." The carnal mind is a sworn enemy to the things of the Spirit. It is a rebel against the law of God (Romans 8:7). The worldly mind is essentially opposed to the mind of the Spirit. To be carnally minded is death.

2. Imaginations. "Casting down imaginations" (v. 5). Those high-flying renegade thoughts that would carry us to the palace called vanity, and that seeks to put the crown of pride, upon our self-satisfaction. Such vain imaginings are dangerous to the soul's highest good (Psalm 2:1).

3. Everything that Exalts itself Against the Knowledge of God (v. 5). Every thought and feeling and act that springs up from a doubting heart against the word, the will, and the wisdom of God is vile presumption. Everything that is moral in the "old man" seeks to exalt itself. Beware of pride.

II. Our Weapons. The weapons of our warfare—

1. Are Not Carnal (v. 4). They don't belong to the "old nature." They are not man-made. Not a product of human ingenuity. Spiritual enemies cannot be overcome by material weapons. We cannot overcome evil with evil. "Railing for railing" and such like are of the flesh and not of God.

2. They are Mighty through God. They are mighty because God's hand grips them, and that hand is almighty. These are His weapons for bringing down the "strongholds" of unbelief, sin, and Satan, and breaking the wings of our vain and lofty imaginations, and everything that would exalt itself "against the knowledge of God." This unbending and never-failing weapon is the "Word of God" in the hand of the Holy Spirit, for the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). With this weapon of His Truth, we are also, through faith, to be more than conquerors. "For the Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Like the sword of Goliath, "There is none like it. Give it me."

III. Our Victory

1. Is Sure. "The pulling down of strongholds" (v. 4). The first stronghold that has to be pulled down is our own self-will. This is the citadel of the carnal man. Here we have victory by surrendering to the Prince of Life. When our wills have been conquered by the subduing power of His mighty love, then we become partakers of the Divine nature, and are brought into league with Christ Himself, and so become, by His grace, victors over sin and the strongholds of Satan. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might" (Ephesians 6:10).

2. It is to be Complete. "Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (v. 5). When a fort has been captured, then all that are in it are taken prisoners. Thoughts are fugitive things, and have to be watched and restrained, "for as a man thinks, so is he." Thoughts constitute character. Pure thinking leads to noble action. They are the subtle weapons of life's warfare. How important then it is that our thoughts should be brought into captivity to the will of Jesus Christ. Thoughts require mastering. Who can guide, sanctify, and use them as Christ can? Under His control they become weapons of triumph. Thoughts are difficult things to get hold of, but when captured by Christ, He will hold them for thoughts are captured when they are captivated. Like Rebekah, they say, "I will go with this Man" (Genesis 24:58). We can bring out thoughts into the captivity of obedience of Christ by keeping steadfastly "looking unto Jesus," who is the Author and Finisher of our faith, the Subduer of our wills, the Winner of our affections, the Captor of our thoughts, and the Giver of every good and perfect gift. "What think you of Christ? "

2 Corinthians 12:1-10 POWER IN WEAKNESS.

The personal experiences of the apostle, as recorded in those verses, are deep with significance for all who are persistently staggering after his example.

I. A New Revelation. "He was caught up, and heard unspeakable words" (v. 4). This revelation was for himself alone, therefore it was unutterable to others. We can only know its character by its fruits, for by their fruits you shall know them; and the fruits as seen here are worthy of the God of all grace. Special revelations are given to many of God's faithful servants, when their minds and thoughts are caught up by the Holy Spirit, as on wings of faith and hope, into the highest Heavens (Ezekiel 11:24; Acts 8:39), where they see and hear things which the language of mortals cannot fully express. They are precious seasons of the consciousness of God's presence, and the reality and power of eternal things.

II. A New Trial. "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" (v. 7). New trials usually come after new visions. God knows that pride goes before a fall, so He permitted Satan to drive

this stake of affliction into his body. What it really was it is difficult to say. To the Galatians he wrote: "You know that through the infirmity of the flesh I preached unto you the Gospel" (Galatians 4:13). He was still more anxious to preach the Gospel than glory in his special revelation. It is better, in His eyes, that we should be witnessing for Christ than reveling in our new discoveries, but know that these are not contradictory, but complementary.

III. A New Promise. "My grace is sufficient for you: for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (v. 9). The power of this weakness is abundantly evident in 1 Corinthians 2:3-5. This is not the weakness of ignorance or of unbelief, but that of conscious self-inefficiency and entire dependence on the offered grace of God. If God's strength is to be made perfect in weakness, surely here is an opportunity for all of us. But it is much easier for some to be self-confident than self-emptied. To be full of self-confidence is to be empty of the power of God. God will not give His glory to another for self-display. Humble yourself, and He will exalt you.

IV. A New Source of Gladness. "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (v. 9). Glorifying in our infirmities is something nobler than merely submitting to them. But no one can glory in afflictions because they are afflictions; but if by faith we can see them to be the Divinely appointed means whereby we are made more effective witnesses to the power of Christ, then we may gladly glory in them. It is common for Christian workers to find gladness in their gifts, but not so common to find gladness in their infirmities. Rejoice in the Lord always: He does all things well.

V. A New Resolution. "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (v. 10). He took pleasure in every trial and hardship that made him feel more keenly the measure of his weakness, knowing that this only made more room in his life for the grace and power of God. We glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation works patience, experience, hope (Romans 5:3). "No chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yields peaceable fruit unto them that are exercised thereby" (Hebrews 12:11). Let this afterward strengthen our faith for the present.